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## Embedding Observation into the Context of Cultural Musicology: Some Moments in Mexico City

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### Abstract

Narrative analysis needs narration. In cultural musicology, a term worth being taken up in succession and contemporary modification of ethnomusicology or anthropology of music, observation is an essential skill that most elaborately reveals itself in narration. Moreover, narrations include personal features and thoughts that are often avoided in academic writings. However, they offer a wide potential for narrative analysis.

This paper is to exemplarily discuss theoretical issues on cultural musicology taking a holistic approach that includes analytic description, heuristics, source interpretation by means of the so called objective hermeneutics, and phenomenology. In 2008, outlines of some small stories put exemplarily together were written down in German, and part of a story collection was published in 2009. The city being observed is Mexico City that was visited in September 2006. This paper is to review the original narrations in an extended version under the aspect of their academic effectiveness after having developed further analytical tools in the last 5 years. Besides questioning conservative academic rules of reporting outcomes, this paper also reflects on the possibilities of intense methodological developments during a relatively short time.

The topics of discussion include dealing with and presenting cultural heritage (*Danzas de los Voladores*), history of sound preservation (Songs of the Cora Indians), music in social movements and holistic approaches to research.

**Keywords:** Narrative analysis, Mexico City, *Danzas de los Voladores*, Cora Indians, early sound recordings



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## **Incorporando la observación al contexto de la musicología cultural: algunos momentos en la Ciudad de México**

### **Resumen**

El análisis narrativo necesita narración. En la musicología cultural –término que vale pena considerar en el desarrollo de la etnomusicología o antropología de la música–, la observación es una habilidad esencial que se revela a sí misma en la narración. Además, las narraciones incluyen pensamientos y rasgos personales que muy a menudo son evitados en los escritos académicos. Sin embargo, ofrecen un amplio potencial para el análisis narrativo.

Este artículo tiene como finalidad abordar la discusión de temas teóricos sobre la musicología cultural adoptando un enfoque holístico a través de ejemplos. La discusión incluye descripción analítica, heurística e interpretación de fuentes por medio de las llamadas hermenéutica objetiva y fenomenología. En 2008, escribí los bocetos de algunas pequeñas historias en alemán y en 2009 algunas de ellas se publicaron. La ciudad que se observa es Ciudad de México, que visité en septiembre de 2006. Este artículo tiene por objeto hacer una revisión de las narraciones originales, en versiones ampliadas, desde una perspectiva académica después de haber desarrollado, en los últimos cinco años, herramientas analíticas adicionales. Además de cuestionar las reglas académicas de tinte conservador que rigen la comunicación de los resultados, este artículo también reflexiona sobre las posibilidades de desarrollos metodológicos intensos llevados a cabo durante un tiempo relativamente breve. Los temas de discusión se refieren al tratamiento y a la presentación de la herencia cultural (Danzas de los Voladores), la historia de la preservación sonora (Cantos de los Cora), la música en los movimientos sociales y los enfoques holísticos en la investigación.

**Palabras clave:** análisis narrativo, Ciudad de México, Danzas de los Voladores, indígenas cora, primeras grabaciones sonoras

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## **Incorporando a observação no contexto da musicologia cultural: alguns momentos na Cidade do México**

### **Resumo**

A análise narrativa necessita de narração. Na musicologia cultural –termo que vale a pena considerar no desenvolvimento da etnomusicologia e da antropologia da música–, a observação é uma habilidade essencial que se revela a si mesma na narração. Para além disso, as narrações incluem pensamentos e notas pessoais que muitas vezes são evitados nos textos académicos. Sem dúvida que oferecem um grande potencial para a análise narrativa.

Este artigo tem como finalidade abordar a discussão de temas teóricos sobre musicologia cultural adoptando um enfoque holístico através de exemplos. A discussão inclui descrição analítica, heurística e interpretação de fontes através das chamadas hermenéutica objetiva e

fenomenologia. Em 2008 escrevi o esboço de algumas pequenas histórias em alemão e em 2009 algumas foram publicadas. A cidade observada é a Cidade do México, que visitei em setembro de 2006. Este artigo tem como objetivo fazer uma revisão das narrações originais, em versões entendidas, a partir de uma perspectiva académica depois de ter desenvolvido, nos últimos 5 anos, ferramentas analíticas adicionais. Além de questionar as regras que regem a matriz conservadora dos resultados das comunicações académicas, isso também reflete sobre as possibilidades de desenvolvimentos metodológicos realizadas ao longo de um tempo relativamente breve. Os temas de discussão referem-se ao tratamento e à apresentação da herança cultural (“*Danzas de los Voladores*”), da história da preservação sonora (“*Cantos de los Cora*”), da música nos movimentos sociais e dos enfoques holísticos da pesquisa.

**Palavras-chave:** análise narrativa, Cidade do México, *Danzas de los Voladores*, índios Cora, primeiras gravações de som

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## Introduction

This paper is to exemplarily discuss theoretical issues on cultural musicology (van der Meer and Erickson 2014) taking a holistic approach that includes analytic description, heuristics, source interpretation by means of the so called objective hermeneutics (Oevermann, Allert, Konau, and Krambeck 1987), and phenomenology. The abstract order of these methodological terms may turn out to be a pleasant personal prose on a visit to a city and the derivation of problem statements that finally lead to the proposed discussion on cultural musicology.



The Paseo de la Reforma of Mexico City, in September 2006 without any traffic.  
(Photo by the author).

The city being in focus is Mexico City. I visited this city in September 2006 in order to attend the annual conference of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives. The following personal description in explanatory prose is part of the way of breaking some conservative academic rules that seem to be partly too stiff in working with reflective data. The style and the order of description follow a deliberate systematic method that should invite curiosity instead of ticking boxes for achieved outcomes.

In doing so, I consider that the ability to tell stories in cultural musicology is a key skill in order to address important academic issues. Promoting this self-reflective complex of methods, I must say that stories are not to be avoided but to be interpreted and taken as a point of departure in discussing underlying core problems within the field.

## Story 1

The large public park of Chapultepec in Mexico City has benches, which must have been made by truly clever thinkers among all bench designers. One day in September 2006, when I adjusted my back to the slightly curved shape, sitting (down) already, (seized me into) a deep calm and comforting fatigue seized me. The seat is elegantly tilted back and long enough to let the knees rest and relax at a favorable angle. I assume that most adults in Mexico are about my

size because I am rather small compared to other tall-grown Europeans, and therefore, a lot of people may truly understand the value of these awesome benches in the greatest of all major cities throughout Latin America. The benches are so overwhelmingly functional that they would be very well suited as a preventive agent against public and personal violence. Just let the offenders take a seat. And while I thought about this and imagined how much I would miss these benches from now on, unable to forget the benefits that they had done to me after many hours of brisk walking, my thoughts were already going into a pleasant airy dream. I fell asleep in the middle of the rushing green on a strawberry-yogurt colored bench.

The transitions from wakefulness to sleep from sheer representational perception to a fanciful speculation, from physical tension to emotional compensation somehow always lead to interesting links and to fragments of avid, little stories.

Before my eyes dark skinned Mexicans circled around, hung by the feet and with bare and outstretched arms. They were singing endless verses of an ancient ballad with slight changes in each stanza making them appear even more significant. Dream and reality played a trick on me, because the flying dark men do not sing and the ancient ballad is one of the songs of the Cora communities that were recorded under incredible conditions a hundred years ago. That song, engraved into a wax cylinder is part of another exciting episode, about which I will report soon.

## Story 2

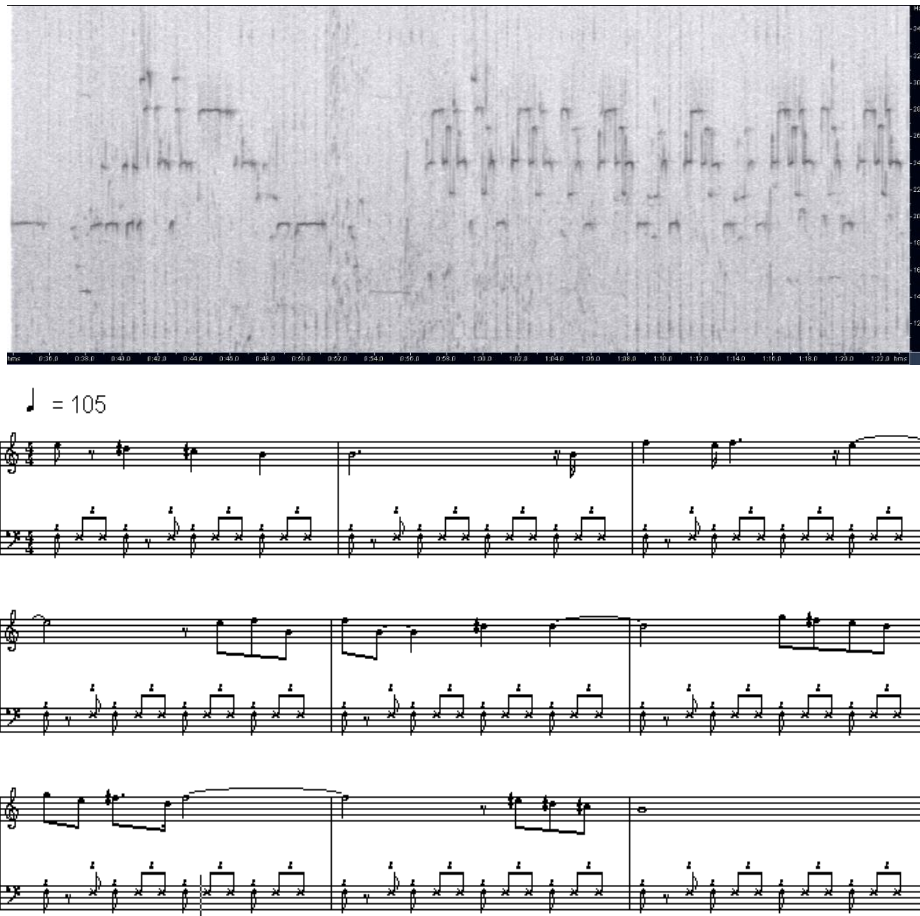
Just before I settled on one strawberry yogurt colored bench, I had seen the “pole flyers”. They built their bare, light blue painted tree-of-life symbolizing pole on a circular plaza near the Anthropological Museum and attracted many people on this somewhat cool Saturday morning. The pole flyers are called *Voladores*. They are one of the cultural rediscoveries that give visitors at so many places in the world the feeling of being among the very few elected observers of unique cultural creations. We can rarely assess what is really unique and creative about this or how far it was modified in order to fit our perceptual framework, but we are never averse to the idea of being the chosen ones. We like to believe in being something special.

The pole flyers in (the) Chapultepec Park are specially hired by the museum to perform this actually rare ritual for the guests of the museum. They try to really meet the individual requirements for the ritual and keep to the order of acts. But the magic is only vaguely revealed with a lot of imagination on the part of the audience. There were five performers at work who gave the impression of being a bit tired and unfocussed. The man acting as the priest went first into the middle of the circle around the seven-meter-high pole. After him, the flyers appeared. Normally, the performers or real persons in a ritual differed in appearance by their clothes. At least the priest would wear a red shirt with a white collar and a colorful cap and the flyers would prefer inconspicuous clothing or a naked upper body. But here, all five were dressed similarly as priests. They wore a sash with additional applications over their white shirts. They were dancing while revolving around the ‘tree of life’ together with the priest who played a one hand flute and a one hand drum, which he held stiffly in the same hand as the flute with four finger holes.



Detail from a mural in the Anthropological Museum of Mexico City. The four pole flyers and the priest are shown in the background. (Photo by the author).

The rhythmic pattern of the melody was based on the step size and depended crucially on the consistency of the flute tuning. I noticed among local instrument makers at Constitution Square that almost all the flutes are tuned differently, so it obviously does not really matter which special intervals are played just the direction –up or down– decides about correctness. This phenomenon is quite similar to dance steps that can vary individually. Most essential seems to be the step direction and intensity with which they are conducted. Pacing changed with synchronized dance steps following the pattern left-right-left-right-right, while the repeated right step precipitated more powerfully and took a longer span of time. At the end of a circumnavigation, the flyers stamped with their priest in synchronism to the drum beats in metric triple subdivisions with alternating step accents. Sometimes the flyers also turned themselves around in the same walking rhythm with their heads bowed to the axis itself. This short rotation is actually the remaining core of the ritual danced to the sun god. But this moment went so quickly and was so shy that it got lost in the general amazement. After a few repeats the flyers climbed up the pole equipped with ropes into the square frame crowning the pole.



Section of a spectral picture and of a transcription of the first dance (by the author).

There, they fastened their belts to the rope loops that should keep them on their way upside down. They were followed by the priest who went to the center of the pole playing uninterruptedly his musical instruments. He sat down on a big drum right on the top of the pole's cross-section and should actually have silenced his small drum, but the pressure from the upwards looking audience that expected sort of ongoing sound made him continue playing and (to) fulfil the imagined demand. He did it more gently than before, but it was doubtful whether he could appease the sun god with this acting. The flute part symbolizes lightning bolts that pierce the sky and seek the nearness to God. The big drum is beaten to the dance and it should highlight the heartbeat of Mother Earth. This seems to be rather dangerous to the performers in the air seven or more meters above ground. In 13 rounds the pole flyers were lowered down by ropes that unwound by the rotation of the square frame. Just before they touched the ground with their outstretched arms, they went back to the upright position and stepped down well-coordinated and simultaneously. The second round of the dance began, and two more followed. Only then was the ritual bound to special numbers and repetitions completed<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Some friends –Bill & Patsy (2001) and Lane (2009)– described the ritual in Mexico according to their many observations and the text spoken to Bruce Lane's documentary: "The Sundance begins with the four flyers entering the circle led by the Priest. The Priest, who is dressed in red and white to represent the sun, wears a multi-colored

$\text{♩} = 98$

Excerpt of a transcription of the second dance (by the author).

The *Voladores*, the pole flyers, tried very hard not to look bored by their own performance. Interestingly, at least it seemed, this seriousness in their faces made them look tired as if they were trapped in their performed ritual, unable to escape spontaneously. They could not laugh or just fall backward on the lawn enjoying the wonderful cool and clear Saturday noon as so many other young visitors to the park were doing.

When I awoke again I saw them from afar. They packed their costumes in a linen bag and rolled the long ropes together. End of the show. The audience got lost in a star shape in the park. Some strolled past to the special benches that had long since been occupied. Generously, I made space for a mother with two whining children and strove toward the park's main exit.

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headress to reflect the rainbow. All five dance around the base of the pole, stopping in the four primary directions to ask permission for the Sundance which honors the Creator. The four flyers, in turn, ascend the pole, which towers from the earth a full eighty feet, topped by an eight-inch diameter drum and a rotating platform. The pole represents the connection of the earth to the heavens; our earthly connection to the divine, the Creator. The rope which is wrapped around the pole from the bottom to the top, and which they use to climb, represents the umbilical cord. The Priest is the last to ascend. Once on top he makes an offering in song using a flute, dancing on top of the eight-inch drum, stopping in the four directions to offer a prayer in song. The drum, upon which he stands, carries his footfalls down through the pole to the earth as his flute song is carried to the heavens. The drum upon which he dances, represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth and the flute represents lightning.” Additional information can be found in the documentary *The Tree of Life* of Bruce “Pacho” Lane. ISBN 978-1-891813-00-9. There are shown 6 pole flyers in priest clothing all with a cone hat and fixed ropes.



### Story 3

In September 2006, the adjacent Paseo de la Reforma resembled a giant training camp for open-air politicians. The two wide multi-lane roads were paved with yellow, white and blue plastic tents whose portals were rolled up calling you to stop and enter. “El Pueblo Unido” rang out from the speakers. Gesturally elaborated political speeches flickered on video monitors and coffee mugs piled on the tables together with questionnaires, forms, and colorful newspapers. The walls of the tents were adorned with banners. A guitar peeped here and there out of some boxes from the household. Between the tents, laundry dried and sleeping bags ventilated on ropes that were strikingly similar to those of the *Voladores*. A surrealistic view was offered through the drying faded T-shirts fluttering in the wind (over) to the glass and steel facades of the big banks alongside the road where the colorful hustle and bustle was reflected as well as strictly excluded. There was a smell of grilled meat and there was, despite all the exceptionality, an experienced tranquility that reminded me of professional funeral services. It was evening, when excitement took over as well as hope, despair, comfort, and passion that erupted in speech choirs. “Obrador, Obrador” the people’s voices sounded throughout the place and long, and longer the speeches of the speakers became. Everyone among the audience looked capable to contradict, to express applause, and even to jump on the stage consisting of wooden boxes underlining with flying arms and hands what particularly moved him or her. For a moment the enormous appeal that can be caused by such spontaneous expressions of life of a mass of like-minded people was disclosed to me. How easy it was to stretch a fist against an imaginary omnipotence, and how easy it was to shout out unabashedly with the others into the sky of this night! This might have been the incredible moment of self-sacrifice, which ultimately justified everything, which fraternized and twinned all together.

The lively thoroughfare, the main artery of the center, did not pulsate for a few weeks, thus missing the usual non-stop traffic. The tops of the palm leaves just began to recover from the burden of the dust. However, one could only walk along on foot. When the sun managed to break through the smog, it crawled under the bright sultry yellow plastic tarpaulins, in which visitors gathered for countless reasons. I was intrigued by the curiosity of what was left of the proverbial Latin American revolution energy among the masses. After the hope had left me in my pre-teenage years with the death of Allende, I somehow avoided this wild world of spontaneous adherence to principles. The songs here sounded very similar, but the spirit seemed less sparkling and contagious. I felt old and quite treacherous, looking for excuses for my changed being since I was an enthusiastic teenager who believed in the strength of unconditional solidarity. Questioning myself, I watched the sun-burnt faces of Mexican men and women of the same age who were too busy with themselves and too far in mind to even get an inkling of what was going on inside me.

I longed for a better overview and sought for the Torre Latinoamericana, once the tallest house of the region. Much slimmer and far more inconspicuous than I had imagined, the tower suddenly stood there in the middle of the street maze, framed by undecorated stalls, a seemingly shy church and swanky sandstone buildings which were inhabited by bizarre authorities and other key institutions. The lift to the uppermost floor lurched slightly and came to a halt quite

abruptly. I could look out in all directions and the window glass seemed to be pretty close to the center which increased the impression of fragility. The view was still overwhelming. In half an hour, the sun was going to set down. I looked for a good place and dreamed toward the event. Although the tower was quite high, I felt after some time that I was looking uphill. To the north, a densely built mountain range arched into the sky. To the west, the way went upwards to Chapultepec Park, with its dark trees above, which eagles were circling, and small feathery clouds that sent their shadows down on the walkways. The dark street canyons of downtown looked like holes in a stony ground of the sea. Only the bright yellow tents of the revolutionary occupants flashed forth and led past the tower along the Paseo de la Reforma.

#### Story 4

The sunset was kind of disappointing: a yellow-pinky flickering stripe as seen through graying frosted glass. Only the small clouds over the park shone silver blue for a few moments. The lights below the yellow tents were lit and caused the long road to be illuminated like a golden snake that crawls on the dark ground of a labyrinth. When I came down, the streets were filled with people who took refuge in the cool night breeze. Below Plaza de la Constitución the young, beautiful and mostly rich Mexicans met and chatted. They strolled along the aged colonial buildings and sat down in the plushy wicker chairs of the rather expensive street cafés. Between them, tourists wandered around in Birkenstock shoes and with painfully burnt necks. They were somehow attracted by the *Obrador* followers. Probably, they regarded the scene as a holiday addition and were happy to experience real resistance fighters under authentic Third World conditions, to take amazing photos and video. Some elderly couples among them hesitated. They might have shared my state of mind in this matter, I speculated.

Despite the light breeze, the crowds and the heated stone made the stroll not very relaxing. To move faster, one had to go into the underground. On the roads there was no other means of transport possible than on one's own legs. The few side streets with traffic were full of vans and taxis in which incorrigible travelers sat, who came much later to any appointment than using public transport together with common people. The subway in Mexico City is well-organized, well-tempered and amazingly reliable. A haven for all the insecure and downhearted.

Outside the noble city center, the protecting impact of the subway was even more obvious. The stations offered with their infrastructure more comfort not only to city hikers and commuters. They were important especially to those who had dismissed the supposedly hard life in the Mexican province. At the station Insurgentes, farmers came from remote mountain villages and gathered in small groups as if they were going to re-constitute their families in this alien environment.

There were very simple food stalls, moderately usable washrooms and a traffic-free round place that looked like it had been sunk like a revolving stage in the middle of the place surrounded by heavily used expressways. It was extremely important that the enclosed area offered protection from the rain and sun, thus giving a temporary living space for travelers.

It was there that I met an older couple from Nayarit on the Pacific coast. They were sitting on the balustrade of a flower island and were dressed much too warmly for the season. The

woman wore a turquoise blue long skirt with finely embroidered flower edgings on a yellow background. She wrapped herself in a black scarf made of coarse wool. Her husband was dressed in an outworn jacket, quite youthful blue jeans and a brightly colored orange T-shirt. His head was decorated with a nearly white hat that was kept together with a gray hatband.

Exhausted from walking, I sat down beside them and studied the woman's embroidery. Both began to explain in slow and, thankfully, bad Spanish that they would wait there for their son, who was searching for their daughter. The daughter had already moved to the capital many weeks before because she had found work there. She must be a seamstress somewhere, but she had never reported back home. This was followed by a detailed description of the young girl. The couple was worried because they heard of so many unhappy stories. In particular, young people would leave the Sierra Madre, mainly those living east of Highway 15. They looked at me as if I could help them to get the thing back on track, to stop immigration into cities, to make those children return to their parents, and to protect young girls against dealers who need them to do anything else but work as seamstresses.

Nayarit was once the cradle of the Mexican revolt against the Spanish conquerors. The cruel suppression of the so called Mixtón War (1540-1542) led already then to mass abduction of Indians. The Cora and Huichol are therefore quite widely dispersed in Mexico and at the same time characterized by a deep attachment to their home landscape. It is all the more incomprehensible for these people how one can leave their home voluntarily, unless he or she has such serious reasons as this elderly couple.

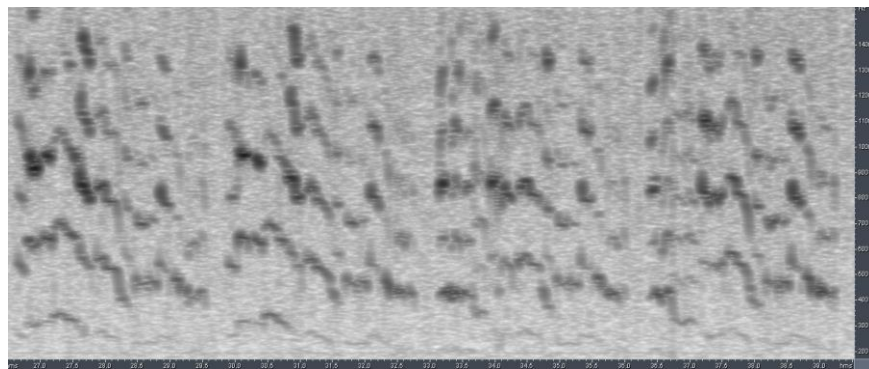
### Story 5

I remembered a Mitote, a narrative song of the Cora from the, at that time, small and inaccessible village of Jesús María Cortes in Nayarit, then still under the name "Military District Tepic", which was one of the earliest sound recordings made in Central America. The anthropologist Konrad Theodor Preuss had traveled to Mexico "On behalf and with funding from the Royal Prussian Ministry of Culture using the Duke of Loubat-Professeur Foundation" in 1905 and 1906 and got through adventurous incidents, following his own determination there. Among others, he picked the Cora singer Leocadio Enriquez, one of the few in town that still remembered the long Mitote chants. Places named Jesús María exist in many other areas of Mexico such as Aguascalientes, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, Michoacan, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa, Nuevo León, Baja California Sur, Campeche, Coahuila, Durango, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Tamaulipas and Zacatecas. The little addition 'Cortes' is more recent than the audio recording itself of the then young Konrad Preuss, who, like many of his colleagues, introduced himself as a brilliant observer and who could eventually soon become a renowned researcher thanks to his many rare recordings. Unfortunately, he also could not, as, later, an experienced and –one would think– wise man, resist the temptations of the state-supporting ideology in the impending Third Reich and was jealous of the front places with Richard Thurnwald fighting against Walter Krickeberg and Hermann Baumann, who, in turn, seemed to be the most devoted followers of the then ruling regime. The grotesque scientific and theoretical debate hardly hid the fundamental political profiling struts and the elementary fear of suddenly getting, through

carelessness, into existential danger. However, diligence and skills alone seem to be not sufficient for a good anthropologist. It is as if a doctor cannot see blood or, let's say, a vegetarian goes into teaching with a butcher. I almost said 'fortunately', the consequences of Konrad Preuss' actions remained abstract to him. He died peacefully in 1938 and took his zeal with him into his grave (Petermann 2004).

What remains is the recordings that were not destroyed, fortunately, although there was more than one occasion during war time and reconstruction. The song that fits so well the Cora couple I met, lived once by its driving rhythm, the minimum variation of the verse part, with steady and unflinching repetition of the second part of each stanza. The real skill may be seen in the extensive text to be memorized, but also the effective musical variation of such monotonous-appearing long songs is an art in itself. It is obvious that the song animated dancing and that parts of it were accompanied instrumentally, possibly with simple reed flutes that can be held in one hand.

♩ = 134



Excerpt of the transcription and the spectral view of the Mitote chant (by the author).

Compared with later recordings, the just very deliberate though unobtrusive differentiation of melody lines in the early recording is quite remarkable. Dance songs that are sung during the festival 'Las Pachitas De Los Corachol' in Santa Teresa, for instance, consist mostly of identical repeats in the verses. Only the ololyges and the added instruments bring changes in the process. Now, the repertoire seems generally more "ready-made" according to presentation contexts.

### Story 6

Two years after Konrad Theodor Preuss had left Jesús María, Catherine Palmer Finerty (1908-2006) was born, who, in later life, eventually spent eight years in this place, and at the age of 92 wrote a book about this time. Born in Southern California, she fled the modern city environment of Manhattan and found herself converted by her neighbors in the remote place, although she initially came to proselytize Indians. After these eight years she traveled further into an even more remote settlement of the Huichol, whose inhabitants needed her help in education and health more urgently than she thought. The Mexican government awarded her the Golden Medal of Honor, the highest award for humanitarian services in the country to pay tribute to her tireless efforts.

How different are the ways of Konrad Theodor Preuss and Catherine Palmer Finerty! It takes a good deal of professional dispassion to get to the data collected by them with equivalent interest. The academic Preuss has done much, because without him we would know nothing of the Mitote chants at the beginning of the 20th century. It was also the National Socialist Preuss, who was eventually topped in his eagerness only by Walter Krickeberg. Somehow it is not really surprising that Krickeberg followed him in office and stayed undisturbed until 1954, thus being able to twist with a very similar zeal his own story in order to adapt to new times.

And here, I was again in the middle of my observations. How much more honest are the probably tired and sweating fighters in the yellow tents along the Paseo de la Reforma? In a few days, the tents will have to be torn down. The deadline will have passed, the daily madness will return to the busiest avenue in the capital. Will these people ever deny having campaigned for Obrador and his movement? Will they stay upright, though broken?



Detail from a decoration made of gypsum depicting a music ensemble in a procession. Anthropological Museum of Mexico City (by the author).

What will definitely stay is the irresistible benches in the public park of Chapultepec and the pole flyers who will make everyone believe they are experiencing something extraordinary.

### Lesson

So far the pure prose. So far the messed up and biased thoughts of an observer who tried to mobilize all resources available in order to get the maximum out of a short stay in a place among unfamiliar people and in an irretrievable time. The text consists of six short and somehow interrelated stories with a minimum of footnotes and no in-text citations. It is not hardcore science but speculative writing mixed with observation details. Though nothing could be objected, everything is in question through the gaze of academic demands. What could be revealed through such stories, through telling them as if there is no other way to explore data?

The lesson to learn is that observations are complex and require indeed the mobilization of all personal resources. Another lesson is that everything is connected, especially the subject observed and the individual experience that is applied to it. And yet another lesson is that moralizing is a strong motivation to get into details and to overcome bias that is based on possibly wrong information. Seeking for proof that justifies bias is the motor of many scientific moves. If well done, it is also the defeat of bias.

The first story implies that the pole flyers are acting a ritual to amuse strangers who do not really know what happens. It might be to attract people that visit the Anthropological Museum located in the park of Chapultepec. The benches along the walkways through the park are seen as the authentic and ultimate experience while the performance at first view seems to be sort of a fake event. This is only partly true. The *Danzas de los Voladores* were recognized as Cultural Heritage of the World in 2009, proudly announced on the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO

Commission on Intangible Cultural Heritage in Abu Dhabi. On 12 October in 2009, the official celebration took place in Papantla in the North of the State of Veracruz near the Gulf of Mexico. The pole was placed on the square place of El Tajín and the event was nationwide commented in the mass media. What the pole flyers did in 2006 was heading toward this recognition and the performers gave indeed their best to convince a large audience. It was part of a nationwide program to promote a cultural practice that was forbidden by Spanish rulers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Taylor 2007: 42). At that time, the performance of pre-Spanish theatre or rituals during church festivals was seen as resistance (Lane 1998). Interestingly, even low level Spanish settlers were excluded from attending or watching these performances, which says something on the attention paid and the appeal of the dance in general. In other words, the feeling of observing an extraordinary ritual is nothing new to the subject matter. It is coincidentally backed by reliable sources.

The second story is seeking for analytical details. As in a number of other cases, items which are so famous that they are considered as being a cultural heritage in a region are often not well discussed in terms of performance details, structural features and causations of movements. If anyone wanted to study a cultural practice in Mexico, the pole flyers would not be among the top ten topics since it would be contemplated as ‘over-researched’. This is a wide spread bias among academics. If something is prominent in the mass media, then this must be well known to researchers in the field. Unfortunately, this is a fallacy. Despite being an item of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the World, it is worth studying this ritual in all its practical details and in as many historical and regional versions as possible to get a slight understanding of performance history among the people living in today’s Mexico. The anachronism is the transcription of dance outlines which seem to be outdated as they impose a musical thinking on the performance that might be completely different from the reality of the participating individuals. However, the dresses of the dancers were also a kind of imposition, since they have adopted partly Spanish style and circus attitudes since some hundred years ago (Taylor 2007). The transcription is, so to say, a point of departure into another thinking that has not yet been reached. Unfortunately, transcriptions often have the reputation of being a result rather than a point of departure. They help the researcher to find sensitive structural issues and re-construct the listening experience at the moment of observation if he or she is literate in this type of drafting musical processes. The spectral view might be less biased. However, the entire software is biased and shows features as well as emphasizes elements that may have little or no meaning within a culture alien to the software producer. In combination with a transcription, both can help to visualize a progression in real time or at least some essentials, but neither of them is indeed depicting ‘music’.

The third story needs long term personal experience with social transformation to be exploitable for academic purposes. Possibly, it needs some other stories to get on a level from where an unexcited analysis is possible. The background indicated is an experience of social movements beyond the Iron Curtain and its black & white framework (Neamțu, 2010). As an author that experienced as a school kid in the 1970s the worldwide rebellion against ongoing colonization in Latin America, the conflicting parties were soon diversified into bad friends, good enemies, accordingly, into good songs and honest poems, or into plain propaganda and into

a hypocritical embrace that does not allow for independence from the hugging power. Latin American songs were performed widely in the East of Europe. They were to symbolize open arms and unconditional solidarity of the people so far away and yet with them in their mind and heart. Many young people were enthusiastic about the songs, the rhythm, the timbre of guitars, and bamboo flutes. Sharp male choir voices added up to the fascination. Spanish was a hot language among teenagers. Festivals of music were widely politicized and political meetings were widely musicalized. Visitors from Latin America were showcased as resistant fighters and the music preceded them. The atmosphere was comfortable among these solidarity groups since it gave many young people an idea of what could be the meaning of life. However, the episode was too short and too confusing to last long or to deeply influence individual biographies. The only long lasting memories were the songs (Brauer 2012, Zourek 2014). As a result, the sound of these songs carries a special meaning that is very different from the meaning they have had in the place of origin or they have now in current practice. It is highly sensitive to look through the gaze of these experiences into the pitiless presence. Yet it gives a clear picture of the history of diversity in global perception toward music in politics and vice versa. One insight is that, though the story keeps to the plain observation, it is a perceptive self-reflection on what impact the music has on the observer's mind. The story avoids, however, looking at the impact the movement has on the life of the movement's members and singers. Once fighting for equality and human rights, the state itself is of unequally higher interest to the observer. This treacherous self-documenting moment is seemingly hard to overcome and may inhibit any participant of any movement in its own way.

The fourth story is to find back into contemporary issues, though this story is still affected with rather imposing moral considerations. Bias meets bias. Cultural background knowledge helps definitely to find access to the tragedy of recent migration patterns. However, not everything that can be backed with academic literature and common sense is a safe ground to operate. It is right to say: Too general, too speculative, and blurred with stereotyping hearsay. Yet, this story tells how communication may disintegrate if two sides depart from significantly different conditions. Being in the same place at the same time does not mean much to the integrity of knowledge gained through a conversation (Oeverman et al. 1987). The many gaps will be nearly always filled with some general or speculative ideas confirming stereotyping hearsay that is still available to the individual.

The fifth story then escapes fully into sources made of academic articles, reports, and rescued recordings (Ziehm, 1976, Neurath & Jáuregui, 1998). Since it is the history that is presented, a seemingly safe place to write about is reached because of others who already contributed their part and who can be anonymously consulted. This reading process is not free from danger. Different from story 4, the 'bias meets bias' situation is not only given through varying pre-conditions but through varying time experiences and completely unknown requirements that gave all these mainly written sources their distinct shape. Interestingly and actually somehow surprisingly when considering the high ethics of cultural musicologists, it is much easier to deal with papers than with real persons. Many articles on one subject area are only indirectly connected, much less connected than people who meet in person even for a short



time. Every author or institution follows a strict goal, relying mostly on limited data and presents facts that fit the goal. The potential to deal in one's own research writing with a number of academic documents that were made fitting rather than left open for interpretation is very high. In the era of the internet, the shapes of these documents transform into the uniformity of bits and bytes. It becomes increasingly difficult to differentiate the reliability of sources. Insofar, the escape into the past and into written sources can fail catastrophically. Taking this risk is as good as speculating in storytelling. However, the account on Konrad Theodor Preuss is symbolic for putting academic outcomes high despite personal shortcomings. The achievement is what counts. On the other hand, it is obvious that hard work alone does not always contribute to individual wisdom seen from a holistic perspective. The fight for power among academics at the time when Preuss (1932), Krickeberg (1956) and Thurnwald (1931-35) –who still have big names in the world of ethnography today– were at their best age appears bizarre if not ridiculous. Not less bizarre is the forgiveness in the years after the war and the long lasting inclination toward the personalities of these researchers.

The sixth and last story tries to compensate for the absence of kindness in the fifth story. It is a story about a story. The central figure is a lady who started her life again in a remote Mexican town. What mattered to her was things in life which were completely different from those of the three men mentioned above. She must have been a brave woman who was respected by her neighbors. This story has nothing to do with music but it is well sounding and praising how differently the world can be seen, can be changed and can be appreciated. The book, Catherine Palmer Finerty wrote with the title 'In a Village Far from Home: My Years among the Cora Indians of the Sierra Madre' is touching as many other diaries and travel reports. What is outstanding is the humble thankfulness for her experiences and a subtle hidden humor she could afford.

Though this last story is merely about an approach to life and its meaning, it is possibly the most helpful methodological hint in exploring culture musically and music culturally. Thus the circle closes: Telling stories is a strong tool in studying one's own and others' observations and a number of speedy research projects would benefit from re-discovering the art of narration that is followed by its critical analysis in an updated cultural musicology.

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**Biography / Biografía / Biografia /**

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