

2. "Latin American" Musical Identity

I am closely related to the music of Chávez and Revueltas, the greatest Mexican composers, because beside quality and appeal, they have something which I find missing with few honorable exceptions in the music being composed today in Mexico: identity. This has nothing to do with the quality of some of the works coming out of the pens of very important composers of the generation that now is between forty and sixty years of age. I just find that the impact of the music of the previous generation (not only in Mexican composers, but Latin American in general) is greater to the ears of an international public looking for a distinct and original language.

Eduardo Mata¹

1. *What's in an Adjective?*

If thus far I have been in the least successful in conveying identity's multidimensionality, by now the reader should begin to feel apprehension at the soundness of the term. The process of introjection as it applies to the music of Piazzolla as well as the contest between conflicting musicological narratives that I have dealt with so far offers a window into the many different factors that may exercise an effect upon the construction of Latin America's musical identity. It would seem as though no one factor alone identifies it properly, and at the same time considering various factors together shifts Latin America's identity deeper into a very unstable, unsettled terrain. If this is the case, is it at all possible to find a stable mental space for the notion of a Latin American identity? If the constitution of an identity is so fluid, how can one ever possess a fixed identity? Does one ever possess a fixed identity?

¹Interview by Jeannine Wagar in Wagar 1991, 182.

To tackle these questions let us go back to the previous chapter and reflect upon Alejandro Planchart's characterization of the complex configuration of Spain at the turn of the fifteenth century. Planchart refers to the mixture of the three different Iberian cultures —Christian, Muslim, and Jewish— as "the soul of a nation." He resorts to this rhetoric in order to avoid dealing with an immensely problematic proposition such as the identity of a nation. He is careful to use the word "soul" precisely because the "three Spains" counter-narrative, while being more pragmatic and therefore perhaps closer to the truth, obliterates any attempt to propose a clear-cut identity for fifteenth-century Spain. It is safe to talk about the Spanish soul without having to define what is meant by it because a soul is understood as an immaterial essence, an animating principle that defies categorization. The soul does not require a name. Identity, however, is necessarily defined according to categories and labels. To seek the identity of something or someone necessarily leads to the question "what should it be called?" and once a name has been attached to a certain being, object, event, or circumstance, its identity becomes fixed almost as if it were written in stone.

Madan Sarup explains this process by saying that "one element of identity construction is the process of labeling. People often attach certain labels to others, and the labels often begin to have an effect" (Sarup 1993, 14). The act of identifying something, therefore, could be described as a process that starts with a benign noun. Often, the noun becomes a controversial adjective, which eventually becomes a despised label or stereotype. By the time the chain has transformed the noun into a stereotype an important piece of information is lost: who gave the item in question a name in the first place and how did this noun become an adjective? Only when we try to answer these questions--by engaging in an epistemological study--one recognizes to what extent identity can be perceived as a measure of power and a weapon of control. The power is in the hands of those who not only imagine, construct, and invent an identity but, even more significantly, of those who coin a name for it.

"To name is to possess" writes Ilan Stavans in his book *The Hispanic Condition: Reflections on Culture and Identity in America* (1995, 155). Perhaps no other statement summarizes in such a concise, bold manner the reason why attempting to discuss identity is such a struggle for some while for others it is not even an issue. It is not difficult to notice that those who feel the burden of domination or colonialism constantly struggle with the question of identity. Those who do not — or those who feel part of a dominant or colonial force— take the identity issue for granted or avoid it altogether. Whatever the case, the statement by Stavans touches the wound that may be causing Latin

America's identity dilemma. It suggests that the origin of Latin America's struggle to define its identity might be quite endogenous. Could the origin be found in the name "Latin America" itself? After all, it is said that the name nations give themselves represents a good point of departure to study their identity.

Moved perhaps by the implication of this principle, Jesús María Herrera Salas, in his article "Cultural Identity and Development: The Social Violence Implicit in the Term 'Latin America'" (1995), argues that the term "América Latina" is Eurocentric and ethically biased in nature, and that it does not appropriately represent the complex social reality and diverse cultural configuration of the territory it is applied to. Even worse yet, Herrera Salas goes on to demonstrate how the name harbors connotations of violence and discrimination toward certain sectors of the continent's population.

As I summarize Herrera Salas's article below, it would better serve the purpose of this chapter if the reader keeps in mind the following question: if the name "Latin America" is mischievous to begin with, how can anything preceded by the adjective "Latin American" (as in "Latin American music") be any less mischievous or, in any case, easier to define?

A brief onomastic account of the term Latin America uncovers a long history of what Herrera Salas calls "Eurocentric toponymy," that is, the designation of native places according to European christening traditions. From the beginning of the conquest, Spaniards dismissed autochthonous names of places—which they heard from the natives themselves—and went on to baptize them according to their imaginations. "Guanahani," which means iguana, the native Lacayan name for the island where Columbus first landed, was immediately renamed "San Salvador" (Saint Savior) and the stopping points that followed soon thereafter suffered the same fate, receiving names such as "Santa María de la Concepción," "Fernandina," "Isabela," and so forth (Judge 1986). Similarly, the first designations given to the entire set of islands encountered were a product of geographical fantasies. Columbus was, after all, under the spell of Ptolemy's and Marco Polo's geographical accounts, which made him flirt with names such as "Terra Australis" and "Indias." But when he writes to the Catholic king he makes these territories seem even more exotic by referring to them as the "Other World." Soon thereafter the name "Nova Terra" or "New World" was coined by his brother Bartolomé. But it was the Italian geographer Americus Vesputius (Amerigo Vespucci), however, who first identified the fourth part of the world as "America," or land of Americus. It is at this point in history that the race to possess an entire continent by designating a name for it began.

Of course, in accusing Vespucci of wanting to appropriate the New World, Spaniards rejected the name "America" and did not accept it until the eighteenth century. Thus, in his 1647 book *Política indiana* (Policies of the Indies), the Spaniard Solórzano Pereira considered several names of Spanish origin: "Indias," "Antillas," "Orellana," "Colonia," "Columbia," "Ferisabel," and he personally recommended "Orbe Carolino." We see how by the turn of the fifteenth century the toponymy of the continent ceased to be based upon geographical concerns and very quickly became a manifestation of the violent process of conquest and colonization. This is how new nations with names such as "Española," "New Cádiz," "New Granada," and "New Spain" began to show up in early maps of the region. Predictably, the transition from "Spanish America" to the current modality of "Latin America" was also orchestrated in Europe, as recent as the nineteenth century, and as a result of the influence exercised by the emerging imperial nation of the time: the France of Napoleon III.

By 1850 France had become the second most powerful nation in the Western Hemisphere. After securing its financial and industrial stability at home, France launched a campaign to benefit from the rich material promises of foreign lands such as America, Suez, and Indochina. In an 1861 issue of *Revue des races latines*, L. M. Tisserand mentioned "L'Amérique Latine" in reference to French economist Michel Chevalier's propositions to participate in the construction of an inter-oceanic canal in Central America (eventually funded by the United States and constructed in Panama) as well as to a Mexican expedition that would secure France's inclusion in the affairs of the American conglomerate. This interest on the European front coincided with the tremendous impact that the French revolution had on the fathers of the Spanish American movements of independence, such as Simón Bolívar and José de San Martín. Not surprising, the new Creole aristocracy embraced the term "Latin America" as a way to expand their struggle for independence beyond the borders of the Iberian peninsula and at the same time endorse the ideas and writings of the new French liberalists. Hence, as far the ideology of the dominant classes was concerned, at the turn of the century Latin America could have well been called "French America."

Well into the twentieth century the controversy over an appropriate name for the continent lingers. Important writers like Chilean Gabriela Mistral and, more recently, Mexican Carlos Fuentes consistently lobbied for the reintroduction of Spain's legacy in the continent's name, favoring "Hispanoamérica" and "Iberoamérica" over "Latinoamérica." The Cuban patriot José Martí proposed "Nuestra América" (Our America), among other reasons to oppose the appropriation of the

original name "America" by the United States. Furthermore, if anyone would have cared to ask the original inhabitants of this part of the world, they would have found out, for example, that the native Cuna people of Panamá had their own name for the entire continent, as did most other pre-Colombian cultures. The name the Cuna people gave to America was "Abya-Yalá," which means mature land.

It is difficult to find an account that better demonstrates Ilan Stavans's assertion that "to name is to possess" than the one presented by Herrera Salas. As we saw, the designation of an entire continent became the means to claim ownership, create an artificial genealogy, and in the process construct the identity of extraneous forces. The name Latin America stands for domination and repression. It is the result of the Western world's greatest pathology, the construction of its own identity through the representation, portrayal, or delineation of an imagined "other." The identity of Latin America, at least as far as the name is concerned, has been carved out of what the Europeans imagined and longed for, rather than out of what it actually is or what they actually saw. As a consequence, and as this onomastic account suggests, even a basic issue in the construction of their identity, like an all-encompassing name, is still and should be controversial for Latin Americans. One would not be mistaken in concluding that as far as the name is concerned, the identity of this immense area of the world, containing nowadays more than 30 nations, has not yet left the drafting board. This being the case, if the name Latin America itself is anything but diaphanous, how do we interpret and posit the identity of all things Latin American? Ontologically speaking, how much does the power struggle described before transpire in disciplines identified as "Latin American"? As we will see next, in the case of Latin American music, the consequences are quite unfortunate.

In 1945, the Music Division of the Library of Congress issued one of the first English publications on the subject of Latin American music: Gilbert Chase's *A Guide to Latin American Music*. To show the extent to which the adjective "Latin American" was still difficult to define 450 years after Columbus's landing in Guanahani, I quote Chase's lengthy explanation in the preface to the guide:

The term 'Latin American', adopted for the sake of convenience, is not susceptible of a too-rigid interpretation. Strictly speaking, it does not apply to all the territories lying in the southern section of the Western Hemisphere. The Guianas, the British and French West Indies, the Republic of Haiti —these can only loosely be called 'Latin American' by virtue of geographical proximity. All that pertains to aboriginal culture before the coming of Columbus is in no sense

Latin American, but Amerindian. And in other cases the predominating influence is Afro-American. As a ready working formula, we have grouped under the rubric 'Latin America' all of South and Central America, Mexico, the West Indies, and those parts of the United States in which Hispanic influence was once predominant. For the sake of completeness it seemed desirable to include the Bahamas also.

The entries are grouped under the individual countries or territories to which they pertain, but in certain cases such classification is bound to be more or less arbitrary. For example, references to Incan music will be found under Peru, although the ancient domain of the Incas included parts of what is now Bolivia, Ecuador, and Argentina. References to Patagonia will be found under Argentina, though the Patagonia territory extends also into the political boundaries of Chile. Again, Puerto Rico is not included in the section devoted to United States, but has a separate entry. (Chase 1962, 9)

From Chase's very careful explication the reader should sense the insufficiency, even inappropriateness, of the adjective's application. It is almost as though every subject preceded by the adjective "Latin American" requires a reference to Chase's definition. In any event, for whatever reasons, *A Guide to Latin American Music* went out of print shortly after its publication. Through the efforts of Charles Seeger, and later Guillermo Espinoza, a new edition was published again almost 20 years later, in 1962, this time, however, bearing the title *A Guide to Music of Latin America*. The change from ". . . Latin American Music" to ". . . Music of Latin America" is quite significant and is worthy of a brief discussion.

The reason for this change was not so much due to the Samaritan realization that it is impossible to grasp in one single adjective Latin America's extraordinary variety of musical cultures, which range from the purest folk idioms to the most heavily transculturated conservatory styles. More likely, and more importantly, it was a necessary reaction against the results of yet another extraneous invasion. This time, however, the power play was not an affair between nations but an affair between corporations, namely Hollywood and the recording industry. Due to the manipulation by these industries of the success of artists like Carmen Miranda, the Brazilian singer who during the 1940s and 1950s went from being a spokesperson for Brazil to a caricature of the entire South and

Central America, "Latin American music" became a pervasive category, very narrow in scope, and commercial in aim (Solberg 1994).

During the seventeen-year gap between the first and the second edition of Chase's guide, Latin American music came to signify, almost exclusively, the dance music of certain urban centers of four specific countries: Cuba, Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. It took less than twenty years to fix the identity of Latin American music—at least in the minds of the general public—to the sound and imagery evoked by a few urban styles like the Son, Mambo, Corrido, Mariachi, Samba, Choro, Bossa Nova, and Tango, their rich attributes notwithstanding (Roberts 1985). Within this narrow repertoire, there was little or no place left for hundreds of other rural and urban musics, much less for erudite musical expressions, such as the seventeenth-century polyphonic villancicos of Mexican Gaspar Fernandes, or the ballets and Bachianas of Brazilian Heitor Villa-Lobos, the six symphonies of Mexican Carlos Chávez, the modernist concertos of Argentinian Alberto Ginastera, Mexican Silvestre Revueltas' and Cuban Amadeo Roldán's syncretism, the neoclassicism of Chilean Juan Orrego-Salas, or the dodecaphonic works of Argentinian Juan Carlos Paz and Panamanian Roque Cordero, to name only a few relevant examples that come to mind.

More recently, in the United States the binomial category "Latin American" underwent yet another permutation, losing its "American" half and embracing a few other dance genres like the *merengue* from Dominican Republic and the Colombian *cumbia*. This permutation became known simply as "Latin music," or when fused with jazz and rock 'n' roll, the categories "Latin Jazz" and "Latin Rock" emerged. As a result, these days "Latin music" is reserved strictly for the music exploited by the recording industry. "Latin American music," on the other hand, is reserved for the academic world. It encompasses music of indigenous origin, or other forms of interest to ethnomusicologists, as well as what falls within the rubric of art music, whether colonial sacred music or nineteenth- and twentieth-century salon and concert hall music.

It is important to mention here that before World War II, "American" music meant music from north and south of the Rio Grande alike. The boundaries that today identify "Latin American" composers and "American" were very blurry back then. "Music Americanism," first coined by Uruguayan Francisco Curt Lange in a 1935 issue of the *Boletín latinoamericano de música*, denoted the sublimation of indigenous musical material by composers from the United States as well as from Central and South America. We should not forget that a wide range of North American composers, such as Aaron Copland, Henry Cowell, Harl McDonald, Paul Bowles, and Morton Gould, felt very

comfortable utilizing themes and rhythmic mechanisms originating south of the border (Chase 1962).²

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, due to Paris's great concentration of composers from both North and South America, who as foreigners shared, naturally, common social and musical circumstances, "American" music came to signify music from the entire Americas. Very telling in this respect are the concerts organized in Paris by what was called the Pan American Association of Composers (PAAC). During the 1930s, for example, Nicolas Slonimsky conducted public concerts advertised as "American Music" that brought together compositions by Chávez, Caturla, Roldán, Ives, Ruggles, Cowell, and Varèse (Slonimsky 1994). However, after World War II, due to the failure of programs such as the so-called "Good Neighbor Policy" (1938) and the Alliance for Progress (ca. 1960) as well as the ideological threat of the Cuban Revolution, the similarities previously sought between the United States and Latin America progressively became interpreted as dissimilarities (Lowenthal 1991). The increasing political, social, and economic disparities between north and south that brought about mutual distrust caused "Latin American" music to go one way while "American" music went another way. Despite attempts by a handful of people, who, backed by the Organization of American States (OAS), implemented initiatives such as the Inter-American Music Festival in Washington, D.C. (1956-85), the sharp dividing line between "American" and "Latin American" music has persisted to this day.

Whatever the case, the metamorphosis in connotation undergone by the adjective "Latin American" as applied to music reiterates that identity, in the view of Madan Sarup, "may perhaps be best seen as a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings blend and clash" (Sarup 1993, 25). What concerns me, hence, is how to elucidate that "multidimensional space" commonly filed under the category of Latin American art music. I believe this poses great difficulties but certainly, as with Planchart's clever replacement of the word "identity" with the word "soul," one must necessarily rely on rhetorical devices that avoid even the slightest suggestion that this category of music has

²In addition, strong personal friendships between prominent North and South American composers also contributed to the sense that the entire Americas were in it together. This is the way Cuba's Amadeo Roldán expressed this sentiment to Henry Cowell: "As an American musician my ideals are first of all to achieve an essentially American art, in all senses independent from Europe, an art of our own, continental, worthy of being universally accepted, not for the exotic wealth found in it but for intrinsic importance . . . New art, new procedures, better said, American art, American procedures, sensibility, forms, new means of expression, American ones . . . with the purpose of avoiding in our America any symptoms of Europeization" (Paraskevaidis 1991, 15).

clearly defined boundaries, much less a fixed identity. Therefore, in the next section of this chapter, I will attempt to show that identity is a concept that, especially when it is used in relation to aesthetic expressions from Latin America, should be approached not unlike, or at least in close connection with, the meaning of the word "soul."

2. Soul and Sense of Identity

I stumbled upon the relationship between the terms "soul" and "identity" while reading the diaries kept by Che Guevara during his motorcycle odyssey around South America, at the age of 23. In the preface to this publication Aleida March de la Torre, the editor of Guevara's archive and his second wife, writes that through these diaries the reader can witness "the extraordinary change which takes place in him as he discovers Latin America, gets right to its very heart and develops a growing sense of a Latin American identity . . ." (Guevara 1995, v). To my surprise, this is the only statements I have come across that exhibits a sensitive approach to the problematic nature of identity. March de la Torre does not proclaim that Che Guevara, riding his motorcycle through South America, developed a Latin American identity. Instead, she suggests that he developed only a "growing sense" of it. This (not so subtle) distinction between acquiring a "sense of" instead of actually acquiring an identity points toward the fact that, as with the soul, nothing tangible exists to account for an identity. As I have shown so far, identity is an ephemeral construct, an intellectual illusion. Like an aroma or a flavor, one cannot really possess it but one can only have a growing sense of it--or better yet, a changing sense of it. The sense of identity is completely fluid, it is always growing, always changing. As Sarup says, "identity is a kaleidoscope where the patterns are continuously changing."

The soul, instead, is unchanging. The soul is the "I" or what psychologists call "the self." The interpretations we make of our "self" can change without disturbing the soul itself. The soul exists independently from identity. The soul is inborn or endogenous. Identity, instead, is acquired or exogenous. It is a result of interpretation. This distinction is very important and it leads to one last characteristic of identity which will be crucial for dealing with the following chapters. This characteristic could be called the binary quality of identity, that is, the fact that identity has an inside and an outside, a private and a public side. Quoting Madan Sarup once more:

The "outside" of our concept of self could be called, perhaps, our "public" identity, and the "inside" of our identity our "private" identity. I do not mean by this that private identity is psychological and that public identity is sociological [they are both], but that the former is how we see ourselves and the latter is how "others" have typified us. (Sarup 1993, 14)

Recognizing identity as a binary concept is as basic as recognizing that genealogy is defined by both maternal and paternal inheritance. Yet in discussions about musical identity, as seen in the Santiago de Chile forum, the "public" side is usually neglected. It seems that an artistic identity is mistaken with the notion of soul. The soul can shine through our private identity, yet when a composer pours his/her soul into a musical creation, the receiver of this creation (the audience) does not listen to the composer's soul, or even to his/her private identity, but rather to an expression of it. This is why Ralph Waldo Emerson writes that the human race is only half itself; the other half is its expression.

This expression —one half a human being!— is always subject to interpretation, in the case of music, either by the composer him/herself or by others. The combination of private (self) and public (others') interpretations of an expression makes up the sense of identity. Most often, however, the public identity--how others interpret and typify the expressions of the self--plays a more decisive role in the construction of that kaleidoscope of patterns that continually change, which is called "identity" for lack of a better word. It is the public identity of an expression that is usually at stake. Gidon Kremer's characterization of Piazzolla's music as a "language of nostalgia" is a display of the reach and vulnerability of this music's public identity. By the same token, the discourse of a given narrative asserts or denies a public identity and, likewise, labels or categories are devices through which public identities are manipulated. In all of these cases, the private identity is not at risk: it does not even constitute an issue. In fact, many times the private and the public, inside and outside, pull in opposite directions, contradicting each other, making it therefore impossible to claim a fixed picture of a subject. Instead, the contradiction inherent in its binary quality permits us only to "sense" identity, get a feeling for it, and in the process, experience its multidimensionality.

Western music has many good examples of how the public identity of one single composer can be manipulated over time in order to accommodate changing political or cultural interests, regardless of the contradictions this might create. Zdzislaw Mach, for instance, offers a fascinating account of how Chopin's music has been successively redefined in terms of the changing

contexts of Polish nationalism. During the early part of the nineteenth century, Chopin was imagined as a representative of a distinctive Polish voice amidst a dominant European, mainly Germanic culture. Later, however, at the height of Romanticism, Chopin became the role model for the individualistic artist, the solitary voice that struggled against the world. But this image was reversed again during socialist Poland, where Chopin became a hero for refusing to conform to the nineteenth-century aesthetics of the bourgeois elite, and instead adhering to, and even creating, a Polish grassroots musical aesthetics.³

3. Changing Faces of Villa-Lobos's Identity

In Latin America, the puzzling case of Brazilian composer Heitor Villa-Lobos parallels in some way Mach's account of Chopin's changing public identity. Unfortunately, in the case of Villa-Lobos, as in the case of most composers from that part of the world—as the following chapters will show—the manipulation of his public identity has not worked in his favor. Very far from glorifying, or even advancing the place of his music inside the musical canon, in most cases the manufacturing of Villa-Lobos's identity has had dramatic and very negative implications, many times appearing like vicious orchestrations aimed at diminishing, even undermining, its merit.

One certainly finds in the construction of Villa-Lobos's public identity a stage where the most varied of interpretations clash. We encounter a figure like Cuban Alejo Carpentier, one of the most important Latin American authors, who wrote extensively about music, declaring in 1973 that Villa-Lobos was Latin America's most brilliant and universal composer of the twentieth century (Carpentier 1973). Scholars such as Simon Wright and Carleton Sprague Smith corroborated this portrayal and, in the case of Smith, Villa-Lobos's influence outside the continent was exalted by assertions such as "through his own merits, [in Paris], he was recognized as one of the most representative figures of the decade and became one of the stars of the Parisian musical heaven" (Orrego-Salas 1966, 3). But in almost total opposition to these depictions of Villa-Lobos as a true musical giant, a more contemporary scholar like Britain's Wilfred Mellers judges Villa-Lobos harshly. According to him, Villa-Lobos impresses only "when it is most fortuitous," limiting his status as an artist and situating him in the "phenomenon" category. "Villa-Lobos is not, by the

³See Zdzislaw Mach, "National Anthems: The Case of Chopin as a National Composer," in Stokes 1994, 61-70.

standards of a Bach or Beethoven or for that matter an Ives, a great composer; he is however an extraordinary phenomenon . . . , " writes Mellers, who goes on to compare what he calls Villa-Lobos's "quasi-art music" with the second-rate jazzy pop music of contemporary New York-based Brazilian pianist-singer Tania Maria (Mellers 1992, 15-17). Between Carpentier's depiction and that of Mellers lies the abyss that haunts every composer from Latin America.

With regard to his style, many have wanted to imagine Villa-Lobos's music in the way Nicolas Slonimsky described the 1917 symphonic poem *Uirapurú*, as "nocturnal gatherings of Indians in the forest" (Slonimsky 1945, 44). In one of the first textbooks on Latin American music, Slonimsky declared that after his first composition, a salon waltz, Villa-Lobos devoted himself throughout his entire career exclusively to shaping Brazil's folklore into an art form (ibid.). However, in an interview dating back to 1928, we find Villa-Lobos himself declaring that he is by no means a folklorist. "Folklore does not concern me," writes the composer, "my music sounds the way it sounds because I feel it that way. I don't hunt themes to utilize them later. I write my compositions in the same spirit of those who write pure music" (Carpentier 1928, 8).

This disparity between the private and the public identity of Villa-Lobos permeates and obscures most literature dedicated to the subject. Indeed, attempts to de-exoticize the public identity of the composer prove very difficult because the "savage" and "fortuitous" image of Villa-Lobos is very obstinate. From the beginning of his success, he was pigeonholed as exotic material. One cannot help being dumbfounded by Vasco Mariz's recounting the astonishing story of how, during Villa-Lobos's residence in Paris (mid-1920s), a reporter by the name of Lucie Delarue Mardrus attributed Villa-Lobos with actually having lived the adventures told by German scientist Hans Staden in his book *Voyage to Brazil*. The reporter published her adulterated version in the French magazine *Intransigeant* under the title "L'Aventure d'un compositeur —musique canibale." In this article, Villa-Lobos was depicted as a member of a scientific expedition who was captured and tied to a pole, while cannibals danced around him in preparation for "a feast of human flesh" (Mariz 1981, 150).

This obstinate, exoticized public identity bestowed upon Villa-Lobos spills over even into the fairly recent theoretical analyses of his works. A serious and well-intentioned scholar like Gerard Béhague, author of the recent *Heitor Villa-Lobos: The Search for Brazil's Musical Soul*, cannot escape contributing to this bewildering portrait of the composer. It is disheartening to read his musical analysis of, for example, the composer's *Choros No. 3* (1927), where Béhague resorts to the

fetish created around Villa-Lobos rather than to the inherent elements of this work, which is what he is supposed to address. Consequently, he does not make an objective analysis, but sets out to seek in the music what he calls Villa-Lobos's evocation of "Indian or primitive music, however authentic or idealized" (Béhague 1994, 77). He attributes, for example, onomatopoeic effects and other vocal techniques like glissandi and portamenti used in the *Choros No. 3* to what he vaguely classifies as "Indian performance practices" (Ibid.). However, there is no indication to which specific native performance practices belonging to which cultures he is referring. More seriously compromising is Béhague's paralleling the harmonic progression in the final measures of the piece—wrongly categorized as nonfunctional and pentatonic—with "a sort of solemn, sacred invocation to the land" (ibid., 81). As it turns out, a quick harmonic analysis shows that the last chords are no more sacred invocations of the land than are a traditional set of cadential chords in any four-part chorale by Bach. The last measures of *Choros no. 3* indeed spell out a clever, jazzed-up variation of a $vi - vii^0/vi - vi^6 - V^4 - I$ chord progression in E-flat major (see example 1).⁴

Of course, the purpose behind mentioning these extreme depictions of Villa-Lobos is not to judge which one is right and which one is wrong, or which one is more truthful to reality and which one farther removed from it. Whether right or wrong, whether Villa-Lobos is adulated as the twentieth-century musical messiah or stripped of his status as true artist and placed in the ranks of a "phenomenon," the point is that all of these diverse portraits together constitute his public identity. To get a full sense of his identity, however, we must still add his own writings about his music and one more very important ingredient: the material evidence we have of his expression, that is, the scores and recordings that exist of his works. In hopes of getting closer to the composer's soul, these objects are the only real channel we possess to bypass the existing distorted public identity. The problem is that as soon as one makes vocal the sense one has of Villa-Lobos's identity—that is, the interpretation we make of the intricate web of public and private identity, and material expression—this "sense" ceases to be a mere feeling and it becomes yet another monolithic piece in the immense puzzle that makes up what we commonly call "the identity" of Villa-Lobos.

⁴My own analysis.

4. Between Realities and Representations

We have seen how the term identity lends itself to being unwrapped, in an almost metaphysical way, with the aid of an ontological and epistemological deconstructivist strategy. To avoid losing sight of how this strategy can help our main concern—that is, the manufacturing of Latin American art music's identity and its effects on interpretation and dissemination—I must drive home the first part of this study.

The cases presented in this and the previous chapter should leave little doubt about the degree to which identity is spectacle. No matter the discipline in which any identity is at issue, that discipline becomes a theater of war. Simply stated, whether in the visual arts, public policy, law, literature, or music, this war game is played in order to claim kinship and, consequently, to establish difference, or vice versa: to establish difference as means to claim kinship. We saw, for example, this game being played out in the way Gidon Kremer reinforces the fact that he is from Latvia—as opposed to Russia, the dominant, expansionist nation of the region—by manufacturing a lineage with the music of Piazzolla, a composer belonging to a nation like Argentina, which likewise stands at the fringes of a dominant region, the so-called West. Also, in this chapter I have discussed how Western musicology has manufactured homogeneity between historical periods in Europe by systematically marginalizing the historical influence of Arab music on the continent. Similarly, kinship and difference were at issue in the evolution of the term "Latin America" and I have shown how the music of Villa-Lobos is commonly depicted in order to highlight difference, literally separating it, temporally and spatially, from the continuum of so-called Western music composers, such as Bach, Beethoven, and even Ives.

Anthropologist Fernando Coronil, in his illuminating article "Beyond Occidentalism: Towards Nonimperial Geohistorical Categories," describes the process of manufacturing difference and kinship in detail. With the aid of important anthropological literature, he uncovers the reasons, strategies, and consequences of this theater of war. All his arguments, as well as all the literature he uses to back his arguments, point toward the construction of identity and toward the "international asymmetries" underwritten in such an enterprise. In explaining the concept of "Occidentalism," one of the authors he incorporates into his narrative is John Comaroff:

In a broad-ranging discussion of constructions of cultural difference, John Comaroff defines ethnicity, in contrast to totemism, as a classificatory system founded on asymmetrical

relations among unequal groups, and reminds us that "classification, the meaningful construction of the world, is a necessary condition of social existence," yet the "marking of identities" is always the product of history and expresses particular modes of establishing cultural and economic difference. (Coronil 1996, 57)

The excerpt above will serve as a preview to the next chapter, where I will explain Fernando Coronil's definition of "Occidentalism" and expose the role this strategy has had in framing a space (I should say non-space!) for art music from Latin America. This preview is useful here, however, to restate the fact that identity implies a certain hidden agenda. We see in this brief appearance of Comaroff's writings that identity's hidden agenda is fueled by totemism. The consequence of this centripetal force is the creation of its counterpart: ethnicity. It is not difficult to translate this totemism/ethnicity dynamic into the realm of Western music. The totem has been clearly defined. It constitutes the revered and emblematic European historicist mainstream repertoire. Everything else falls in the "ethnic" category, not because kinship cannot be established, but because the totem's lasting influence is accomplished by a certain absence, without which it would not exist. In Madan Sarup's words, "in order to be anything, there are other things which one cannot be. What is important in identity is not only what it cannot say, but also what it cannot be" (Sarup 1994, 24). In other words, the construction of the identity of, say, Varèse —make no mistake about it— depends in great measure on distancing it from what it cannot be, a composer like, say, Villa-Lobos.

We will see the consequences of this particular dynamic between Varèse and Villa-Lobos in the last chapter. To wrap up the ongoing one, however, I want to refer to the alternatives spectators have when made aware of this existentialist struggle, which I referred to as "theater of war." The most immediate and comfortable alternative for a spectator is to be involved passively by simply observing the show from the standpoint of an audience.

A second option, and a more demanding one, is to get more pro-actively involved by watching this theater of operations from backstage, behind the scenes. Whereas a member of the audience would have to enjoy, perhaps even at moments believe, the spectacle for what it is, from backstage the spectator will not be able to help distinguishing between what is representation and what is reality. Not only this, but behind the scenes, the spectator can witness how every representation necessarily entails distorting reality.

From this angle, theater is no longer mere spectacle but becomes a fascinating interplay between fact and fiction, reality and representation. Even from the audience point of view, enjoying a

play depends on knowing a priori that the events and characters appearing on stage are fictitious. Otherwise it would make an audience very uncomfortable. We know that a play is not reality but only a representation of reality. We know that actors have their own "real" lives besides the lives of the characters they play. In short, we go to the theater to see a play with the understanding that there are separate components which together form the spectacle that we call "theater." These components are reality and representation.

Following the same logic, and recommending the spectators to choose the backstage alternative, I propose that identity be understood and dealt with through deciphering its separate components. In this way, we can toss out the problematic term "identity" altogether and concentrate on defining, on the one hand, what constitutes the representation of a given subject and, on the other, determining what the evidence tells us about the subject itself. We can then appreciate the dynamic between these two ingredients: how reality and representation feed off each other.

With this in mind, we could imagine the original obtuse question mentioned at the opening —"can the Chilean identity be defined as the total absence of identity?"— being reworked as "is the representation, or depiction, of Chile as a nation incongruent with its social, political, and cultural reality?" Contrary to the first question, this one can be worked out fairly easily. First we examine what has been written about Chile; how; by whom; and afterwards we compare these data with actual evidence in order to distinguish fact from interpretation in order to raise awareness of the possibility of alternative interpretations.

In this light, identity could be identified as an intermediate mental space, where events (reality) and the interpretations of these events (representation) are negotiated. This mental interface is constantly being adjusted, causing it always to be unstable and enigmatic. Nevertheless, its outer borders remain, at any given moment, relatively stable. Expressed in the simplest possible way, reality is a sequence of facts while representation is a collection of portraits. Identity then becomes a crossword puzzle that could be engaged by matching and unmatching items of one with items from the other. The following chapters will focus on providing clues for this crossword puzzle, defining, in the process, the boundaries of the interface space vaguely labeled today as Latin American art music.