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"Music and Interculturality"

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## Generating Ontologies of Historical Sound Recordings. Interculturality, Inter-collectivity, and Transmutation as Method

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### Abstract

The article focuses on historical sound recordings and how they are perceived by several actors, showing the limits of interculturality when dealing only with human/human interactions. Inter-collectivity is suggested as a concept that includes human/non-human relations taking these ontologies as certain and as a serious basis for an analysis. In the second part, problems of translation in inter-collective interactions are discussed, leading to the method of "transmutation". The concept refers to Roman Jakobson's (1959) idea of an intersemiotic translation, defined as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign system". Furthermore, it demonstrates how transmutation is a general practice in Pemón shaman and ipukenak (wise person) interactions with spirits. Therefore, the ritual song genre murúa (Pemón) is chosen as an example. Finally, the present study shows how transmutation in indigenous translation practices can be applied as a method to analyse historical recordings. I argue that sound as sound itself and the material that contains it have to be understood as a new ontological unit that is continuously generated. The process of that generation is defined by several entities (e.g. thoughts, practices, relations) and their semiotic systems.

**Keywords:** Interculturality, human/non human interactions, transmutation, historical recordings, Koch-Grünberg



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## **Generando ontologías de las grabaciones sonoras históricas. Interculturalidad, intercolectividad y transmutación como método**

### **Resumen**

El artículo se centra en las grabaciones históricas de sonido y cómo éstas son percibidas por varios actores, mostrando los límites de la interculturalidad en el marco de las interacciones humano/humano. Se sugiere que la intercolectividad es un concepto que incluye relaciones humanas/no humanas y se considera a estas ontologías como ciertas y como una base seria para el análisis. En la segunda parte, se discuten los problemas de traducción en las interacciones intercolectivas, lo que lleva al método de “transmutación”. Este concepto remite a la idea de Román Jakobson (1959) de una traducción intersemiótica, definida como “una interpretación de los signos verbales mediante signos del sistema de signos no verbales”. Además, se demuestra cómo la transmutación es una práctica general en las interacciones de Pemón chamán e ipukenak (persona sabia) y los espíritus. Por lo tanto, se elige el género de canción ritual murúa (Taurepán) como ejemplo. Finalmente, se muestra cómo se puede aplicar la transmutación en las prácticas indígenas de traducción como un método para el análisis de las grabaciones históricas, argumentando que la grabación y su soporte de grabación (cilindro de cera) deben entenderse como una nueva unidad ontológica generada continuamente. El proceso de esa generación está definido por varias entidades (por ejemplo, los pensamientos, las prácticas y las relaciones) y sus sistemas semióticos.

**Palabras clave:** interculturalidad, relaciones humanas/no humanas, transmutación, grabaciones históricas, Koch-Grünberg

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## **Gerando ontologias de gravações sonoras históricas. Interculturalidade, inter-coletividade e transmutação como método**

### **Resumo**

O artigo enfoca gravações sonoras históricas e como estas são percebidas por vários atores em suas comunidades de origem, mostrando os limites da interculturalidade ao lidar apenas com interações humano/humano. A inter-coletividade é sugerida como um conceito que inclui relações humano/não humano, tomando essas ontologias como verdadeiras e como uma base séria para análise. Na segunda parte, discutem-se os problemas de tradução em interações inter-coletivas, levando ao método da “transmutação”. O conceito refere-se à ideia de Roman Jakobson (1959) de uma tradução intersemiótica, definida como “uma interpretação de signos verbais por meio de signos do sistema de signos não verbais”. Além disso, isso demonstra como a transmutação é uma prática geral nas interações entre xamã e ipukenak (sábio) de Pemón com os espíritos. Assim, o gênero de música ritual murúa (Taurepán) é escolhido como exemplo. Por

fim, o presente estudo mostra como a transmutação pode ser aplicada nas práticas de tradução indígena como um método para a análise de registros históricos. Argumento que o som, como som em si mesmo, bem como o material que o incorpora devem ser entendidos como uma nova unidade ontológica que é gerada continuamente. O processo dessa geração é definido por várias entidades (por exemplo, pensamentos, práticas, relações) e seus sistemas semióticos.

**Palavras-chave:** interculturalidade, relações humano/não humano, transmutação, registros históricos, Koch-Grünberg

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## Introduction

This article deals with the repatriation of historical sound recordings in relation to the question of the concept of interculturality. The processes of repatriation of historical recordings to a source community have recently discussed by Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Weintraub (2012), Leclair (2014), Hatoum (2015), Barros and Pamfílio Sousa (2017), Mifune (2017), Valdovinos (2017), and Lewy (2017a). The focus is on the very special interactions between an academic scientist and an indigenous group via historical sound recordings. The experiences of Rainer Hatoum with the Navajo nation and my own work among the Pemón people serve as examples to reveal the difficulties and even limitations of intercultural relations. Therefore, new and/or other meanings of the notions “interculturality” and even “culture” in ethnomusicology will be suggested. For this purpose, the anthropological concepts of Hoolbrad and Pedersen’s “ontological turn” are applied, whereby the term “ontology” refers in the first place to its etymological notion of “the study of being”. In addition, Hoolbrad and Pederson define the subject of “turn” suggesting inquiries about the ethnographic data like: “what *is* a thing, what *is* a person, and what *is* their mutual relationship” (Hoolbrad and Pederson 2017: 3, italics in original). According to the authors the ontological turn is “about creating the conditions under which one can ‘see’ things in one’s ethnographic material that one would not otherwise have been able to see” (Hoolbrad and Pederson 2017: 4, italics in original). Thus, these questions implicate a further, more fundamental question, which is the main focus of this article: “How do I enable my ethnographic material to reveal itself to me by allowing it to dictate its own terms of engagement, so to speak, guiding or compelling me to see things that I had not expected, or imagined, to be there?” (Hoolbrad and Pederson 2017: 45)<sup>1</sup>. The author’s visual apperception of “seeing” needs to be extended to the audible stance here. Holbraad and Pederson’s inquiries are complemented by Bruno Latour’s “modes of existence” which are described as:

[...] a banal label, but it has a special meaning here. When one speaks normally about the mode of existence of some group or individual, one refers to their customs, their mode of being, their ethology, their habitat in some way, their feeling for a place. In this inquiry, we are keeping all the connotations of the phrase, but we are giving the two terms “mode” and “existence” stronger meanings that don’t direct attention towards human groups or individuals, but towards the beings about which humans are interrogating themselves. The word “being” should not be unsettling: it is another way of replying to the question, “What, for example, is the law, or religion, or science?” “What is important to you?” and “How can I talk about this properly with you?” (Latour, <http://modesofexistence.org/#the-project/v-paragraph> [accessed: December 12, 2018]).

Ethnomusicology, as well as the term “culture” in ethnomusicology, is largely restricted to the area of human beings. As an example, it can be stated that Ethnomusicology is defined as the research on “humanly organized sound” (Blacking 1973), “the study of people making music”

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussions about ontology in anthropology see: Charbonnier, Salmon, Skafish (2017) and Venkatesan et al. (2010).

(Titon 1992), or “the study of why, and how, human beings are musical” (Rice 2014). A few standard publications include human and non-human interactions as research focus (Seeger 1987, Feld 1990, and Menezes Bastos 1999). Over the last years, these human/non-human interactions became more important; for instance, in works about Amerindian groups in the Americas (Brabec 2012; Lewy 2012; Brabec and Seeger 2013; Simonett 2012; Lewy, Brabec, and García 2015, just to mention a few). Steven Feld (2017) recently confirmed that the base of acoustemology is defined by ontological relations between human and non-humans. Jeff Todd Titon’s work on ecomusicology has to be mentioned. He recently published an extensive taxonomy in ecomusicological interrelations (Titon and Bock 2017). Bernd Brabec de Mori notes that in most Amerindian groups, human beings define themselves as “real humans”, while neighbours, spirits, animals, and plants are classified as “humans” (Brabec de Mori 2015: 82-86). In western naturalistic thinking (Descola 2013), entities like plants, animals, or other “humanised things” (Lambos, in Lewy 2017a) are classified as part of nature, whereas in Amerindian thinking they are part of a human culture.

While “culture” is not only limited to the human area, the notion of “nature” includes humans as well. Thus, the term “interculturality” becomes difficult to apply when dealing with Amerindian sound ontologies. In this context, Viveiros de Castro’s concept of “multinaturalism” as opposed to “multiculturalism” needs to be mentioned as well. He states that in Amerindian thinking, the point of view lies in the body and not in the mind of a “person”, no matter if real human, human or non-human. Thus, Viveiros de Castro (1997, 2014) revealed the dichotomy of a European multiculturalism or cultural relativism with its axiomatic system *culture/mind/representation* on the one hand, and the *nature/body/perspective* axiomatic system of “multinaturalism” (Lewy 2017b) on the other.

So what to do with the notion of “interculturality”? Should we talk about “inter-collectivity” referring to the word “collective” as suggested by Descola (2013) –one that includes all humans and non-humans? Another option could be “inter-naturalism”, following Viveiros de Castro. Or shouldn’t we just reject the term “interculturality” as another orientalism (Said 1978) of the western/naturalistic ontological paradigm? The standard practice in the academic world is to keep the notion, adapting it to new and/or other meanings. Before we try that, one definition of “Intercultural Musicology” needs to be mentioned here. It was published by the Music Research Institute (MRI) which was founded by Marcia Herndon:

This field includes the study of (a) one’s own indigenous music culture using techniques applicable to other music cultures (b) music cultures other than one’s indigenous culture (c) music created by combining elements from various cultures, and (d) other forms of intercultural activity, for example, the study of performers who specialise in non-indigenous music idioms ([http://www.music-research-inst.org/subs/im4\\_1/im.htm](http://www.music-research-inst.org/subs/im4_1/im.htm) [accessed: April 28, 2018]).

This definition applies Amerindian thinking to a western discourse, but the point of view lies in the indigenous community. MRI’s point c (combined elements) leads to Francesco Giannattasio idea of a transcultural musicology as part of a 21st century comparative

musicology. His concept refers to Welsch<sup>2</sup>, suggesting that not only classical categories as for instance “musical instruments and artefacts” (Giannattasio 2017: 23) need to be analysed, “but rather new creativity and new, shared musical languages” (Giannattasio 2017: 23). These “shared musical languages” takes us back in a way to MRI’s point d) “the study of [...] non-indigenous music idioms”. Giannattasio does not give any explanation of the term, but elsewhere he refers to “musical communication” in that context (2017: 23). This notion can be understood in the sense of Alan P. Merriam, who explains “music as communication” as a symbolic meaning:

The most obvious possibility is that communication is effectuated through the investiture of music with symbolic meanings, which are tacitly agreed upon by the members of the community. There is also verbal communication about music which seems to be most characteristic in complex societies in which self-conscious theory of music has developed (Merriam 1964: 10).

However, ignoring Merriam’s phrase of “complex societies” as all humans and human groups are complex, I would like to complement Merriam’s “symbolic meaning of musical communication” as well as his “verbal communication about music”. First, we have to add the non-humans as serious entities as well as all non-verbal and performative communication on and about music and sound as, for instance, Seeger (1987), Titon (1992), and Pinto (2001) suggested. Second, we have to study the “semiotic system of sound” and its transmutations, that include the ontological biases and the connected “modes of existence”, a point that also refers to Carlos Severi’s “transmutation” (2014, see below). Third, we have to include the intersemiotic forms of “trans-specific communication” as it is a usual practice in Amerindian sound ontologies (Halbmayer 2010; Lewy, Brabec de Mori, and García 2015). Fourth, we need to call for the “combining elements from various cultures”, which is MRI’s point c. Who and/or what are these “elements”, and how they are defined? I prefer the term “entity” instead of “element”, because entities are elements mostly charged with agency (Gell 1998). And fifth, I suggest that all kinds of perceived and unperceived entities continually create new and/or other ontologies of sound of one and the same unit<sup>3</sup>. But even with these extensions, the general question remains: How can we translate between musical languages as systems of communications?

As mentioned before, the focus is on repatriation of sound archives and historical recordings. It needs to be stated that the particular interaction between the recorder and the performer has to be categorized as a historical processing of specific ontological sound entities. We have to keep in mind that ontological recording interactions were dominated by our

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<sup>2</sup> Wolfgang Welsch writes: “the description of today’s cultures as islands or spheres is factually incorrect and normatively deceptive. Cultures de facto no longer have the insinuated form of homogeneity and separateness. They have instead assumed a new form, which is to be called transcultural insofar that it passes through classical cultural boundaries. Cultural conditions today are largely characterized by mixes and permeations” (2017: 34).

<sup>3</sup> An idea that refers to Latour’s sociology of associations, a counter-concept to a “sociology of the social” which is based on his Actor-Network-Theory (ANT/Callon and Latour 1981, Latour 2005). See Miguel García’s (2017a) critical analysis on ANT, reflecting his attempts to apply this concept to ethnomusicology.

predecessors and carried out under different theoretical and methodological paradigms<sup>4</sup>. Our predecessors generated very special and unique ontological units which are stored in archives today. These ontological units include in some cases the material in which the recordings are embedded (wax cylinder, gramophone record, sound wire, etc., see fig. 2) as well, provoking intercultural conflicts. A very special case serves as a first example to show the limits of interculturality, aiming to sensitize the reader for the questions of ontological biases.

### The limits of interculturality

Rainer Hatoum reflects about the repatriation of Navajo's ritual songs performed by the singer Hosteen Klah (1867-1937), who was recorded by Georg Herzog between 1927-1932. The collection includes 1280 wax cylinders (Hatoum 2015: 224f.).

Hatoum (2015: 231) describes the first reactions of the Navajo people as a confusing spectrum, stating that cultural groups consist of persons who do not always have the same opinion. Next to enthusiasm and open arms, some Navajo rejected his cooperation. They argued that the recordings were stolen. Other Navajos even wanted to destroy the original wax cylinders. Hatoum explains their reasons:

In fact, ceremonial songs, like other ritual knowledge, are considered to be a concrete manifestation of the forces of the universe that have been given to man by the Holy People in certain forms. As such, these fundamentally intangible healing medias should not be transferred to material medias permanently (Hatoum 2015: 233)<sup>5</sup>.

He further explains that like most ceremonial knowledge, Navajo ritual songs are received from “supernatural sources”.

From this perspective, they are by no means “songs” in the conventional sense and of human origin (the premise that defines the subject of ethnology or the UNESCO Rescue Initiative), but rather concrete forms of manifestation of universal power or forces. These energy levels are a danger to those who are not trained in dealing with them (i.e., those who are not Navajo ritual specialist), and any carelessness endangers the universal balance (Hatoum 2015: 231)<sup>6</sup>.

The example demonstrates the aforementioned different ontological biases. On the one hand, the Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv can not destroy any wax cylinder. On the other hand, for some of the Navajo Amerindians it is unthinkable to keep those cylinders “alive”. This Navajo specialists do not argue from a “cultural” perspective, but from a collective position. Hatoum's

<sup>4</sup> It is one of the reasons why archives always should be “under suspicion” as Miguel García (2017b) recently stated.

<sup>5</sup> “Tatsächlich werden Zeremoniallieder –wie anderes rituelles Wissen auch– als konkrete Manifestation der Kräfte des Universums betrachtet, die den Menschen von den *Holy People* in bestimmten Formen übereignet worden sind. Als solches sollten diese grundlegend immateriellen Medien zur Heilung nicht dauerhaft auf materielle Medien übertragen werden”.

<sup>6</sup> “Aus dieser Perspektive sind sie [die Lieder, Anmerkung des Autors] eben keinesfalls “Lieder” im herkömmlichen Sinne und menschlichen Ursprungs (die Prämisse, die überhaupt den Gegenstand der Ethnologie oder der UNESCO-Rettungsinitiative definiert), sondern vielmehr konkrete Manifestationsformen universeller Macht bzw. Kräfte. Dabei stellen diese Energiekonzentrationen nicht nur für diejenigen eine Gefahr dar, die hinsichtlich des Umgangs mit ihnen nicht geschult sind (d.h. Für alle, die keine Navajo-Ritualspezialisten sind). Vielmehr gefährdet etwaige Unachtsamkeit auch das universelle Gleichgewicht”.



“supernatural” forces are serious entities. The cylinders have agency as I mentioned above. So, what Hatoum defines as an equivocation of the term “medium” is in fact an ontological dilemma. Hatoum describes two very distinct concepts of “media”. The western idea of the Phonogramm-Archiv defines medium as a “storage medium”, a material western communication tool –purified from any kind of agency. Navajo people understand the wax cylinder with the recording as an ontological unit. “Immaterial medias” like songs are manifestations of the power of the universe and should not be stored on “material medias” (Hatoum 2015: 234). A parallel prohibition of such hybrids or ontological units are the ceremonial sand paintings, which have to be destroyed after their production and application to patients in healing sessions (Hatoum 2015: 234).

Thus, the western point of view can be denominated as a kind of “ontocentrism”, because it judges another ontology only by one’s own “modern” ontological values and limits. This argument refers to Latour who reveals that the word “modern” is constituted by two sets of practices. One set is “the translation” of new mixes between beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second set creates, by “purification”, two different ontological zones between humans and non-humans (Latour 1993: 10). So what distinguishes Latour’s “modern people” from “premodern” is that the first one do not think such hybrids, but they produce, paradoxically, constantly “more possible interbreeding” (Latour 1993: 12). The so called “premodern”, or better “non-modern” people who “devote themselves to conceiving hybrids, [...] have excluded their proliferation” (1993: 12.). Latour suggests: “It is the disparity that would explain the Great Divide between Them –all the other cultures– and Us –the westerners– and would make it finally possible to solve the insoluble problem of relativism” (1993: 12). In applying Latour’s purification taxonomy as a reference of the mentioned dilemma, it can be stated that the “limits of interculturality” are defined by UNESCO’s and/or the Phonogramm Archiv’s ontological bias by not taking the concepts about non-human agencies as a real certainty of an indigenous ontological bias. The question arises, how we can deal with such ontological biases on an everyday level, where ontological differences are more sophisticated and not easy to locate? How do I know the ontological bias of others when trying to do an ethical and decolonised repatriation, using episteme based on a mostly unreflected naturalistic ontological bias?

### **The techniques of disguise and intersemiotic systems**

Hatoum describes elsewhere that the Navajo ritual specialist Hosteen Klah used de-energizing practices when producing rugs with ritual designs of sand paintings. He just changed some of the details. Hatoum (2015: 235) assumes in this context that the singer has used a similar technique during his recordings with Herzog. As mentioned above, the question is how to reveal an ontological bias, or, in other words, how do we perceive signs like “spirit languages” as we cannot know that they exist?

During my interpretations of Hatoum’s experiences, I realized my own “ontocentrism” as I reflected about my own repatriation ideas in 2005. In several articles (Lewy 2018a [2010], 2017a, and 2017b), I describe these first experiences about my attempts to return Koch-Grünberg’s recordings to their source community. The German ethnologist and linguist Theodor Koch-Grünberg traveled in 1911 to Serra de Pacaraima at the border region between Venezuela,



Brazil, and Guyana. He recorded 50 wax cylinders shortly after his arrival in an indigenous community named Koimélemong or “Maloka do Mel”, inhabited by Makuxí, Taurepán, and Wapixana people that days.

During the beginning of my repatriation process in 2006<sup>7</sup>, I realized how complicated it was to find specific relatives of the recorded indigenous people. I tried my best to find descendents of one of the recorded singers. But this idea follows a western ontological concept of copyright and authorship (Lewy 2014, Brabec de Mori 2016), which is a counter-concept to the Pemón idea of ownership, in which the owners of songs are in general non-human entities (Lewy 2012, 2015, 2017b, and 2018a). As mentioned above, the recordings have a mode of existence. Spirits hear their songs and are attracted by them, wherever the sound source is located. Spirits as non-human entities perceive the sound as humans do. They hear their songs. Spirits are able to perceive the minds of humans as well. But it needs to be underlined that none of my Pemón teachers confirmed whether spirits receive recorded sounds if they are not played, or if they are stored on wax cylinders in an archive. When looking at Koch-Grünberg’s sparse documentation (Lewy 2017a), it is remarkable that he was able to record secret songs. The healing rituals often took place in isolated rooms, because the villagers and present indigenous guests should not hear anything. This was especially true for the songs of the shamans (*piasán*). Koch-Grünberg describes the recording situation as follows:

We close all the entrances and windows, and in the dimly dark back room, the magic takes place; he [the shaman] sings three full rolls in his mighty, nasal voice, three successive songs, which he accompanies with a bundle of branches clapping loudly; he holds the branches in his right hand and claps them to the ground in time; in his left he holds the cigar and smokes mightily; just like yesterday at the healing session; I reproduced the songs immediately, of course, only in front of a selected audience, Pajé [shaman], Tuschaua, Pirokaí and myself; they are excellently received, a significant acquisition!<sup>8</sup> (Koch-Grünberg 1911, unpublished diary, notebook 2).

A hundred years later, when I hear that recordings with my Pemón teacher and other Pemón people, I still have this “feelings of unease” (Lewy 2017a). My method of repatriation is oriented in the linguistic discourse analysis of Sherzer and Urban (1986). Therefore, the repatriation process is conducted by the Pemón specialist Balbina Lambos. We conducted several hearing sessions led by her with different Pemón cohorts, like adolescents from Santa

<sup>7</sup> I just wanted to analyse the possibilities of repatriation, as I realised that maintaining a constant relationship was necessary. The process has gone on for 15 years. Officially, the recordings are not “given back” to any nation, but to the Pemón. Therefore, I contacted the “capitánes generales” as well as the capitánes of several communities with which I am in constant contact. So I have been in Santa Elena de Uairén regularly. Right now I have my centre of life here and worked closely with Venezuelan institutions in Santa Elena as well. I thank the Berliner Phonogram Archive, Lars Koch, Albrecht Wiedmann, Ricarda Kopal and Susanne Ziegler, who supported my project allowing access to all recordings and Koch-Grünberg’s documentation.

<sup>8</sup> “Wir schliessen alle Zugänge und Fenster, und im halbdunklen hinteren Raum geht der Zauber vor sich; er singt mit seiner mächt. näselnden Stimme drei Rollen voll, drei aufeinanderfolgende Gesänge, die er mit einem Bündel Zweige laut klatschend begleitet; die Zweige hält er in der rechten Hand und klatscht damit im Takt auf den Boden; in der Linken hält er die Zigarre und qualmt mächtig; genau wie gestern bei der Krankenkur; ich reproduzierte die Gesänge sofort, natürlich nur vor geladenem Publikum, Pajé, Tuschaua, Pirokaí und mir; sie sind ausgezeichnet aufgenommen, eine bedeutende Erwerbung!”.

Elena de Uairén's classical orchestra "El Sistema" or older Pemón people. These older Pemón specialists had no problems in identifying the song genre. But when listening to the shaman songs, most specialists were afraid, saying that these songs attract spirits from the table mountains. Furthermore, they explained that there are two kinds of performances of shaman songs both called *murúa*. The first form of *murúa* is recorded on wax cylinders 25, 27, 29 and 30. These songs were performed during the described healing sessions.

My Pemón teacher has special knowledge, but from time to time, a little part of the mosaic is missing. We contacted a *piasán* (shaman) during our research to find a specialist to analyse these wax cylinders. He just told us that he will not listen to the recordings, because he is in a process of healing and these recordings would disturb his session. A well-known older Pemón was recommended to us. He did not identify himself as a *piasán* but as an *ipukenak* (wise person). He explained to us, that his uncle was a *piasán*, and he could sing us his songs (*marik*), but, he meant, undisguised in a *parishara* dance festivity version. So we recorded this genre with him in 2006, and again, in 2015.

It can be stated that the recordings were a part of performances for contacting and interacting with *mawarí* spirits. The *piasán* changed his voice and timbre. He also transformed the text from an intelligible text into unintelligible sounds that did not fit the well-known Pemón musical scheme of the second *murúa* form, because the aim of these transformations is to make the song unrecognisable for human beings. The only intelligible word in wax cylinder 25 is "utö" (come down). It was sung for 18 seconds by the shaman, showing the strength of his voice (Lewy 2011, 2012).

1. Apata pürütoko kuyarikutonmö. Mawarí 1. The beauty of your place adorns us. The pachi rü wüya kuyarikutonmö. female spirit decorates us.
2. Apata pürütoko kuyarikutonmö. Watoto 2. The beauty of your place adorns us. The pachi rü wüya kuyarikutonmö. Watoto female fire decorates us.

Figure 1. Wax cylinder 38, Koch-Grünberg 1911, transcription and translation: Balbina Lambós 2006, Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv: VII\_W\_2794\_K\_GR\_BRASILIEN\_38

This second form of a *murúa* performance (fig. 1) was also recorded by Koch-Grünberg without describing any context or lyrics. These songs are reserved for the *piasán damük* (shamans). They sang those songs at the end of a *parishara* dance festival in song form with intelligible words. They were accompanied by non-shamans, but only adult people were allowed to participate. Children had to go to sleep or older Pemón plugged their ears.

The *murúa* song on wax cylinder 38 has intelligible lyrics. The "beauty of the landscape" means that it dealt with the spirits (*mawarí*) in the table mountains (*tepuy*). But different specialists gave different explanations of the lyrics. One version says that it was sung *watoto* (line 2), referring to the anthropomorphic interiority or spirit of the flint *wato*, which is consulted in the case of healing. The word *pachi* indicates the female gender of the spirit. Another interpretation concludes that *waitütü* was sung. This entity is a bird whose interiority is a spirit.

Songs like the recorded one on wax cylinder 38 serve to establish contact with the individual spirits who are specifically named. Compliments were told with the intention of inviting the spirits to a dance festival. The general function of the *parishara* dance festivity was the celebration of the human and non-human collective. The musical structure has a song form. It is built by the phrases A, B, and C. Phrase A consists of the syntagma “*apata pürütoko*” in line 1 and line 2 (fig. 1), which is performed only in subphrase a. The word “*kuyarikutonmö*” in line 1 and line 2 generates the subphrase b. This subphrase b is also part of phrase B. Before the repetition of subphrase b sounds in phrase B, the subphrase c is preceded by the syntagma “*mawarí pachi rü wüya*”. This technique of combining firmly attributed textual and melodic units can be described as a particular form of musical parallelism, combining not only the textual components but also the inseparable melody of these textual units (Lewy 2011). The period sequence is four times AABBC. In phrase B only the word “*mawarí pachi*” is intoned. During the second repetition the phrase B is also repeated, whereby instead of “*mawarí pachi*”, the syntagma “*wototo pachi*” is sung. The third repetition is equal to the second, only the last one of all period sequences is ABC. It seems that the singers were informed about the limited capacity of the wax cylinder, because they finished exactly with the words of phrase C.

Note that both *murúa* examples are not versions of the same song, but both represent the same genre performed in different contexts. The differences are very clear. The lyrics were changed from a verbal to a non-verbal sign system and the musical form and structure were completely different. The name of the female spirit is sung, and another specific word is used to create contact with the spirit in the second example. In the first example, the name of the spirit is included, but it is not understandable for humans. Only the word *utö* (come down) gives humans a clue that a trans-specific communication was established. Thus, the translation of the semiotic sound signs makes it impossible for any human being (even another shaman) to identify the spirit who is contacted. It can be suggested that even other spirits are unable to identify the receiver entity in the spiritual world as well. With the help of this technique of disguise, the shaman protects himself and the whole collective of human and non-human entities. It is a kind of intra-collective interaction of trans-specific communication, that is reserved only for a shaman-spirit interaction. This technique of disguise or intersemiotic translation (see below) is necessary to limit and control the interaction with the spirits. It finally follows the same principles as the described de-energizing practice of Hosteen Klah, both cases clearly show their ontological bias.

Another translation of a trans-specific sound interaction is found in written form in Koch-Grünberg’s myth collection. There, one myth deals with the question of how the *murúa* dance appeared in the human world<sup>9</sup>. As I explained elsewhere (Lewy 2016), the informant and shaman Mayuluáípu told the German anthropologist a “disguised” or “translated” version of the myth, which had a secret song included.

In bygone times, the shaman Ameluzaípu lived on the headwaters of the Surún<sup>10</sup> at the savannah Mauarí-batéi<sup>11</sup> near the Waitiliyén Mountains. Just in the moment when he was

<sup>9</sup> Title: “How Murua dance emerged” (original: “Wie der Tanz Murua entstand”, Koch-Grünberg 1916: 123).

<sup>10</sup> Surumú (footnote from Koch-Grünberg’ original, p. 123).

<sup>11</sup> I.e. “Creb-savannah” (footnote from Koch-Grünberg’ original, p. 123).

vomiting water, the Mauarí Uazala-lueni<sup>12</sup> [spirit] encountered him. He was vomiting water as well not far from him. They talked to each other until the Mauarí [spirit] walked away. Other people call Ameluzaípu, asking him to dance and drink Kashiri [beer] with them. Only he knew how to dance and to sing Muruá [shaman dance song]. He invented it on his own. So he went there to dance. His sister was Aleunápen. He danced with his sister. A lot of people danced behind them. Then Ameluzaípu became drunk so that he was not able to dance anymore. He laid himself down into his hammock and fell into a deep sleep. Then another came and woke him up saying: “Let us continue dancing, brother-in-law!”. He stood up to dance again. He went out of the house with a thick dance stick made of bamboo, Walungá, in his hand. He went on dancing. Then, the Mauarí [spirit] came out of their house Me-tépe and met him. He sang:

[1]“epá taká le yáwé uyé poléme  
[2]“epá taká le yáwé wazálálu-wenin  
[3]“a-ya a-ya ha-ya  
[4]“ameluzaípu epá taká le yáwe”.

[1]“It was a lie that he vomited water when I met him  
[2]“It was a lie that he vomited water, Arára-killer<sup>13</sup>.

.....

[4]“Ameluzaípu, it was a lie that he vomited water”<sup>14</sup>.

Then the Mauarí [spirit] took him to their house Amatá-tepe<sup>15</sup>. The Mauarí took his sister to their house Me-tepe. Before his sister entered the house, she hang up her pubic apron over the entry of the house<sup>16</sup>. Ameluzaípu hang up his necklaces made of peccary teeth, Amatá, over the entry of the house. You can see the things there until today [...]. (Koch-Grünberg 1916: 123, Lewy 2016: 54).

Koch Grünberg’s Taulipáng (Taurepan) Mayuluaípu informant changed the interaction in his narration between Ameluzaípu and the spirit. When looking at the song text, line 4 shows his technique of disguise, as he sung: “it was a lie that he vomited water”. It can be stated that the *Mauarí* (*mawarí*/spirit) instead of vomiting has sung the *murúa* song to the shaman Ameluzaípu. “Vomiting” is another word for “telling songs” or “strengthen the voice” (Koch-Grünberg 1923: 212, Lewy 2012: 58). My Pemón teacher concludes that the song is performed as part of the narration, and therefore the whole narration is a performance that establishes a trans-specific interaction. It means that when telling and singing it to other-than-shamans or to other spirits, the mentioned spirit as well as the narrated text and the included song have to be disguised (Lewy 2016). In comparison to the recording situation, Koch-Grünberg wanted to write down the lyrics of the *murúa* song. But the myth itself reflects how Mayuluaípu applied his

<sup>12</sup> Shamans, from time to time, drink water until they vomit, particularly water with foam taken from the cataracts. I observed often that they vomit several times and drink again. A kind of inner purification (footnote from Koch-Grünberg’ original, p.123).

<sup>13</sup> The narrator explicitly said that the words of the danced song are a bit different from common life (footnote from Koch-Grünberg’ original, p.123).

<sup>14</sup> The translation is made by the narrator and reflects only his interpretation (footnote from Koch-Grünberg’ original, p.123).

<sup>15</sup> Two mountains close to each other (footnote from Koch-Grünberg’ original, p.124).

<sup>16</sup> On a rock (footnote from Koch-Grünberg’ original, p.124).

technique of disguise by just not saying the song lines. It is a usual practice to keep the children away when hearing the myth performance. The shaman who was recorded on the mentioned cylinders transformed the sounds very well, so it is incomprehensible for other-than shamans, as well as for other-than the mentioned spirits. We will never find out for which entity the songs on wax cylinder 25, 27, 29 and 30 were performed. However, what we can presume is that the names in the recordings, as well as the mentioned song performance as part of the myth, were transformed by transmutation into a ritual language of inter-collectivity.

In the first example of the *murúa* recordings, the transmutation was necessary to save the non-shaman indigenous people from the spirits. In the second example of the myth, Koch Grünberg was saved from the bad spirits during his notation of the myth and its performance itself. Both examples show the ontological bias. This bias can be experienced by first “feelings of unease” or just emotions due to one’s own sensitivity to such phenomena techniques of negation or disguising are just common practices which need to be experienced in the field as well. These practices are an integral part of the different semiotic systems in Amerindian ontologies making translation indispensable.

### Transmutation

Roman Jakobson suggests three distinct kinds of translations. The first is the “intralinguistic translation” or “*rewording*”, which is defined as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language”. The second form is the “interlingual translation” or “*translation proper*”, which is explained as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.” These two forms are common practice when dealing with translation in general. Jakobson’s third category is the “intersemiotic translation”, or “*transmutation*”, which is “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (Jakobson 1959). Carlos Severi (2014) applied this idea of an intersemiotic translation to the Yekwana weaving techniques. The Yekwana baskets are inhabited by non-human beings. These bad non-human beings are able to retransform themselves with the basket into dangerous “monsters” if the basket is not woven in a ritualised manner. The main part of such rituals is singing a list of names to keep these bad non-human beings “culturalised”<sup>17</sup> (Guss 1989, Severi 2014). They can be identified by their “body paint” which correspond to the designs of the baskets. Severi concludes that between the narrative (verbal) code system and the iconographic code system (nonverbal) acts of translation can be found, stating that:

It is clear that in the Yekwana case the passage from verbal to nonverbal code does not involve a simple equivalence between code-units. Rather, this form of translation mobilizes two equivalent messages in two different codes, language and conventional iconography. Each code is organized following its own rules. In other words, there is indeed semiotic heterogeneity (Severi 2014: 50).

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<sup>17</sup> Humans have a non-human master named Wanadi, who is the defender of the humans and the counterpart to his twin-brother Odosha (evil). Odosha is represented by bad non-human beings, including the baskets, which are humanised and, therefore, transformed into “good” and/or “culturalised” by singing during their production (Guss 1989).



A similar kind of transmutation can be found in the Wayana iconography and in Wayampi music. Severi demonstrates as an example the recorded “suite” Moyotule (Beaudet 1983, 1997: 139, Severi 2014: 58), which generates an anaconda when playing. It is composed by several pieces performed by a soloist as well as in group performance. There is a list of other beings (monkey, birds, insects, mammals, fish) who are part of this anaconda theme. The generated anaconda suite is the “acoustic image” of a “complex invisible being” (Severi 2014: 58).

In the case of the Pemón musical genre *murúa*, the sign system needs to be transmuted, that means, it is translated from a verbal sign system to a nonverbal. The nonverbal sign system can be seen as a “musical communication” without a human semiotic-linguistic but with a non-human semiotic-linguistic meaning. In that case the owner of the song (spirit) is present in both performances. The difference of the code systems (verbal/non-verbal) is the intention defined by the non-human owner (spirit) of the song when humans (shamans) try to interact with him or her.

### **Transmutation as method for generating ontologies**

This translation of difference semiotic systems can be applied to the analyses of historical recordings as well, following Severi, who states:

[...] we could go a step further, and formulate the hypothesis that Jakobson’s logical distinction characterizes not only “language” and nonlinguistic codes, but also the exercise of thought itself. In this way, we could pass from an abstract opposition between “thought” (defined as rationality and categorization) and “language” (essentially defined as grammatical patterns) to the study of a set of multiple relations between forms of cognition (related, for instance, to ritual action and visual thinking) and intralinguistic, interlinguistic, and intersemiotic forms of translation. As we have seen, these forms of translation do not exist only between different languages, but also between different codes, and different pragmatic contexts, within a single culture. In this new perspective, variations in the use of codes and variations in the establishment of pragmatic contexts (not only variations between cultures and languages) would become sources for the variation of thought processes, and for the subsequent definition of “states of the world”, or of ontologies (2014: 64).

As we have seen above, the idea of “culture” has to be expanded to the term “collective”, when taking indigenous ontologies seriously. Thus, different variations of semiotic codes can be observed from all parts, like the academic researcher, the indigenous teacher, and/or indigenous specialists as well as non-indigenous specialists, etc. The intersemiotic translation (transmutation) becomes necessary not only in a single culture, but in interaction with all involved persons and entities from different collective and semiotic backgrounds of knowledge, associations, affects, and experiences.

When looking at the practice of ethnomusicology and/or inter-/transcultural musicology, ethnography is our main method for collecting data. It is well known that in general, one person who is part of a so called academic society tries to retrieve data from “another culture”. Over the years and after several attempts, this “other culture” is reduced to only a few representatives, often just one or two<sup>18</sup>. Over the years, the academic researcher and “informant” or “teacher”,

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<sup>18</sup> A good example is the co-publication of Bruce Albert and Davi Kopenawa (2010).



create a personal relation. This personal relationship is a kind of constantly renewing resonator, as both persons have their field of thoughts connected with their knowledge, experiences, imaginations, fictions, associations, emotions, etc. that resonates between both. A classic resonating process of collecting data and creating relations between different spheres as the academic world, the field world and the researcher as resonator is presented by the Brazilian anthropologist Carlos Rodrigues Brandão (2007) who reflects on his techniques, from first contact via participant observation to first interviews. Furthermore, he describes a situation with a special person, with whom he records several interviews, explaining distinct stages of copying data from one diary to another. He analyses interviews and goes back to the field to rethink and discuss several topics with his “informant”. He then generates a kind of pre-articulation of his material, saying that he connects “wires”, associating his data with recently published articles or books in the academic area. This process of connecting “wires” is a common practice in anthropology and ethnomusicology; creating new signs and new worlds of knowledge and “epistemic cultures” (Knorr Cetina 1999) often called “academic knowledge” due to its paradigms (Kuhn 2000). Another word to describe the process of “connecting wires” is association. It is the main performance of thoughts in the processes of generating such “epistemic cultures”, which reveals the “new” or “unknown” entities to the researcher’s discourses. In other words, Brandão states: “One has to be aware that most of the time in research, the most important things are the answers which have no questions –the things that come out and flow free”<sup>19</sup> (Brandão 2007: 27).

When adapting the idea of transmutation as a process of generating ontology to the interaction of hearing sessions on historical recordings, a recording can be defined as an actant, constantly generated by different entities.

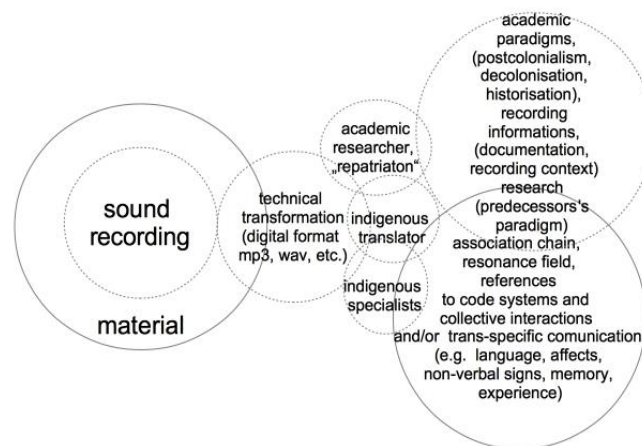


Figure 2. Generating ontologies of historical sound sources.

<sup>19</sup> Ter consciência de que numa pesquisa, muitas vezes, a coisa mais importante são as respostas que não foram perguntadas, as coisas que fluem e saem livremente (Brandão 2007: 27).

Associations provoke affects controlled by non-human entities. It explains why the good mood of a specialist can change into no reaction or even rejection when listening to a historical sound source (Lewy 2017a). Thus, everything can happen during a hearing session. On the one hand there are reference chains revealed with the “fruitful” informations, like the missing lyrics, the categories of the genre and/or ontological/mereological informations. On the other hand, the recording can produce sadness, trouble, a ban against playing it, or even a strong argument against the existence of the recordings. In Hatoum’s case it is more complicated, because only the information of the existence of such sound entities provoked an intercultural conflict due to an ontological crash.

Historical sound sources are never finished entities as they are constantly newly generated actants, defined by the involved entities, their quantities and qualities. These entities are the mentioned association chains, resonance fields, references to code systems (verbal/non-verbal), trans-specific interactions between human and non-human agencies, as well as affects and memory, just to mention a few categories (see Figure 2). As an example, the generating process of the mentioned *murúa* hearing sessions will be reflected on again. The aforementioned information was based on several hearing sessions with different members of an indigenous society. But, there are a few more association chains revealed in other hearing sessions.

One of such hearing sessions was realised with Florinda who is part of the *orekotón* people (Lewy 2011, 2012, 2017a). She used to perform *areruya* and *cho’chiman* rituals as the ritual leader. For her, both categories of the *murúa* systems (non-verbal/verbal) are part of the *aiyan* world, the layer of bad energies like *kanaima*. These are entities who are sometimes perceived as humans and sometimes as non-humans, depending on their “kanaima state”. *Kanaima* kill other Pemón to serve for the *aiyan* layer. Humans are sacrificed by *kanaima* in order to receive reciprocity, as the “bad energies” of that layer are responsible for the growth of plants. The fruits of the plants serve for animal’s alimentation. The circle is closed when taking into account that feeding animals is necessary to guarantee alimentation of human beings (Lewy 2017b, 2018b). Florinda states that this knowledge refers to the Pemón “premodern times”, before the interaction with Christian spirits appeared. The beings of the *aiyan* layer has changed to the *makoi*, the bad layer in *areruya* practice today (Lewy 2011).

As I mentioned elsewhere (Lewy 2017a), Koch-Grünberg’s recordings of several “Oareba” (*warepan*) and *murúa* songs triggered an emotional reference –a chain of sadness during the hearing session with Florinda. The recordings reminded her of the death of her family. It was the reason why she entered into the described *areruya* state. Her reaction was not expected by my Pemón teacher and we stopped the hearing session. Florinda wanted us to record *areruya* songs and *aguinaldo pemón* (Lewy 2011) as well as songs to help the yucca plant growing, which we did immediately. A final hearing session in which wax cylinder 38 was played refers to a workshop I held in 2018 with younger Pemón people who are part of “El Sistema” in Santa Elena de Uairén. The adolescents did not recognize the recordings of the *murúa* as Pemón music. They told me that it sounded like “some kind of African music”, arguing that it reminded them of music used in Hollywood movies.

These few examples show how the perception of a historical sound recording produces

varied and even new meanings in a so-called source community. On the one hand we were able to realize intersemiotic translations of that genre (*murúa*) following the comments and descriptions of the older Pemón, especially the *ipukenak* as reference for the Pemón culture. On the other hand, the reference to other genres (*areruya*), like the song on wax cylinder 38, was heard and perceived as “bad”, demonstrates how new or other semiotic systems were associated (Florinda).

On a third level, it needs to be mentioned that none of the older Pemón specialists asked for the history of the recordings, the main paradigm of the academic world (fig. 2). Only younger Pemón were interested in Koch-Grünberg. They wanted to know why he recorded the songs and why he took them to Germany. In this case, translation is necessary as his intentions, circumstances and academic paradigms of his specific time needs to be explained. It is often transmutation as well, as we have seen it in the mentioned example of Koch-Grünberg’s recording situation. There, he describes how dangerous recordings are, arguing that only a few selected persons were allowed to hear them. But, he takes the recordings to a powerful place like Europe to share them with everyone there. The ambiguity becomes translatable when explaining the separation of a person as a scientist and as an ethical feeling human being, which was typical during Koch-Grünberg’s time. While the first representation of the person Koch-Grünberg is a clear formulated verbal sign system (his books and diaries), the second is a non-verbal sign system. This latter one seems to be in conflict with his inherent ethical rules caused by the perception of different ontological biases. This perception can be reconstructed by his described meta-communication and his behaviour. As a linguist, he focused on every detail in the Makuxí and Taupépán languages. He collected several text versions of the common and non-dangerous “yucca rubbing songs”, which, by the way, were identified by even the youngest Pemón today. Otherwise Koch-Grünberg did not write down not even a single word of any of the ontological dangerous genres like the “Oarebá” (*warepán*), *murúa*, or parts from the healing sessions. He only published myths about the common genres like *tukuik* and *parishara*, as well as the *murúa* version (see above). It can be assumed, that Koch-Grünberg even knew that the *murúa* song in the myth was an indigenous transmuted version.

These two faces of one person refer to a process of transmutation that can be explained and translated from a non-verbal sign system (behaviour) to a verbal semiotic sign system (language) as well. It also shows how different ontological biases can be revealed. In his case, the performance of hiding, or just “not-telling”, shows that he was aware of the ontological entities, but it was impossible for him to handle such differences in those times.

### **In sum**

In the introduction it was asked whether translation between musical languages as musical communication is possible in intercultural relations. An approach to answer is that the notion of interculturality needs to be expanded with inter-collective perspectives, taking human and non-human relations seriously and as modes of existence. The inter-collective communication combines new and/or other paradigms, which need to be revealed. A fundamental axiom is the ontological bias.

Another method is transmutation, which is not like an intra-linguistic or interlingual translation, but an intersemiotic translation. Transmutation is practised in distinct indigenous semiotic systems. These practices can be applied as a method in ethnomusicology to generate ontologies of historical recordings.

The short analysis of only one genre (*murúa*) that was recorded on wax cylinders, shows the complexity and the process of generating ontologies. New “elements” or “entities” like thoughts, associations, and concepts always appear. They vary and emerge in forms and meanings, defining the process of repatriation in a sense of intercultural/inter-collective relations between people.

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Matthias Lewy is an anthropologist and ethnomusicologist who received his PhD from Free University Berlin (Germany). He realized a postdoc research project focussing on sound ecologies of the circum-Roraima people at Universidad de Brasilia. He is specialized in ethnomusicology, indigenous sound ontologies, popular music studies, music and politics as well as music and technology. Recently, he started as a senior research associate at Lucerne University

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