Contemporary Carioca
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Published by Duke University Press

Moehn, Frederick.
Contemporary Carioca: Technologies of Mixing in a Brazilian Music Scene.

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The 1990s were interesting years for the percussionist Marcos Suzano and his colleagues in music, he recalls, precisely because they captured a specific phase of technological transformation. He recorded a lot analogically (i.e., on the tape medium), but also a lot digitally as new technologies emerged. In fact, he “dove headfirst into the digital thing,” and by the time of our July 2007 interview, I could no longer discern what acoustic instruments Suzano used to generate the sonic raw material for the schizophrenically corrupted grooves he delighted in playing back for me on his iPod nano. Yet evidence of them was all around me in his cramped but sun-drenched home studio. An Afro-Brazilian berimbau musical bow rested upright in one corner. Cuban congás filled another crook. I almost stumbled over a wooden zabumba bass drum from the Brazilian Northeast. Shiny metal cuícas, the unique-sounding friction drum of samba, were stacked atop one other. A handsome wooden alfaia, another bass drum from the Northeast,
was perched against a tarol snare drum. Cymbals rested atop drumheads, and cabasa and ganzá shakers lay about. A Nigerian dundún talking drum, Indian tabla drums, a wooden reco reco scraper, a muringa clay jug, an Afro-Peruvian cajón, various pandeiros, and sundry sticks, mallets, brushes, and instrument cases took up the remaining space to one side of the room.

The variety of wood, skin, and brass tones of these items contrasted with the grays, whites, and blacks of much of the electronic gear on the other side of the room, where Suzano had his Apple computer-based digital audio workstation (DAW) and electronic postproduction gear. Suzano might be merely an eclectic percussionist with virtuosic technique without his Pro Tools software and mixing console, Sherman v2 filter bank, Neve 1073 DPD Class A transformer balanced two-channel microphone preamplifier, Rosendahl Nanosyncs DDS audio clock and sync reference generator, Universal Audio 2–610 Dual Channel Tube Preamplifier, Neumann TLM103 large-diaphragm cardioid condenser microphone, and Yamaha NS10 near-field monitors. To the left of the DAW a stand-alone ashtray held evidence of the percussionist’s impulsive habits.

I first met Suzano at Estúdio AR, where he was co-producing Paulinho Moska’s Móible (see chapter 5). At the time, he was also working on his second solo CD, and on albums with Pedro Luís, Chico César, Zeca Balé, Lenine, Fernanda Abreu, Lucas Santtana, and Carlos Malta, among others, all released in 1999 and 2000.2 He had recently recorded Otto’s drum and bass-inspired Samba pra burro (roughly, Lots of samba), and he performed on the soundtrack for the Oscar-nominated film Central do Brasil (Central Station, both 1998). He recorded with Marisa Monte on her Rose and Charcoal disc of 1994, and on Gilberto Gil’s popular Unplugged CD and the corresponding concert tour that same year, as well as the Brazilian rock band Titãs’s Acústico (1997). He also recorded on Gil’s Quanta (1997) and the Grammy-winning live version, Quanta ao vivo (1998); on Sting’s All This Time (2001); and on Gil’s Grammy-nominated Electroacústico (2004).

In the early 1990s Suzano began to gain recognition in Japan, where he frequently travels to perform, record, and teach, and where he has recorded with the pop musician Kazufumi Miyazawa and with the drummer Takashi Numazawa.3 His partnership with Lenine on the 1993 Olho de peixe CD is revered among many musicians and producers in Rio de Janeiro for reinvigorating the role of percussion in Brazilian pop. When the New York Times music critic Jon Pareles saw this duo perform on New York City’s Central Park SummerStage in 1997, he wrote that Suzano “made a simple
pandeiro (tambourine) into a polyrhythmic dynamo.” The bassist Mário Moura of the band Pedro Luís e A Parede maintains that Suzano “turned everything upside down” by playing the pandeiro like a drum kit, and by bringing percussion to the foreground of pop music arrangements and productions. Indeed, while Suzano utilizes a great variety of percussive instruments in his music making, he is best known for his innovations on the pandeiro, the shallow, round, single-headed frame drum with metal cymbals that is probably descended from North African tambourines via the Iberian Peninsula.4

In sum, from the 1990s to the present, Marcos Suzano has remained a percussionist highly sought after for his musical skill and versatility, his recording and performing professionalism, his technological deftness, and his unique sounds. He claims to have played on over two hundred albums. It is fair to say that there exists a Suzano brand, and that he is a cultural entrepreneur who understands his sounds as capital to be managed within a market economy in a way similar to what Jocelyne Guilbault has observed among Trinidadian carnival musicians (2007, 265). As he has been a central figure in the South Zone pop music scene, an examination of his biography and musical practice is a good way to start looking more closely at the people active in this setting. What innovations made Suzano so in demand as a recording and performing artist? How did he adapt the traditional Brazilian pandeiro to changing music technologies and international musical trends? What can his musical practices tell us about race and gender in this setting, or about the image of Africa in musical constructions of Brazilian identity? In what ways do his career trajectory and musical becoming fit into the broader collective project of inserting Brazil into pop? First, some discussion of Suzano’s musicianship, and a few observations about the context in which his musical activities have unfolded.

I begin by summarizing several interconnected innovations and practices for which Suzano is known among Brazilian musicians.5

He helped bring percussion to the foreground of Brazilian pop music. This may strike readers as an unusual claim, given the rich percussiveness of much Brazilian music. The argument, as I have heard it, is that in the 1980s when urban, predominantly white, middle-class Brazilian youths were increasingly identifying with international rock and pop music, percussion came to serve as a mere “complement” to an instrumentation structured around a drum kit.6 With a commanding
stage presence, virtuosic technique, and “contemporary” sounds, he
was able to claim a new space in MPB for, in particular, the pandeiro.

He preferred thick, natural drumheads for his pandeiro, in order to
achieve more low-frequency resonance. By contrast, many players
were using comparatively thin skins or plastic heads in the early 1990s.
Playing his somewhat heavier instrument requires physical stamina,
and his favorite pandeiro, now three decades old, is bruised, beaten,
and held together with duct tape (see figure 2).

He lowered the pitch of the pandeiro by loosening the drumhead. Tradi-
tionally, the instrument is tuned relatively tightly, giving it a medium-
pitched and comparatively brief sonic envelope. Influenced by the
drum and bass, jungle, and dub genres, Suzano was interested in gen-
erating a more sustained low bass.

He developed a playing technique that corresponds to these stylistic
priorities, and that allows him to get at what he called the “Afro in-
tention” of certain popular music grooves. In a typical samba tech-
nique for playing the pandeiro, open strokes with the thumb em-
phasize beat 2 in duple meter, analogous to the surdo bass drum. The
surdo is said to have been added to samba by the drum corps director
Bide (Alcebíades Barcelos) in the late 1920s as a way of keeping car-
nival marchers in rhythm as they parade. Suzano, however, keeps the
thumb free to accentuate the offbeats, which he sees as closer to the
role of the large rum (or ilú) lead drum in the traditional drumming of
the African-Brazilian Candomblé religion (see, e.g., Béhague 1984,
232; Fryer 2000, 18). The smaller lé and rumpi drums in this tradition
are typically responsible for steady patterns. Similarly, the cymbals on
the pandeiro, in Suzano’s method, generally maintain even sixteenth
notes (that is, four subdivisions of the beat, without “swing”) as they
are shaken and clang against one another, providing the fastest pulse
of a given rhythm and functioning as a kind of “density referent”
(Koetting 1970). The middle range on the pandeiro includes various
sounds such as a muted slap on the drumhead. I detail some of the
basics of Suzano’s playing technique in Appendix 2.

He captures and amplifies the sounds made on his pandeiro with a small
condenser microphone that clips to the instrument’s frame and is
aimed at the rear of the drumhead, as seen in figure 2. He was thus
able to collaborate with audio engineers to achieve an outsize sound

for the pandeiro both in live performance on the stage and in the recording studio. This has also allowed him and his favored engineers to control and electronically manipulate the sound of his instruments.

He, along with some of his colleagues, have utilized “mini-sets” (alt. “mini-kits”) of percussive instruments and odds and ends that allow great varieties of timbres and are customizable to the particular musical context.

He adapted rhythms from a range of international influences such as rock, techno, jungle, and drum and bass to the pandeiro and to his mini-kit.

He experimented with music technologies in his search for new timbres, textures, and grooves. For example, he has used samplers and computers to record his acoustically performed beats and subsequently

Figure 2. Marcos Suzano’s favorite pandeiro (underside) with attached microphone and electronic foot pedal effects
to loop or modify them electronically. He also uses a variety of special effects in the form of foot pedals or rack-mounted outboard gear, especially filters. The pairing of the “natural” material to electronics is a central theme in his work, and he has taken it further than his predecessors in Brazil.\(^7\)

In a conversation I had with Paulinho Moska he referred to Suzano as a “Carioca Blade Runner” who is “truly contemporary” and at the same time very rooted in Rio de Janeiro culture and life. Fusing the popular term for a native-born resident of Rio (Carioca) with the Hollywood reference, this characterization evokes the image of a savvy, somewhat aggressive, do-it-yourself solo male hero negotiating between nature and culture, emotions and programmed responses, humans and machines, corporate control and free will, like Harrison Ford’s Detective Deckard, the Blade Runner. Deckard is charged with “retiring” rebellious “replicants,” the bio-engineered slaves who are forced to live in a labor camp on another planet and who, after developing powerful emotions, seek to outlive their pre-programmed expiration date. In the end, Deckard chooses not to retire the last replicant, Rachel, with whom he falls in love and whom he invites into his home. He thus domesticates the threatening and alien technology much as Suzano has progressively domesticated imported music technologies and electronic sounds in his work and in his home DAW. Paul Théberge has observed that music technologies are often represented in advertising as women to impart a human “feel” to machines while simultaneously playing into male anxiety about the need for domination and control (1997, 124–25). This, he writes, is what is conveyed in Blade Runner’s character Rachel.

Bearing these associations in mind, Paulinho’s characterization of Suzano suggests some interesting ways to think about the latter’s musical practices. If the Blade Runner aspect suggests a heroic domination of alien technologies, the “Carioca” modifier speaks to the percussionist’s command of local and Brazilian musical styles (insofar as carioca samba is often understood—at least locally—as representative of “Brazilian” music). Did the sonic shift away from allowing percussion to serve as a mere “perfume” in the mix—as one musician described its place in Brazilian pop music “before Suzano”—toward a soloist man-and-his-tambourine sort of positioning index a broader shift in nationalist sentiment that at least partly played into existing sentiments about masculinity, control, power,
individualism, and the “conduct of conduct”?

In fact, Suzano’s desire to foreground percussion and to limit the role of the drum kit (understood as an import) complemented efforts by, for example, the members of the bands Pedro Luís e A Parede (PLAP) and Chico Science and Nação Zumbi (CSNZ), who similarly attributed to Brazilian percussion a reinvigorated role in the pop-rock ensemble.

Mário Moura explicitly expressed this kind of sentiment when he noted in one of our interviews that the band CSNZ emerged in Recife during a period of national anxiety following the impeachment of President Fernando Collor de Mello: “Brazilians got incensed with the lack of shame of this guy . . . He put his hand into everyone’s bank account and . . . put [the money] in his pocket . . . And no one did anything beyond removing him from power. So that inflamed a nationalist movement of people, you know, ‘I want a real Brazil, man!’ And suddenly Chico Science and Nação Zumbi appeared with this totally different sound, mixing tambor [hand drum] with distorted guitar, hip-hop, rock ‘n’ roll, with agitated words, and it caught on. It was what the youth wanted to hear—strong, vigorous sounds, that seemed to say, ‘Brazil is awesome [do caralho]!’” The “strong” and “vigorous” sounds of CSNZ mobilized both new music technologies and the rather martial “no apology” (Crook 2005, 237) drumming of the Afro-Brazilian maracatu tradition along with other Afro-diasporic sounds to fortify beleaguered nationalist sentiments, and indeed to counterpoise the corrupted conduct of those in power (or removed from power because of their conduct). Suzano had already plugged into this sonic amendment through his collaboration with Lenine in 1993. (The title of Suzano’s subsequent solo album, Sambatown, was in fact a play on the title of CSNZ’s song “Manguetown.”)

Some of Mário’s language draws attention to the social construction of gender and sexuality. For example, one of the expressions Mário employed is associated with male sexuality: do caralho, which I have translated as “awesome,” derives from a slang term for “penis” (caralho).10 Similarly, Mário described Suzano as a cara foda (roughly, “formidable guy”), which derives from a vulgar slang term for sexual intercourse (foder). In our interviews, Suzano often used another popular Carioca word, porra (the double r sounding like an h), an interjection commonly used to express frustration, surprise, or anger or simply to stress a point. It is actually, however, slang for “semen.” These terms, Richard Parker notes, “place emphasis on the potentially active quality of the phallus—on its aggressive quality, on its
potency not merely as a sexual organ, but, in the language of metaphor, as a tool to be wielded, as a kind of weapon intimately linked to both violence and violation” (2009, 41). “In the play of words,” he continues, “the phallus becomes, figuratively if not literally, an arma—a weapon, an instrument of metaphoric aggression, or in an extension of Pierre Bourdieu’s expression, of symbolic violence” (42). The exclamatory interjection porra, “understood as both phallus and semen, as well as in its relation to anger and violence,” Parker argues, “becomes a kind of essence of masculinity—a symbol of creative power, of potência (potency) and vida (life)” (42). These kinds of expressions, common in Carioca conversation and no less so in the male-dominated recording scene, are drawn from an extensive public repertoire of androcentric macho language in which the heterosexual male is represented as (sexually) active, in control, and producing (rather than reproducing), while women and gay men alike are passive, lacking control, receptive, or debased. Notwithstanding the ubiquity of such language, its use in this context adds to the sense that the modes of agency at stake in some of these musical developments have sexualized and gendered dimensions.

Suzano also calls on the Yoruba and Afro-Brazilian deity Ogum, a powerful, sometimes aggressive figure who presides over fire, iron, hunting, war, and, in some conceptualizations, politics (Ogun in Spanish-speaking Latin America, or Ogou in Haiti). Gage Averill and Yuen-Ming David Yih have noted that in Haiti the Nago dance for Ogou in the Vodou religion evokes military combativeness (2000, 276). As a blacksmith, Ogum is also understood in the Candomblé and the related Umbanda religions as the god of technology. He is often depicted brandishing a blade, and the gonguê iron bell of maracatu is sometimes associated with Ogum. He can be a symbol of the struggle for justice (Shohat and Stam 1994, 45). In the minds of followers, Sandra T. Barnes writes, Ogum presents two images: “One is a terrifying specter: a violent warrior, fully armed and laden with frightening charms and medicines to kill his foes. The other is society’s ideal male: a leader known for his sexual prowess, who nurtures, protects, and relentlessly pursues truth, equity, and justice. Clearly, this African figure fits the destroyer/creator archetype. But to assign him a neat label is itself an injustice, for behind the label is a complex and varied set of notions” (1997, 2).

As will become clear, Suzano identifies Ogum with what he understands as the diasporic power of low frequencies to lead or drive a given musical sound, while the associations Barnes describes resonate with the percus-
sionist’s broader projects to invert what he saw as certain incorrect hierarchies of music production, to subvert corrupt and centralized power, and to control the tools of his trade in his sonic smithing.

Suzano’s evocation of Candomblé points to Bahia, the religion’s ethnic and iconographic center, the most African of states in Brazil, the country’s “Black Rome” (Dunn 2007; Sansone 1999, 20). At the same time, however, as José Jorge de Carvalho has argued, orthodox Afro-Brazilian religions such as Candomblé “suspend the question of who is black” because the deities worshiped “are universal and as such put themselves on top of whatever divisions are built on racial, social, political or sexual basis” (1994, 2). Instead of offering a black identity, he writes, these traditional religions “merely state ritually that anyone, black or white, can be an African.” The “sound of Africa” (Meintjes 2003) can thus be called upon without necessarily engaging black identity politics. Interestingly, in the Candomblé and Umbanda religions as practiced in Rio de Janeiro, Ogum is typically syncretized with Saint George, the chivalrous slayer of the dragon in popular iconography. It is not mere coincidence that in Mika Kaurismäki’s documentary film The Sound of Rio: Brasileirinho (2007), Suzano can be seen performing onstage in a T-shirt with the figure of Saint George lancing a beast—an image, that is, of heroic manhood.

The casual references to Harrison Ford’s Detective Deckard and to Ogum in my interviews with musicians thus allude to a setting in which their efforts to bring percussion out of the background, central to the project of inserting Brazil into pop, can be seen as partly gendered and sexualized, while also drawing in complex ways on ideas about African sounds and Brazilian national identity. I bear these dimensions in mind when I contemplate the photograph I took of Suzano in his living room during one of our get-togethers (figure 3). The Carioca Blade Runner demonstrated how he runs his pandeiro through a series of electronic foot pedals—which I liken to Ogum’s “frightening charms”—in the creation of compressed, filtered, sometimes distorted, often strange sounds generated through the percussionist’s human, rhythmic mediation between the skin drumhead and the machines. The pandeiro itself might be thought of as Suzano’s main weapon in his challenges to received sonic practices, akin to Ogum’s sword or Saint George’s lance.

Let me be clear that I am not saying these moves are only or even primarily an assertion of an essential(ized), heteronormative masculinity (possibly with racial and ethnic dimensions). Rather, I am seeking to
“embed” this musician’s practices, his “desires and intentions,” and his “plans and plots” into “motivated, organized, and socially complex ways of going about life in particular times and places,” what Sherry B. Ortner calls “serious games” (1996, 12). Individuals play the “games of life . . . with intention, wit, knowledge, intelligence” (aspects of their “agency”),
but these games are serious to the extent that “power and inequality pervade” them (12). Whether or not we adopt Ortner’s metaphor, the point of it is to theorize “people-in-(power)-relationships-in-projects as the relatively irreducible unit of ‘practice’” (13). Importantly, there is never just one game (13). So, for example, the project to “insert Brazil into pop” was a power move that reflected a specific shift in ideas about national identity and music making during the 1990s (particularly among middle-class subjects), but also historical anxieties over the “penetration” of foreign influences into Brazil (the drum kit displaces percussion, for example). It is worth remembering that the influences of jazz on bossa nova, and of the Beatles on the iê iê iê (yeah, yeah, yeah) pop music of the Jovem Guarda, were previously described in language that similarly evoked gendered power dynamics (penetraur, or even violar [rape]; see A. L. Barbosa, et al. 1966).

These same dynamics, however, can be read—and in fact were read locally—as related in not-always-obvious ways to questions of markets and, more precisely, in recent years, of neoliberal globalization, or even to problems of corruption in government, as the following passage from my 2007 interview with Suzano shows: “We have a serious problem that is reaching an unbearable level today, which is corruption. . . . It is endemic, it is one of our traits [uma coisa nossa]. The Brazilian is corrupt. It is depressing to admit it, but the Brazilian allows himself to be corrupted very easily. And we see this in music continuously—a corruption, for example, in the sense of accepting imported models, formulas for success, and people lower their heads and corrupt themselves to achieve success. How many great musicians, incredible people, caved to the requests of the record labels, the pressure? And the most basic example comes from our capital, Brasília. . . . Perhaps fewer than 10 percent of the deputies and senators have a clean police record. Either they . . . stole money, didn’t pay their taxes, or were involved in some scandal, it’s unbelievable!” Clearly what is at stake in these varied interpretations of foreign influence, market pressures, and individual creativity is power: (empowered) agency versus submission, an aversion to “lower[ing one’s] head” and “accepting” (also a gendered/sexualized image consistent with tropes of the female being passive, receiving), or “caving” in.14 With so many things having an impact on the games people play, a given influence or hybridizing practice can be good in some ways at some times to some individuals, and bad in other ways or at other times for other folks, or for the same ones. Thus we
observe adjustments and readjustments over time of, for example, the role of the drum kit in Brazilian pop and rock (or of the electric guitar, the pandeiro, of samba, techno, “Afro” sensibility, and so on).

Yet there is something more to this story; there is also Suzano’s emergence as a professional musician and experimenter with sounds and technologies. In this dimension, the percussionist’s desires—realized not necessarily as clear intentions or as agency-in-a-project, but sometimes as a vague sense of frustration and search for a “line of flight”—are what make possible new musical and life experiences. The following pages offer a more biographical narrative as I sketch out Suzano’s career trajectory in relation to transformations in the political, economic, and technological spheres.

Formative Influences and Collaborations in Suzano’s Early Career

Suzano was born in 1963 and grew up in Copacabana, a busy, eclectic, and intense neighborhood of condominiums, shops of all sorts, cafés, bars, restaurants, and nightclubs bordering the famous beach of the same name. In contrast to the previous generations of popular musicians that included many of Brazil’s great singer-songwriters of the 1960s and 1970s, the influential Tropicália movement, and also the protest song associated with left-leaning student populations during those decades, Suzano reflected that his own youth was relatively removed from political concerns, and indeed from musical genres typically understood as Brazilian. He conceded that he didn’t sense the dictatorship because his family “didn’t suffer at all from any side—neither from the right nor from the left.” He had no idea what was going on, he said, and only began to be exposed to the realities of the authoritarian regime once he began his college studies. He also made a point of observing that he only got to know the music of Os Mutantes, Caetano Veloso, Gilberto Gil, and Tropicália in the 1980s when he was older. Reacting against what he perceived to be an over-saturation of media attention to Tropicália at the time of our first interview early in 1999, he sought to distance himself from the movement. In doing so, Suzano affirmed how his own musical biography formed an independent narrative, rather than simply following a path broken by the Tropicalists. (And of all the people I interviewed for this project, Suzano was perhaps the least inclined to evoke the anthropophagy metaphor to explain his musical hybridizations.) As a youth playing around in Copacabana in the 1970s (be-
tween the ages of seven and seventeen), he remembered, he and his friends listened to rock groups from abroad such as Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath; they were not paying attention to protest song.

In fact, in the early 1970s the Brazilian economic miracle of high growth helped keep many among the middle classes from agitating for democracy. By the late 1970s, however, economic expansion had ground to a halt while the new social movements coalesced around democratization during this period known as the abertura (opening). These transformations in the political sphere coincided with Suzano’s increasing interest in two musical genres strongly identified with Rio de Janeiro and with Brazilian national identity: samba and choro. He was inspired to learn to play a variety of samba percussion instruments when he heard a carnival bloco in the early part of the decade. (A bloco is a musical association with percussion that parades relatively spontaneously through local neighborhood streets during the days of carnival, rather than in the media-ready sambadrome where the main competition between the big samba schools is held.) Traditionally, bloco repertoire focuses on samba or other favorite carnival genres like marcha (a fast march), with an emphasis on drumming and syncopated rhythms deriving in part from Afro-Brazilian influences, typically in duple meter. It is easy to understand how hearing a street bloco could inspire a middle-class youth in Rio’s South Zone to turn his attention from rock to samba during this period of political opening.

Choro, by contrast, is not associated with carnival or street processions. This primarily instrumental music emerged in mid- to late nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro as Brazilians adapted European salon dances popular at the time such as the polka and the schottische to the syncopated inflections of genres like the lundu. By the 1940s a large body of repertoire had become standardized, and instrumental virtuosity had become a key feature of the genre, similar to jazz in the United States. The pandeiro, used in many Brazilian genres, including samba, became an essential part of the contemporary choro ensemble as the main percussion instrument providing rhythmic accompaniment to the melody and harmony instruments. The popularity of choro suffered in the late 1950s and the 1960s with the explosive international success of the bossa nova genre. In the late 1960s, however, the mandolin virtuoso Jacob do Bandolim formed the Época de Ouro (Golden Age) ensemble in an effort to keep the genre alive. Among the original members of this group was Jorginho do Pandeiro (Jorge José da Silva), a master of the pandeiro. When Suzano heard
Jorginho play in the 1980s, he was inspired to concentrate more intensely on that instrument. In the 1970s a younger cohort of choro musicians in Rio furthered the revival of the repertoire and instrumentation; since then, a variety of groups and successive generations of musicians have maintained an active choro scene in Rio, São Paulo, Brasília, and other places in Brazil and even abroad (e.g., Choro Ensemble in New York City). It was in neotraditional choro and samba circles in the 1980s that Suzano first mastered the instrument with which he is most identified.

Not yet resolved to make music his career, Suzano attended the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) to study economics. Meanwhile, he also began learning Afro-Brazilian rhythms with the percussionist Carlos Negreiros, a specialist in Candomblé drumming, while performing with him in the group of the prominent choro and jazz clarinetist and saxophonist Paulo Moura. He eventually decided to abandon the idea of a career in economics (although he earned the degree). After college he participated in one of the new generation of choro ensembles, Nó em Pingo d’Agua (Knot in a Drop of Water), recording the critically acclaimed albums Salvador (1988) and Receita de samba (Recipe for samba, 1991) with that group. Founded in 1979, Nó em Pingo d’Agua has been one of the most active contemporary choro ensembles in Rio; they have incorporated jazz and funk influences, composed new repertoire, and collaborated with a broad range of talented musicians. Suzano left Nó em Pingo d’Agua after Receita de Samba. (Celsinho Silva, Jorginho do Pandeiro’s son, replaced him.)  

In 1989 Suzano formed the Aquarela Carioca (Carioca Watercolor) jazz ensemble together with the saxophone and flute player Mário Sève (also a founding member of Nó em Pingo d’Agua). Aquarela Carioca performed at the 1989 Free Jazz Festival in Rio and São Paulo and released their debut album that year, winning the prestigious national Sharp Prize for instrumental music (analogous to the Grammy Award) the following year. Their repertoire was eclectic; their second album, Contos (Stories, 1991), for example, featured original compositions alongside pieces by Villa-Lobos, Caetano Veloso, and Led Zeppelin. (Suzano even adapted some of John Bonham’s distinctive rock drumming to pandeiro for their recording of Led Zeppelin’s “Kashmir.”) The group’s third release, As aparências enganam (Appearances are deceiving, 1993), was a collaboration with the Brazilian pop singer Ney Matogrosso, and they released two more cDs after that (Idioma [Language], 1996, and Volta ao Mundo [Return to the world], 2002). It was with this group, Suzano noted, that he began “to develop [his] sounds” in
collaboration with the recording engineer Denilson Campos, with whom he would work again on the Olho de peixe album and other projects.

While both Nó em Pingo d’Água and Aquarela Carioca had focused on choro and jazz instrumental arrangements, Suzano soon began to work with MPB artists. An early such collaboration was the singer Zizi Possi’s Sobre todas as coisas (About everything) from 1991. Possi had ended her relationship with PolyGram, apparently because she wanted to perform and record a less commercial repertoire than the label preferred. Suzano suggested an acoustic instrumentation of percussion, cello, and piano (with Lui Coimbra, the cellist, doubling on other stringed instruments), moving away from the more typical MPB instrumentation based on a pop ensemble with drum kit. The CD, with some classic MPB repertoire, was recorded digitally in a small studio in Rio de Janeiro at a time when debates over the merits of digital versus analog media were not yet muted by the eventual triumph of digital culture. It was released on the independent São Paulo–based Eldorado label, yet it sold better than any of Zizi’s previous recordings, and it won the national Sharp Prize for best singer and best MPB CD in 1991, an indication of the emergent trend toward digitally recorded independent projects. By this time Suzano had begun to develop his unique method for playing the pandeiro, allowing him greater rhythmic versatility beyond the traditional samba- and choro-style accompaniment. In terms of timbre, however, his overall sound remained quite traditional for the Possi recording.

In our 2007 interview, I asked Suzano to reflect back on the sociopolitical context of the early 1990s, a period when the process of democratization was still relatively recent, and the broad political and economic reforms that President Cardoso would later accelerate were still limited. Suzano recalled:

That was a very rough period because the musicians never received their pay right away, there was always a delay. With inflation of 1.2 percent per day, they would cheat us... So we would do three shows per night—in the Cândido Mendes Theater with [my group] Aquarela Carioca at 7 PM, in the Ipanema Theater at 9 PM with [the MPB singer] Eduardo Dusek, and then around 11 PM at the Mistura Fina [nightclub]—to earn a buck a day, because there was no money around. You’d play the Canecão club with [the rock band] Paralamas for free. It was crazy. There was nothing we could do about it. At first people withdrew
a bit, but at the same time, they began to get savvy about searching for options to continue working, for new ideas to attract the attention of the public. It’s not for nothing that Zizi Possi appeared with her work during this period. . . . It was very important. It was exactly in 1990–91, and people heard that and said, “Wow, what is this, who is this singer?”—all the squares who were used to a different style. And that’s when Marisa Monte came on the scene, and a little later came the reaction of the poorer population, favela funk, funk of Rio, man, you know, that was really serious.

Suzano was also a founding member in the early 1990s of a percussion-based ensemble called Baticum, which he formed with fellow percussionists Carlos Negreiros, Jovi Joviniano, and Beto Cazes. The group had several other percussionists as well (a total of twenty-four) and also featured Carlos Malta on winds and Rodrigo Campello on violão as an occasional guest. It was in this ensemble that the musicians experimented with the mini-kits mentioned previously, which consisted of an eclectic variety of instruments. Suzano’s, for example, was structured around the cajón (a wooden box of Afro-Peruvian and Caribbean origin), in addition to, he said, “electronic things,” while his colleagues Jovi Joviniano and Beto Cazes used samba instruments and miscellaneous small percussion. Carlos Negreiros’s mini-kit featured atabaques, the tall single-headed drums used in Candomblé. The main idea with the mini-kits, Suzano observed, was the timbre, and the timbres of percussion in Brazil, he said, “changed a lot in the nineties.”

Nashville, Jim Ball, and Olho de peixe

In 1992 the singer-songwriter Joan Baez invited Suzano to Nashville to record on her Play Me Backwards album. Working with Baez’s audio engineer Jim Ball helped Suzano develop his sound as he became intensely interested in the technologies used to capture, mix, and produce his performances. In order to facilitate overdubbing several layers of pandeiro, he recorded for Baez with a click track (a kind of metronome, and a relatively unusual practice in Brazilian studios at the time). He recalled being amazed at the spatial organization of sounds between the left and right channels. Even with several overdubs, the tracks did not interfere with each other in the mix, a feat that requires technical skill with equalization, panning, vol-
ume levels, and the use of reverberation and other effects. “The pandeiro sounded so cool,” Suzano related in one of our first interviews, and he was “shocked” by the breadth and detail of the stereo image. It was something he had never experienced “in the Brazilian style of recording,” and it felt like he was “going ahead, going beyond.”

After hearing the rich multitracked studio sound that Ball realized for his pandeiro, Suzano became increasingly convinced that the role of percussion in Brazilian pop music had become merely complementary, a kind of seasoning added almost as an afterthought. Major record label producers were relegating Afro-Brazilian-derived percussion sounds to the background of pop mixes, he reasoned, out of concern that such sounds were not appropriate for mainstream radio airplay. “By the force of the market,” he recalled, “the drum kit took precedence in the 1980s and percussion became a complement. It became that kind of percussion of, you know, clave.” It was “simplistic percussion.” Then in 1993 he teamed up with the singer-songwriter Lenine and the sound technician Denilson Campos (who had engineered the Aquarela Carioca albums and the live sound for the Baticum group) to record Olho de peixe. Mário Moura elaborated on the significance of this project. Samba and batuca (drumming, esp. Afro-Brazilian), Mário noted, had always existed, “but when someone went to make an album, the role of percussion was always reduced to an effect . . . [or used] to fill a space here or there.” Suzano revolutionized percussion, Mário maintained somewhat hyperbolically, by bringing it to the forefront of a pop mix. “I couldn’t believe it!” the bassist said of his reaction the first time he heard Suzano play. “The guy turned the pandeiro into a drum kit, man, it was no joke!” He made percussion into something fundamental to Brazilian pop music, Mário concluded, rather than a “perfume.”

Suzano situated the album, which I discuss some more in the following chapter, within what he called an “explosion of ideas” in which the percussionist Carlinhos Brown in Salvador and the mangue beat groups of Recife played an important role. He was referring to the tendency among these musicians to move away from a standardized rock band instrumentation that had become well established in Brazil by the end of the 1980s. The “rhythmic options” that certain musicians in Recife, Salvador, and Rio presented, he noted, rejected traditionalist purism and gave local grooves a more contemporary treatment, most notably the combination of the backbeat of rock with the Afro-Brazilian drumming of maracatu that Chico Science and his band Nação Zumbi developed in Recife.
Afro-Diasporic Influences and Music Technologies: Suzano’s Solo Albums

The explosion of ideas Suzano described required a parallel correction in the recording studio as producers had to learn to adapt to the new percussion sounds. There was a “bizarre” phase, Suzano reflected in 2007, of incomprehension on the part of pop music producers. The dependence on imported models became very clear to him, especially with respect to percussion. While he and his colleagues in the Baticum ensemble considered the arrangement of the low, middle, and high frequencies and sought to “fill in” all the sixteenth notes, as occurs among the three drums of Candomblé (lé, rumpi, and rum), the “hierarchy of music production,” he remembered, meant that percussion was always the last thing to be recorded in the studio. When they tried to add their grooves, the producers would complain that they were “too busy” and “too full,” according to Suzano, and they would ask if there was a way of playing the rhythm “with fewer notes.” The “imported” hierarchy of pop music industry production models is precisely the inverse, in Suzano’s interpretation, of the hierarchy of rhythms in the more traditional Afro-Brazilian Candomblé practice, in which not only is drumming predominant, but the low drum (rum) is the lead. He identified the place of the drummer in rock and pop as the main impediment to achieving his musical priorities in the recording studio: “There are many ideas that I use today that I already tried to use previously but the producers would cut them. . . . For example, you take a pandeiro and tune it low and play a groove like this [demonstrating a rhythm for me on his instrument] and the producers would ask, ‘Man, what is that? There is already a drummer.’ And I would say, ‘All right, all right,’ and think, ‘Patience.’ Then when I made [my solo album Sambatown] I began to use those grooves and people asked, ‘Hey, what is that?!’ It would be [the groove] I had tried to use four years before.” The emphasis here on exercising self-control as Brazilian producers and listeners gradually caught up to Suzano is thus situated dialectically against the “explosion” and power of his ideas and methods.

To record Sambatown, an album structured around jazz-samba-choro instrumentation and arrangements, the percussionist was concerned to find “the ideal pandeiro sound.” Ironically, given the problem of foreign models of music production, he sought the big stereo image that the recording engineer Jim Ball had created for him on Play Me Backwards. With Ball, he thought, he would make “a definitive pandeiro recording” with what he re-
ferred to as um puta som (which could be translated as “a bitchin’ sound”).

Ball gave him the “difference” that he sought through a wide stereo image
that was not forced or exaggerated. The engineer, he held, “settled his
style” and the direction of his sound. “It was, like, politically correct, but
different,” Suzano explained, by which he meant that the engineer did not
use any electronic effects, distort the sound, or add anything to it. Rather,
he “just recorded very well, checking which phase cancellation made the
sound more interesting, with five tracks of pandeiro, and the stereo very
wide.” While multitracking five overdubs of this instrument was outside
local production norms, Jim Ball’s careful mixing tempered any sense of
exaggeration, maintaining the album’s jazz-like decorum, such that
Sambatown represents a moment of transition between the unplugged aesthetic
that is a prevailing tendency in much jazz (and MPB) and the percussionist’s
more radical dive into sonic manipulation as he began to take control
of machines himself.21

Indeed, Suzano was animated when he detailed the hodgepodge of
acoustic, analog, and digital instruments, technologies, spaces, and tech-
niques they used: “I used my [AKG]98 microphone straight through an
API preamplifier, and then I used two U67 [Neumann microphones
configured] like this [and] a pandeiro here, with the phase reversed. Those two
mics went through the Neve preamps, and there were two ambient mics
that we put through the Demeter tube preamps. We cut straight to the tape,
no console, and the tape machine was a very old MCI, sixteen tracks... We
only used near-field monitors... the NS10 [Yamaha speakers], with a
Hafler amplifier, and on one tune, I think ‘Airá,’ we used some pitch-shift,
like a fifth down... [Jim Ball] spent some time just working on the phase
problem of the pandeiro [between the various tracks and microphones].”
The Carioca Blade Runner used this mix of prized retro and contemporary
technologies, working with the North American audio engineer, to create
the “politically correct” acoustic sound for this jazz-oriented recording.

Sambatown, which earned Suzano the Sharp Prize for new male talent
(“Revelação Masculina”), opens with a two-part piece (“Pandemonium”)
featuring a four-minute pandeiro solo, the first two minutes of which are
Suzano performing alone on pandeiro—and sounding almost like a drum
orchestra, as music critic Jon Pareles put it (1997)—while for the second
two minutes he is joined by an ensemble. Among the accompanying musi-
cians is the wind multi-instrumentalist Carlos Malta, here playing baritone
saxophone and ocarina. Suzano had already performed with Carlos in the
latter’s group Pife Muderno (Modern Fife), which drew heavily on the tra-
ditional fife-and-drum ensemble of the Brazilian Northeast. Pife Muderno adapted that rustic sound for Carioca audiences by mixing in some samba and jazz stylizations while maintaining an acoustic aesthetic and adding to the momentum of resurgent interest in northeastern music in the mid-1990s. Eduardo Neves, with whom Suzano had already performed in Nó em Pingo d’Água, added soprano and tenor saxophone to Sambatown, while the keyboardist Alex Meirelles contributed discreet synthesizer parts. The accompaniment is funky, bluesy, and jazzy; the remainder of the album follows this sound, with Lenine contributing a guest vocal on the song “Curupira pirou” (Curupira took off), which the two musicians composed jointly.22

For his second solo album, Flash, Suzano continued his research into timbres and unusual percussive sounds, this time processing and corrupting the acoustic timbres with electronic devices. He built further on the concept of arranging a jazz ensemble around the pandeiro with a quintet of trumpet/flugelhorn (Nílton Rodrigues), saxophone (Eduardo Neves), electric bass (André Carneiro), keyboards (Fernando Moura), and percussion. It was “very jazzy,” he felt, but there was also the influence of techno and jungle (a fast-tempo dance genre characterized by frenetic snare drumming and dub reggae–influenced bass).23 Now Suzano was using the Akai MPC 1000 sampler and discovering “a great richness in small variations” of timbres, as he explained to me in 2007.

**MS:** With a small repertoire of instruments I managed to create many changes in the timbres through the alterations in the velocity of the sampler. So I began to discover, for example, that a pandeiro played at a certain velocity, sampled, and detuned creates a distortion that would be impossible to achieve playing more slowly and using a distortion pedal. So this began to make me think completely differently.

**FM:** Always starting with the acoustic sound?

**MS:** Exactly. The acoustic sound is always the starting point, and [then] I begin to alter it electronically. This period was very important because it also generated that idea of researching the material. I began to use wood, the cajón, and I built my mini-set, and so on.

The surdo, he said, is “good for playing more spaciously, at tempos of 90 to 120” beats per minute, or for a hip-hop-like bass drum sound, while
for drum and bass Suzano prefers the “drier,” less sustained sound of the wooden cajón. Fellow percussionist Lucas Santtana described how Suzano’s “rereadings” of, for example, jungle, ended up being something different from “a drum that you can program, tss tss ft ft,” because of the physical aspect. With two hands, Lucas said, “it is unlimited what you can do.” In one of our interviews Suzano detailed how he produces specific sounds through different uses of his right hand on the pandeiro. When he strikes the center of the drum head with the middle finger, for example, he tries to approximate something between the sound of the surdo bass drum from samba and the kick drum of a drum kit. On the other hand, when he has “the possibility of opening the thumb a bit more in a groove that’s lighter,” such as, for example, “things that are more ragga, you know, muffin, these things more reggaefied” (raggamuffin is a form of Jamaican-influenced dancehall), “then you can open up a bit, it sounds good.” At the same time, Lucas Santtana noted, Suzano also “woke us up to this thing about amplification.” Moreover, when Suzano added effects, he turned the pandeiro into “a powerful thing,” a new instrument even—an electronic drum kit, “but with him playing.”

The rich bottom end that Suzano sought for his pandeiro and other percussion sounds in his adaptations of techno and other Afro-diasporic beats at first inconvenienced producers, so here too an adjustment was required, as Suzano explained: “People would complain, ‘You have too much bass.’ . . . And I would say, ‘Listen, haven’t you ever gone to a samba school drum corps to hear some real low end?’ . . . It’s a radical beating [pancada]. Maracatu [drumming has this] too. This problem with the bass, in my opinion, comes from an ignorance about our origins, because . . . in Afro-Brazilian music the low end is the soloist. The low drum, man, the rum, that is where it’s at. The bass from reggae, the [bass runs on] seven-string guitar [in Brazilian choro], the kick drum in funk, this is all rum, man, this is Ogum . . . because the African origin is the same. Listen to Fela Kuti in Nigeria, and you’ll say that’s the ijexá rhythm [from Candomblé], and of course it is.” Although Suzano overgeneralizes the diasporic links here, it is noteworthy that he associates bass frequencies with the Yoruba deity Ogum, god of fire, iron, war, and technology. The term pancada, which Suzano uses to describe the sonic force of Afro-Brazilian drumming, means a powerful impact, a blow, or it can refer to a battle, a fight (recalling Averill and Yih’s insights about militarism in Haitian music). Producers in the sphere of pop music,
in this conception, lacked understanding of the power of the African roots (in this case West African) of Brazilian popular music. Meanwhile, Suzano made his own power play as he claimed space for bass in pop mixes, while he shrewdly narrated this move as a return to (national) origins.24

Interestingly, these particular genres from abroad, Suzano held, allowed musicians to foreground traditional Brazilian styles that emphasize busy and rapid percussion grooves, but that had been de-emphasized in the rock and pop of the 1980s. “The thing of jungle and drum and bass,” he said, was “a relief” when it arrived in Brazil, because it demonstrated that percussionists could articulate all the sixteenth notes, with “everything full,” like a frevo, referring to an up-tempo genre from the Northeast, or a fast samba, or even a quadrilha, a form of the eighteenth-century European contradance quadrille that is still popular in the June Festivals, or festas juninas, of the Northeast.

The New Samba

Meanwhile, the state of samba production after the emergence of the pagode subgenre incensed Suzano. In the 1960s to the 1970s, he reflected when we met in 2007, a number of distinctive samba singers were under contract with the major recording labels. Paulinho da Viola, Martinho da Vila, and the old guard of the traditional samba schools such as the singer-songwriter legends Cartola, Nelson Sargento, and Carlos Cachaça, Suzano felt, all had “their own sound,” much as Suzano found his sound. The sambistas (samba musicians) of the era had “an incredible flavor.” The problem, he maintained, was that after some samba musicians became commercially successful, a formula arose, and one producer emerged as the dominant force in the commercialization of pagode samba. This created a sort of sonic ghetto, Suzano felt, in which pagode albums and artists are entirely formulaic and interchangeable. “This is crap for samba!” he exclaimed. “Everything is the same,” and it “doesn’t reflect the reality of the way samba is played, because you have lots of people playing samba well, lots of different possibilities, great young rhythmicists, and they’re not recorded—not by the major [labels].”

By contrast, an album of the samba musician Paulinho da Viola is “complete nobility.” When you hear that, Suzano declared, you think, “Porra! It’s just great,” because it is at such a high level of musicianship. The samba musicians of whom Suzano speaks approvingly here tend to prioritize the richly polyrhythmic textures of acoustic roots samba, typically with memo-
rable melodies and lyrics. We have already seen how, in contrast, some musicians and listeners have criticized the commercial pagode phenomenon as a comparatively homogenized form lacking roots in the communities that produced legendary singer-songwriters in samba such as Paulinho da Viola and Martinho da Vila. (Even some of the established samba musicians I interviewed voiced this criticism.)

At first glance, these viewpoints seem to reprise long-standing debates over what happens to music when it becomes commodified. Yet a simple correlation of the problem with the music industry is not precisely accurate, for, as Suzano noted, in the 1970s a diverse array of samba musicians possessing what he described as distinctive sounds and high levels of musicianship were contracted to the major labels. For Suzano, homogenization bore upon a larger question of intensity in samba, a characteristic of Brazilian music that represented a feeling for the groove that went “a little beyond” the more “cerebral” aspects of music making. Importantly, this meant that a musician could play the rhythm of samba but that didn’t necessarily make it samba—at least not in Suzano’s understanding of the music. There are lots of guys, he said, who invoke the characteristic samba rhythms on the pandeiro, yet the listener ends up thinking, “Porra, there’s nothing there.” By contrast, one might play an atypical rhythm that perhaps “allows for a situation that, porra, is more interesting harmonically, or whatever, but there’s an element of intensity.” (Suzano performed two contrasting rhythms on his instrument to demonstrate during this interview; see figures 4 and 5.) As a further example of this intensity of groove, Suzano described how the guitarist Gerson Silva had him on the edge of his seat at a dressing room rehearsal. It took one measure of 2/4, he remembered, and by the start of the second measure, he was entranced. “Porra! The guy was incredible,” he exclaimed as he recalled this musician’s remarkable swing.

It is the subtlety of execution that grabs Suzano’s attention by the third beat; more generally, he values intensity, independence, and awareness of ensemble dynamics. Suzano described the third beat of Gerson’s groove as the moment that “Dona [Lady] Judith” descended to inhabit the music, much like an orixá (deity). The spirit of Dona Judith, he informed me, “is an entity of the swing.” When Dona Judith “arrives,” he said, “the swing is there.” Samba, in this conceptualization, is a “historically extended, socially embodied argument” about what goods “give point and purpose to that tradition” (MacIntyre 1984, 222; see also Guilbault 2007, 6). By contrast, recent trends in commercial samba recording, as well as the impris-
onment of samba within set patterns of typical or generic rhythmic inflections, could lead to the “corruption” of musical ideals and constrain creative individuality in deference to market forces.

Nonlinear Recording, Filters, and Beatboxes

Working in his home recording environment with Pro Tools audio software and hardware, Suzano uses what he refers to as “nonlinear recording,” a method that develops from the way in which the computer-based DAW represents audio tracks as compound waveforms on a computer screen. In this method Suzano records various “experiences,” as he termed them, examines their visual representation, and then assembles “a mosaic of possibilities” from the parts that he likes. When I asked him in 2007 how the pandeiro fit into his recent work, he eagerly offered to demonstrate with audio examples. He opened a variety of digital files on his DAW and described how he used instruments such as his pandeiro, the cuíca friction drum and the surdo from samba, the cajón, and the Indian tabla, and how these instruments’ acoustic timbres were all “corrupted” (estragado) beyond recognition by his Belgian-made two-channel Sherman filter bank.

To try to describe in words the “strange” sounds (Taylor 2001, 8–9) that Suzano played for me as he illustrated his new grooves at this meeting strains my ability to summon appropriate metaphors. Notating these grooves can only impart a minimal sense of some of the rhythmic organization, while one of the central functions of the filter is radically to alter the timbres of the acoustic instruments. (It can be understood as an example of what Cornelia Fales calls “timbral anomaly by extraction” [2005, 172].) One cyborgian groove, for example, derived from the sound of his pandeiro and cajón, based around a repeating 3 + 3 + 2 pattern of pulses (sixteenth notes in duple meter) heard in many Latin American genres (and elsewhere), but also featuring the oscillating sonic detritus of the fil-

Figure 4. A common basic samba pattern on pandeiro, as demonstrated by Marcos Suzano
Marcos Suzano's corrupting authority. A high, ringing, space-age-sounding melodic part entered after a few measures. It turned out to be a filtered cuíca, the distinctive Brazilian friction drum from samba, but it bore not the slightest resemblance to the natural sound of this instrument.

Another groove featured Indian tabla and cajón, with the latter instrument improbably providing the melody. “Totally manipulated,” Suzano said of it. If he were to remove the filter, he confided, the melody would “lose 80 percent of its attractiveness.” As he played the excerpt for me, a driving bass line entered, also deriving from the cajón. So went this listening session as the afternoon wore on, with Suzano excitedly telling me what instruments produced the original sounds—an entirely unrecognizable pandeiro (“totally destroyed,” in Suzano’s words), a moringa (water jug) used to create a bizarre bass line, and so on. The appeal of the filter as a tool lies in the fact that it emphasizes the timbral aspect and allows the musician to create sounds that the unmodified instrument could not generate: one begins “to create syntheses through the filtering,” Suzano said, and the Sherman was “heavy stuff [barra pesada].” One creates, in fact, by destroying through subtraction the timbral spectrum of the original sound (see figure 6).

The machine’s manufacturer describes the v2 filter bank as “a powerful analog filtering and distortion unit with a huge frequency range and a killing tube overdrive behavior,” designed for “processing every sound source.” With “killing behavior,” the device could be one of the creator-destroyer Ogum’s “frightening charms.” Suzano made a point of mentioning that the Icelandic musician Björk—whom Charity Marsh and Melissa West describe as a cyborg reworking the gendered distinctions between nature and culture, public and private (2003, 195-97)—also utilized the Sherman filter. Interestingly, Björk referred to her recording Volta (2007) as her “techno-voodoo” album (Pareles 2007), suggesting another associa-

![figure 5](image-url)

FIGURE 5. One of Marcos Suzano's pandeiro patterns, as played during an interview with the author (see also Appendix 2)
tion between Afro-diasporic religion and machines for sonic manipulation (“Voodoo” is an alternative spelling for “Vodoun”). Suzano also singled out Björk’s collaborator, the hip-hop producer Timbaland, as someone he especially admired. Timbaland is “a genius of the beat” for his conservative but effective use of multitracking and his ability to beatbox, that is, to produce electronic-sounding rhythms with his voice: “He does the basic grooves all with his voice, man! Porra! . . . For someone who works with rhythm, it’s enough to make you stop playing! . . . And this is . . . a cool thing that the technology of the nineties facilitated. . . . That is to say, until the advent of the computer, recording and hard disk, nonlinear recording, it was practically impossible to hear [someone doing vocalized] beatbox. You could do it on tape, but . . . it was a headache. With a computer it is play, and the play became something serious.” This serious play parallels Suzano’s own adaptation of electronic beats on the pandeiro “always starting with the acoustic sound,” while foregrounding human agency vis-à-vis
machines. “Nature and culture are reworked” in such practices, while “the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other” (Haraway 1991, 151).

From Incomprehension to “Islands of Creation”

As recording technologies became increasingly accessible, “little islands of creation” emerged throughout the city at the expense of the major recording studios, and producers working with the major recording labels ended up having “to give space to new sounds.” Today, Suzano enthused, “you have the advantage of this sort of do-it-yourself method, and you are not imprisoned.” His collaborators send him recordings of sessions to which he adds tracks on his own DAW, and then he sends the accumulated tracks back. “I have everything here,” he said, “and I make my sounds at home.” Liberated from the imprisonment of a centralized music industry, at the time of this interview (July 2007), Suzano was working on his third solo album, Atarashi (meaning “new” or “fresh” in Japanese), which he described as heavily influenced by Jamaican dub, and which he recorded entirely in his home studio. “It’s just percussion, completely processed,” he explained. The word processed may evoke mass production (as in food), but here it describes Suzano’s agency as a creative processor with command over the technologies he helped integrate into Brazilian pop. The electronic manipulation of acoustic percussion was part of Suzano’s ongoing research into timbres, he affirmed.

The new project of which he was most proud at the time of our interview in 2007 was his collaboration with Vitor Ramil, a singer-songwriter from the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul. For Suzano, the double album they recorded, Satolep Sambatown, was another example of how the established centers of musical sound are now “much looser” and more “spaced out” than the major recording studios were. Vitor’s southern sensibility, or “aesthetics of the cold,” he said, represents “a very different musical aesthetic,” yet one that is equally “Brazilian.” They recorded almost the entire album in Suzano’s home DAW. With no rehearsal whatsoever, the percussionist somewhat immodestly noted, it turned out to be “an incredible album,” his most mature duo collaboration in his estimation. “How I manipulated my sounds, man, I felt I found myself, and I think about how many percussionists could be doing work like this but who remain kind of trapped.”
Some twenty years into his career as a percussionist, Suzano apparently encountered the creative self toward which he had been aspiring right in his very home, at his DAW, with unrehearsed spontaneous performances and a mastery of their subsequent processing with machines. Suzano’s manipulation of the acoustic sounds contrasts with the “corruption” arising from the centralization of power in the major music labels, in the largest recording studios, in overly influential producers, and in homogenized aesthetics. Vitor Ramil and Suzano subsequently released the album on the independent MP,B label (MP,B plays on the established acronym MPB, adding a comma to música popular brasileira), retaining ownership of it for potential future releases. “It might work out well,” he gambled, “or it might be bad.” In the case of Suzano’s solo album, Atarashi, there was to be “no label . . . nothing.” Suzano would sell it at his shows and his percussion classes and take it to some stores himself. If somebody from abroad should want to buy it, he would “enter into business directly and export.” He would retain complete control of the work and the stock and would thus earn more, he predicted.

Such retooling of music production and distribution to small-scale, artist-controlled, and often home-based configurations is complementary to certain realignments in cultural funding. Nongovernmental organizations and other nonprofit organizations and foundations have become increasingly important sources of support since democratization in 1985 and the institution of economic reforms in the 1990s. Suzano spoke approvingly of one government initiative at the state level: the corporate incentive laws that encourage private-sector support of cultural productions. These laws have roots in the 1940s, but the stabilization of the economy and economic growth in the past twenty years have turned such policies into something of a success story of private-sector arts funding, while musicians have become more savvy about utilizing them. The incentive laws, Suzano explained, changed everything because “no one needs a record label.” The once-influential figure of the recording label artists and repertoire director is today “completely unnecessary.” He quipped: “These guys don’t speak to anybody anymore, just to people who want easy success. They are irrelevant. You take a guy like Mr. ——, from [media giant] Globo TV. He puts down what you’re doing and you think, ‘What the hell is he talking about?’ A little while ago you might have thought maybe he was right. Now you just laugh and say: ‘Get serious.’ They are a bunch of clowns.”
Conclusions

Marcos Suzano was among Brazil’s most-recorded percussionists in the 1990s and into the following decade in part because he is a skilled (and hard-working) pandeiro player who has managed to keep himself at the center of emergent trends in popular music and jazz. In his telling, part of his early success owed to the fact that he was a good sight-reader and was able to record quickly, playing “with swing, even when reading the music,” as well as to the fact that he was “up to date” with the latest sounds. He learned to play his instrument in the traditions of two established genres strongly identified with Rio de Janeiro: choro and samba. By the mid-1990s, however, he had developed an idiomatic technique that allowed him to play more offbeat low pitches and, in general, a greater variety of rhythms. He saw this technique as more consistent with African-derived aspects of Brazilian musical culture (specifically, the drumming of the Candomblé).

The celebration of Afro-Brazilian culture has been a recurring theme in Brazilian social life for at least a century, but it has also met with resistance or ambivalence at times, and in certain contexts. In Brazilian popular music, the syncopated and polyrhythmic percussion characteristic of roots samba expression has often been relegated to the background. This was true of the bolero-influenced samba-canção (samba-song) of the radio singers of the 1950s, of bossa nova, and generally of MPB, which adopted a band format in which the drum kit tended to carry most of the rhythm. Beginning with the political opening of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Afro-Brazilian drumming came increasingly to be integrated into popular manifestations in the Brazilian Northeast, notably in the blocos afro of Salvador (Crook 1993), and subsequently with the resurgence of maracatu in Recife in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Suzano’s efforts can be seen in part as responding to this tendency, and also as contributing, albeit in a limited and specific manner, to the growing revival of samba among the middle classes in Rio de Janeiro.

Suzano’s early work with groups like Aquarela Carioca emphasized an acoustic sound with jazz influences, but he began to experiment with electronic effects and then samplers, filters, and of course digital home recording while incorporating new influences from international electronic dance genres such as jungle. He developed his mini-kit of cajón, tabla, and various other percussive instruments to augment the catalog of timbres upon which he could draw. Suzano, it could be said, invited a diast-
poric Ogum into his practice as the creator/destroyer in charge of policing technology and the public sphere, of sonically inverting incorrect hierarchies, and of “conjuring” the kinetic rhythms of drum choirs, as the New York Times journalist Jon Pareles described Suzano’s performance at Central Park SummerStage (1997). At the same time, anxiety with respect to technology sometimes exists in a techno-vooodoo dialectic with ambivalent and conflicting stances toward cultural practices that seem more traditional, and that are often racialized; the “question of who is black” may be “suspended” in such a move (Carvalho 1994, 2).

I suggested that the metaphor of a Carioca Blade Runner also pointed to a gendered, specifically masculine, dimension to the way this foregrounding of percussion was interpreted locally. I do not mean that Suzano illustrated some sort of essential masculinity defined by shades of aggressiveness, dynamics of control, and echoes of militarism. Musically constituted masculinity can assume different registers and Suzano is certainly a versatile instrumentalist. Lorraine Leu has argued that in the late 1960s, the Brazilian pop musician Caetano Veloso used the visual vocabulary of style and performed femininity to “deregulate” the body in response to the ideologies of discipline, machismo, and the patriarchal family promulgated under the military dictatorship in its effort to control the national population (2006, 42–43). It is plausible that once disarticulated from authoritarian regulation of civil society and the body, those aspects of masculinity associated with power and control could take on new resonances. Suzano would be given a mandate to implement his musical priorities—a “line of flight” in a Deleuzian sense—when Paulinho Moska took him on as producer for his album Móbile.