Songs Without Words, Intersemiotic Journeys in Works by Boulez, Revueltas and Ablinger, and Portfolio of Original Compositions

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Songs Without Words

Intersemiotic Journeys in Works
by Boulez, Revueltas and Ablinger

Erika Vega

Abstract

This dissertation investigates how literary texts are translated into instrumental music through the lens of intersemiotic translation, with a particular focus on the compositional process. Centered around four contrasting case studies, the study examines how composers translate verbal (literary) sign systems into non-verbal (musical) codes. Pierre Boulez's Third Piano Sonata, incorporates stylistic and radical formal elements of Mallarmé's poetry, such as open form and spatial page design, demonstrating a formal and aesthetic equivalence that resonates with the poem's innovative structure. Silvestre Revueltas' *Sensemayá* achieves a prosodic translation of Guillén's poem, rendering its rhythm, alliteration, and musicality into a song without words. Peter Ablinger's *A Letter from Schoenberg* pursues a linguistic and semantic translation of Schoenberg's speech, transforming inflection and intonation into experimental sonic textures that evoke the semantic essence of the original utterance. Finally, my composition *No oyes ladrar a los perros*, echoes Juan Rulfo's non-linear storytelling and temporal fragmentation, capturing the underpinnings of magic realism.

Drawing on Roman Jakobson's theory of intersemiotic translation and its development within semiotic and translation studies, this research foregrounds the composer's creative agency in navigating the aesthetic, structural, and expressive dimensions of literary texts within musical contexts. Grounded in critical analysis and practice-led reflection, the dissertation proposes a shift in how we understand composition as a form of translation, inviting composers to explore the expressive potential of crossing semiotic boundaries.

In memory of Mario Lavista

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Prelude

1.1 Sonic translations of literary texts

The foundation of my artistic approach was influenced by Leonard Bernstein's *The Unanswered Question*—his *Norton Lectures* Series at Harvard—which I first encountered in my early years as a composition student. Bernstein emphasised the importance of interdisciplinarity, stating that the best way to know a thing is in the context of another discipline. In these six lectures, he examined music through the lens of linguistics, breaking down its structure into three key branches: phonology, syntax, and semantics. This perspective encouraged me to consider music and language in analogous terms, revealing their structural parallels. One of their key similarities is that, despite being distinct semiotic codes, both share parallel graphic and acoustic properties and can unfold either in segmented units or as a continuous flow in real-time.[1]

As a composer, I have always been drawn to an interdisciplinary approach, particularly in exploring the relationship between music and literature. While my compositional process is largely intuitive, I consider myself a timbre-based composer, working with color and texture as foundational materials. In terms of formal construction, I naturally gravitate toward literature and poetry as structuring forces in my instrumental compositions. Inspired by Bernstein's exploration of linguistic structures in music, I incorporate literary forms, techniques, aesthetics,

[1] Agawu, Kofi. *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music*. Oxford University Press 2009, p. 24.

and narratives into my compositional process, fostering a dynamic interplay between the two art forms. By maintaining a formal cohesion between literary and musical elements, I strive to create works that resonate on multiple levels, engaging listeners in a rich and multifaceted experience.

Numerous considerations come to mind when contemplating using text as the central axis for a non-vocal composition: In what ways can composers translate the elements of a text into a musical form beyond direct text-setting, and how can this process achieve cohesion between textual integrity and musical transformation?

In this thesis, I analyse three contrasting approaches to setting text into music, they all address different linguistic aspects of phonetics, syntax, and semantics. While musicologists have extensively studied musical text settings, their analyses often prioritise the textual or theoretical dimensions rather than the compositional process itself. There is little literature examining this subject through the lens of intersemiotic translation from a composer's perspective that engages with the creative choices of music. This thesis contributes to this knowledge corpus by approaching the problem not just as an analytical study, but as a reflection on the compositional act itself: how composers navigate the constraints and possibilities of text-setting. Unlike literary interpretations of musical settings, which often view music as a secondary response to a text, this study reveals how the act of composition transforms the text into a new artistic whole—where words, rather than being merely conveyed, are reimagined through sound. By foregrounding the composer's perspective, this research highlights the ways in which musical settings reshape the experience of text, offering new insights that have been largely overlooked in traditional musicological discourse.

1.2 Framework

When it comes to the study of transcoding between diverse artistic forms, intersemiotic translation stands out as an optimal theoretical framework. Translation theories provide tools to analyse 'texts' from an interdisciplinary perspective as well as and insight that to enriches the theoretical account of translational phenomena. In this dissertation, I distinguish a type of intersemiotic translation: the passage of a verbal (literary) sign system to a musical sign system (non-verbal) according to Jakobson's notion of intersemiotic translation.

Jakobson's tripartite translation model—encompassing intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic translation—highlights the distinctive nature of each translation type[2]. Intersemiotic translation involves transposing signs from one semiotic system to another, such as language to music. It acknowledges the fundamental differences and commonalities between verbal and musical systems, while emphasising the importance of preserving and transmuting meaning across them. By considering the intricate interplay of signifiers and signified within each system, intersemiotic translation allows for a nuanced exploration of the aesthetic and expressive potential inherent in both verbal and musical languages, fostering a rich dialogue between the two mediums that results in evocative and insightful translations.

While Jakobson initially introduced the concept of intersemiotic translation, he did not apply it explicitly to music. However, later musicologists have examined cases where music functions as a translation of literary structures. Several scholars have explored intersemiotic translation

[2] Jakobson, Roman. *Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, Edinburgh University Press, 1959, p. 232-239.

in music studies, particularly in the field of musical semiotics. Nattiez[3] and Tarasti[4] have applied semiotic frameworks to analyse the relationships between music and other sign systems, often referencing Peircean and Saussurean models**.** Eco has also contributed insights into intersemiotic processes, though his focus extends beyond music.[5]

Scholars, such as, Molino, Ruwet, and Dinda Gorlée have significantly contributed to music semiotics and intersemiotic translation. Molino's tripartite model of musical signification—poietic, neutral, and esthesic—has been instrumental in understanding how meaning is encoded and interpreted in music,[6] influencing Nattiez's applications to works like Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune.*[7] Ruwet applied structuralist paradigmatic analysis to instrumental music, particularly in serial and post-serial compositions.[8] While not explicitly about music, Kristeva's intertextuality theory[9] has influenced studies on intersemiotic translation in music. Dinda Gorlée,[10] expands on Jakobson and Peircean semiotics to the study of translation, emphasizing the process of transmutation between different sign systems.

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[3] Nattiez, Jean-Jacques. *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990. A landmark text in music semiology that applies Peircean triadic semiotics to musical analysis.

[4] Tarasti, Eero. *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

[5] Thellefsen, Torkild, and Bent Sørensen. *Umberto Eco in His Own Words*. 1st ed. Boston, Massachusetts: De Gruyter Mouton, 2017.

[6] Molino, Jean. *Musical Fact and the Semiology of Music*. Music Analysis 9, no. 2, 1990, p. 105–156. A foundational text in music semiotics that explores the semiological method's application to musical structures.

[7] Nattiez, Jean-Jacques. *Music and Discourse: Toward a Semiology of Music*. 1990.

[8] Ruwet, Nicolas. *Langage, musique, poésie.* Paris: Seuil, 1972. Examines parallels between linguistic and musical structures through a semiotic approach.

[9] Kristeva, Julia. *Revolution in Poetic Language.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

[10] Gorlée, Dinda L. "Intercode Translation: Words and Music in Opera", *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies,* vol. 9, no. 2, 1997, p. 235-270.

1.3 From intertextuality to intersemiotics

In the field of musico-literary intersemiosis, as well as in all other intersemiotic art forms, Robert Jakobson, a structural linguist, emerged as a pioneer. He introduced the term intersemiotics as the transformation of different semiotic systems in 1959. While working with translation studies, he defined intersemiotic translation as a unidirectional, metalinguistic process involving the recodification of linguistic signs into non-linguistic ones.[11] Transformations between different semiotic systems are evident in different examples, such as the translation of verbal language into visual ones (plastic arts, photography, etc.), into auditive languages (music), or intermedia languages (cinema, music theatre and opera).

Jakobson pioneered the application of semiotics in translation studies in his *Essays of General Linguistics.* His proposal of a tripartite division of translation[12]—interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic translations—offers a valuable framework for translation theory, delineating three distinct methods of sign interpretation. The third type, intersemiotic translation, also known as intersemiotic 'transmutation, transposition, transcodification' as termed by different scholars, consists of the "transformation of linguistic signs by means of systems of no non-linguistic signs".[13]

[11] Jakobson. *Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, 1959, p. 232-239.
[12] Jakobson's tripartite division: 1. Intralingual translation or rewording is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language. 2. Interlingual translation or translation proper is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language. 3. Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems. Jakobson *Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, 1959, p. 232-239.
[13] Ibid., p. 232.

The study of intersemiotic translation draws its definition from theories of intertextuality. According to Kristeva, no text exists as a fully autonomous creation of its author; but rather emerges through the interconnections of textual elements from related texts. Texts cannot be seen as singular entities but as a multidimensional set of various texts. Under this scope, 'text' refers to works of art regardless of discipline. The concept of intertextuality suggests that a text "cannot exist in isolation or as a self-contained entity, and therefore does not operate as a closed system".[14]

1.4 Chapter breakdown

In this dissertation, I examine Pierre Boulez's Third Piano Sonata, Silvestre Revueltas' *Sensemayá*, and Peter Ablinger's *A Letter from Schoenberg*, utilising them as three contrasting examples of how literary texts can serve as points of departure for instrumental composition. These case studies explore different approaches to intersemiotic translation without the direct presence of sung, spoken, or explicitly embedded text in the music. While Boulez engages with literary structure and aesthetic philosophy, Revueltas translates the phonetic and rhythmic qualities of poetry into music, and Ablinger recontextualises speech itself as musical material. Together, these analyses highlight diverse compositional approaches that move beyond conventional text-setting, offering insights into how composers can engage with text in non-vocal works.

The second chapter, "*Lieder ohne Worte*: echoes and transmutations of the Mallarméan poetic in Boulez's Third Piano Sonata", explores Boulez's approach to musical form in relation to

[14] Quoted in Stilll, Judith and Michael Worton. *Introduction, Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*. Ed. Judith Still and Michael Worton. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.

Stéphane Mallarmé's poetic techniques. Boulez—deeply influenced by Mallarmé's revolutionary literary concepts—adopts open form, and spatial distribution as structural principles in his music—an approach he refers to as "the transmutation of modes of thought." This chapter situates Boulez's work within a broader modernist tradition, examining how his engagement with literary aesthetics informs his compositional process. By analysing the intersections between Boulez's music and Mallarmé's poetics, the chapter demonstrates how poetry can shape musical structure in ways that transcend mere thematic or narrative association.

The third chapter, "*Sensemayá*: intersemiotic translation in a song without words", examines Revueltas' orchestral work as a sonic counterpart to Nicolás Guillén's poem *Sensemayá*. Revueltas translates the poem's phonetic structure, rhythmic patterns, and prosodic features into musical gestures. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator*, this analysis explores how musical interpretation can capture the underlying "mode of intention" of a text, rather than simply imitating its literal form. Through this lens, Revueltas' composition emerges as an intersemiotic transformation that preserves and amplifies the essence of Guillén's poetry through musical means.

The fourth chapter, "*Rede ohne Worte:* Ablinger's *Speaking Piano* and *A Letter from Schoenberg"*, investigates Ablinger's method of translating spoken language into instrumental music. Unlike Boulez and Revueltas, whose works engage with textual structures and phonetics, Ablinger directly manipulates recorded speech, transforming it into a musical object through computer-assisted transcription techniques. His concept of *phonorealism*—a practice that seeks to preserve the acoustic characteristics of speech in instrumental form—raises

fundamental questions about the boundaries between language and music. This chapter examines how Ablinger recontextualizes the human voice as a compositional tool, challenging traditional distinctions between verbal and non-verbal expression.

A key component of this thesis is its practical aspect, in which the research informs and underpins my compositional process. While the dissertation primarily focuses on works that do not present literal text, my portfolio of compositions—both vocal and instrumental works—explores the convergence between music and literature in various forms. The insights drawn from Boulez, Revueltas, and Ablinger provide a framework for analysing my creative process, allowing for a dialogue between theory and practice.

The final chapter, "*No oyes ladrar a los perros*: the sonic *´realismo mágico´*", offers a critical reflection on my compositional approach to Juan Rulfo's short story of the same name, shifting the focus from the compositional strategies of Boulez, Revueltas, and Ablinger to my own creative practice. Building upon the analytical foundations laid in the previous chapters, this chapter demonstrates how the insights gained from studying intersemiotic translation inform my compositional approach. Rather than merely illustrating Juan Rulfo's short story through music, I engage with its temporal structure, and aesthetic qualities to inform my musical choices. This approach aligns with the techniques examined earlier yet offers a distinctly personal perspective, positioning composition as both an analytical and creative act.

By drawing comparisons between my strategies and those of the composers previously discussed, this chapter highlights alternative modes of musical representation that move beyond conventional text settings. It serves as the practical realisation of the dissertation's core

themes, reinforcing the argument that literary texts can be reimagined in music without direct reliance on text-setting or narrative depiction. Unlike the critical prefaces submitted separately with the portfolio, which have a brief view of the compositional process, this chapter situates my creative work within a broader theoretical and artistic discourse. Offering new perspectives on intersemiotic translation and contributing to the broader discussion of how composers navigate the intersection of text and music.

1.5 Conclusions

Employing intersemiotic translation as a model for transformation between different semiotic codes can bring a creative practice that contributes to the evolution of the target text:

> Through translation—an unstable, transformative process which embodies both displacement and dialogue at once—texts are read and (re)imagined, necessarily positioned in new linguistic and cultural environments, in different spatial and temporal settings and, increasingly, made to cross "media borders".[15]

When we attribute meaning to something, we engage in an act of interpretation or translation, moving between different representational systems. Peirce's semiotic framework highlights that meaning is not fixed within a single sign system but is generated through its translation into a different one.[16] Eco further extends this notion by arguing that translation is not only a linguistic operation but one that engages intertextual, psychological, and narrative

[15] Perteghella, Manuela. *The Case of the Poem in Motion: Translation, Movement and the Poetic Landscape*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018. p. 63.
[16] Quoted in *International Handbook of Semiotics*, edited by Peter Pericles Trifonas, Springer Netherlands, 2015.

competencies, reinforcing the idea that meaning emerges through dynamic processes of reinterpretation.[17]

Jakobson's threefold categorisation of translation—intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic—has significantly influenced linguistics, semiotics, and translation studies. While his classification remains foundational, the third category, intersemiotic translation, represents a radical shift by decentralising verbal language and acknowledging the broader semiotic processes at play in humanistic disciplines.[18] Scholars have expanded upon Jakobson's work, particularly in the study of music,[19] yet the application of intersemiotic translation to instrumental composition remains underexplored.

This dissertation builds upon these theoretical perspectives by systematically examining three instrumental works where music functions as an intersemiotic translation of literary structures. Unlike existing studies that focus primarily on vocal music, this research presents a formalised approach to analysing how composers engage with literary texts through structural, expressive, and material transformation. By integrating insights from semiotics, translation studies, and music analysis, this study develops a novel framework for understanding instrumental music as a process of intersemiotic translation—one that generates new interpretations of source texts beyond conventional programmatic or symbolic associations. This contribution extends current discourse by providing a method for identifying and interpreting intersemiotic relationships in

[17] Quoted in Kourdis, Evangelos. *Semiotics of Translation: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Translation*. 2015, p. 304.
[18] Gorlée, Dinda L. "Intercode Translation: Words and Music in Opera", *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies,* vol. 9, no. 2, 1997, p. 235-270.
[19] Gideon Toury (1986), Umberto Eco (2001), Peeter Torop (2002), Dinda Gorlée (2010).

instrumental music, offering a model that can be applied to a wider range of compositional practices.

2

Lieder ohne Worte: echoes and transmutations of the Mallarméan poetic in Boulez's Third Piano Sonata

A lace abolishes itself
In the doubt of the supreme game
To only partially open, like a blasphemy
In the eternal absence of a bed.
Mallarmé[20]

In his Third Piano Sonata, Boulez refrained from offering a narrative or literal description to elucidate the connection between poetry and music. Instead, he aimed to emancipate his source materials to a degree where they could serve his specific compositional needs: "The relationship between poem and music is not only on the plane of emotional significance: I have tried to push the alliance still further, to the very roots of the musical invention and structure."[21]

This chapter examines how the stylistically innovative poetry and prose of Mallarmé profoundly influenced Boulez, markedly affecting his approach to composition. This influence catalysed the development of significant formal devices, such as open form, spatial distribution, and controlled indeterminacy. Boulez acknowledged the revolutionary aesthetic principles of Mallarmé's literature as pivotal for artistic practice, underscoring their relevance for contemporary creativity. Through a "transmutation of modes of thought," Boulez achieved a

[20] Stephane, Mallarmé, fragment from *Une dentelle s'abolit. Œuvres Complètes*. Paris: Gallimard, 1998. Translation by Rehder, R. M. "'Une dentelle s'abolit' de mallarmé." Nineteenth-Century French Studies, vol. 1, no. 3, 1973, pp. 162–73.
[21] Boulez, Pierre, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, and Martin Cooper. *Orientations: Collected Writings*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986. p. 175.

compelling intersemiotic transformation between music and literature, introducing novel dimensions to musical expression.

2.1 Modernism in history

The twentieth century witnessed an artistic revolution that embraced the asymmetrical, the asemic, the ahistorical, and the anarchic. Radical content was prioritised over traditional forms to emancipate both the artist and the audience from inherited constraints, grounding them in progressive ideals. Spanning poetry, music, architecture, design, dance, and theatre, Modernism emerged as a philosophical and aesthetic movement that detonated with creative freedom and formal innovations, challenging established precedents. The atonal revolution in music, epitomised by Schoenberg and the Second Viennese School, is historically perceived as a manifestation of these radical possibilities, yet it only partially fulfils the revolutionary implications suggested by its nomenclature—specifically, the embrace of the aperiodic or, more precisely, noise. Even Luigi Russolo's manifesto "The Art of Noises" (1913), the Italian Futurist statement that called for a new music of noise, clung to pitch as a method of organising sounds: "We want to give pitches to these diverse noises, regulating them harmonically and rhythmically."[22] The *Oxford Music Online* defines Modernism as "the consequence of the fundamental conviction among successive generations of composers since 1900 that the means of musical expression in the 20th century must be adequate to the unique and radical character of the age."[23]

[22] Russolo, Luigi. *The Art of Noises.* New York: Pendragon Press, 1986, p. 27.
[23] Botstein, Leon, *Oxford Music Online*, January 20, 2001
https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.40625

Although it is difficult to define Modernism by any political ideology, it is easily associated with all of them: from fascism to social anarchism and, dogmatically, from atheism to Catholicism. Thus, early Modernists, regardless of their political ideologies, shared a common awareness in resisting the bourgeoisie and authoritarianism. They liberated themselves from preconceived notions pertaining to conventional political and ecclesiastical limitations. As posited by Peter Gay, Modernism was mobilised by two main attributes: firstly, the 'lure of heresy' that stimulated their endeavours to transgress the norms of traditional sensibilities; and secondly, the imperative to explore the artist's psyche, anchored in the belief that the self is the great 'mystery of existence'. Gay claims that for modernists "it appears likely that perhaps half the joy of making a radical picture or house or symphony must have derived from the creator's satisfaction to have bested the opposition."[24] The pivot towards revolutionary subjectivity has come to be regarded as a focal point for interpreting Modernism.

In this context, Butler presents Modernism through a Freudian lens, considering one of its defining traits to be the deliberate retreat from social conformity. For Butler, such tendencies mark a radical departure from tradition. Rather than valuing mimesis—the imitation or representation of external reality—Modernist artists sought to challenge the very notion that art should reflect or replicate the world as it appears.[25] Traditionally, mimesis had been central to artistic practice, shaping artistic production from classical antiquity through the Renaissance, where the artist's role was often conceived as a mediator between reality and its representation. However, Modernists redefined artistic expression by centering the self as

[24] Gay, Peter. *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy: From Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond*. First ed. New York; London: W.W. Norton, 2008, p. 20.
[25] Butler, Christopher. *Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe*, *1900-1916*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 3.

fundamental to any work that stands as an independent entity. This shift signified a move away from the idea that art should function as a mirror to the external world and instead embraced subjectivity, interiority, and abstraction. In rejecting mimesis, Modernist artists underscored the autonomy of artistic creation, privileging personal vision, psychological depth, and formal experimentation over direct representation.

2.2 French Symbolism

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, art underwent substantial changes that transformed its foundations, precipitating a significant paradigm shift in intellectual thought. Butler observes that early Modernists pioneered in two primary dimensions: initially, they embraced stylistic self-determination as seen in Symbolism, advancing well past the existing aesthetic norms and eschewing societal standards; subsequently, they believed that "creativity (and art) had to be subjective, intuitive and expressionist in character."[26]

French Symbolist poets Rimbaud, Verlaine, and Mallarmé forged new methods of exploring the artist's psyche, 'mastering the subjectivity,' a key element of Modernism. Their innovations included typographic experimentation, intricate metaphors, and a departure from the logical association of ideas. This rebellion against conventional structures is exemplified by the evolution of free verse. Victor Hugo, experimented with breaking the strict rules of the Alexandrine—a classical French poetic form consisting of twelve-syllable lines—thereby foreshadowing the eventual emergence of free verse, which became central to both Symbolist and Modernist poetry. Barthes critiques modern poetry for its deconstruction of language's

[26] Ibid., p. 3.

inherent functionality, arguing that it "destroys the spontaneously functional nature of language and leaves standing only its lexical basis. It retains only the outward shape of relationships, their music, but not their reality." [27]

2.3 The poetics of Mallarmé

Mallarmé embraced a discourse marked by discontinuity and fragmentation of linguistic logic. Referred to by Barthes as 'the Hamlet of writing', Mallarmé epitomises that fragile juncture in history where the survival of literary language serves primarily to herald its own demise.[28] He breaks from the innate logic of language by signalling a departure at both grammatical and semantic levels. Mallarmé's work suggests that "the disintegration of language inevitably leads to the silence of writing,"[29] where the breakdown of conventional structure foretells the cessation of written expression. In "The Order of Things" (1966), Foucault elucidates Mallarmé's perspective that the deconstruction of words transcends degeneration into disorder or regression to primal elements. Rather, this disintegration is a generative process that gives rise to new words, suggesting a continual rebirth of language.[30]

"Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard" (1897), (A Throw of the dice), represents a seminal work in Mallarmé's oeuvre. The poem debuted in "Cosmopolis", an international journal that published articles about literature, politics, and theatre in English, French and German. Accompanied by two prefaces, the poem serves as an initiation into Mallarmé's experimental

[27] Barthes, Roland, and Annette Lavers. *Writing Degree Zero*. First American ed. New York: Hill and Wang (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 1968, p. 46.
[28] Ibid., p. 75.
[29] Ibid., p. 75.
[30] Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* London: Routledge, 2002, p. 114.

typographic layout. This layout invites readers to engage in an unconventional reading experience, compelling them to abandon traditional linear progression in favour of a more liberated interpretive approach. The open text allows the reader to complete the narrative body in a free interpretative form. Such an 'open form' allows for a free interpretation of the poem's narrative structure, constituting the radicalisation between the poetic language and the linearity of the prose.

Mallarmé's strategic use of whitespace or 'blanks' on the page disrupts the visual flow and accentuates an element of silence, offering a spatial metaphor for the unsaid or void intrinsic to the poem's structure and meaning. He envisions the poem's layout, likened to a constellation. This precise arrangement is meant to echo the actions or objects described, creating a visual rhythm that mirrors and communicates the essence of the poem's subject matter. The poem exists in the written words and the physical spaces and silences between them:

> Constellation, according to the exact laws, will inevitably produce, as far as this is possible for a printed text, the effect of a constellation. The vessel inclines from the top of one page to the bottom of the next, etc.[31]

Deleuze compares the poem to Nietzschean philosophy, finding resemblances from the notion of chance. The ultimate aspiration of the throw of dice is to discover its meaningful counterpart in an alternate realm, a constellation that claims it to be situated in some empty, exalted plane devoid of randomness.[32]

[31] Quoted in Boulez, *Orientations,* p. 146.
[32] Deleuze, Gilles. *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. London: Athlone Press, 1983, p. 33.

Mallarmé conceptualises the poem's layout as analogous to a musical score, “resulte, pour qui veut le lire à haute voix, une partition”,[33] (“results, a score for those who want to read it aloud”). Numerous studies are trying to elucidate the radical visual design, which includes the strategic placement of words and the varied font sizes. In his critique, D’Origny observes that certain features of the poem mirror components of a musical score. He argues that the font size and weight correspond to the dynamics and emphasis necessary for its oral interpretation, dictating the rhythm and pacing of the reading.[34] Boulez reflects on this, noting that such meticulous and artistic presentation of a poem inspired him to find equivalents in music.[35]

Figure 1. Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Un Coup De Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard*, p. 12.

[33] Mallarmé, Stéphane. *Poème : Un Coup De Dés Jamais N'Abolira Le Hasard*. Paris: Gallimard, 1969.
[34] Lübecker, Nikolaj D'Origny. *Le Sacrifice De La Sirène : "Un Coup De Dés" Et La Poétique De Stéphane Mallarmé*, 2003.
[35] Boulez, *Orientations*. p. 147.

Mallarmé envisioned his creations, such as “Le livre”, as open-ended works that call upon a dynamic interaction where the reader becomes an active participant in constructing meaning. In *The Death of the Author* (1968), Barthes claims that Mallarmé's entire poetics is focused on erasing the author to elevate the primacy of the writing and the reader.[36] This innovative and radical view of language anticipates the desacralisation of the author's role because the spectator reconstitutes and develops his knowledge. Rancière further articulates this: "Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story.”[37] This marked the first time the spectator was acknowledged as an essential figure in the interpretative process, a step towards emancipation as they assume the responsibility of active interpretation. Foucault notes that Mallarmé consciously removed himself from his language, desiring to appear within his works merely as a facilitator in the solemn act of the Book’s creation, allowing the text to form itself.[38] Boulez shares his perspective on transcending the presence of the creator in artistic works, advocating that creations should eclipse the personal traits of the artist. He uses the term ‘anonymity’ to describe the state where the presence of the author or composer is no longer necessary, and the work can exist independently and maintain its essence.[39]

2.4 Mallarmé’s influence in the XXth century

The Mallarméan poetics are reflected in the artistic innovations of the twentieth century, where the use of typographic design, dynamic spatialisation, inventive layouts, and varied typeface

[36] Barthes, Roland. *Le Bruissement De La Langue.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984, p. 62.
[37] Rancière, Jacques, and Gregory Elliott. *The Emancipated Spectator*. London: Verso, 2009, p. 17.
[38] Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 333.
[39] Quoted in Walden, Joshua S., and J. S. Walden. Musical Portraits: *The Composition of Identity in Contemporary and Experimental Music*. Oxford University Press, 2018. p. 39.

styles and sizes challenged and transformed traditional conventions of structure and punctuation. These elements later became the foundation for various pioneering art movements, extending across poetry, painting, dance, and music. Within this Mallarméan framework, free verse becomes a symbol of individual autonomy, a concept that resonates with the ethos of Italian Futurism.

Marinetti escalated the avant-garde challenge by advocating for the 'Destruction of Syntax'[40] in 1912. His manifesto *Futurist Words in Freedom* (1919), calls for disrupting traditional syntax, meter, and punctuation—the structural elements that connect subject, verb, and complement. He proposed eliminating all conjunctions and restricting verb usage to the infinitive form. Marinetti's radical stance reflects a broader critique of contemporary psychological norms, arguing for eradicating personal psychology in literature and replacing it with a "lyric obsession with matter".[41] Consequently, poetry transcends mere subjective expression constrained by conventional rules; it becomes a medium for exploring the dynamic relationship between humanity and the physical world.

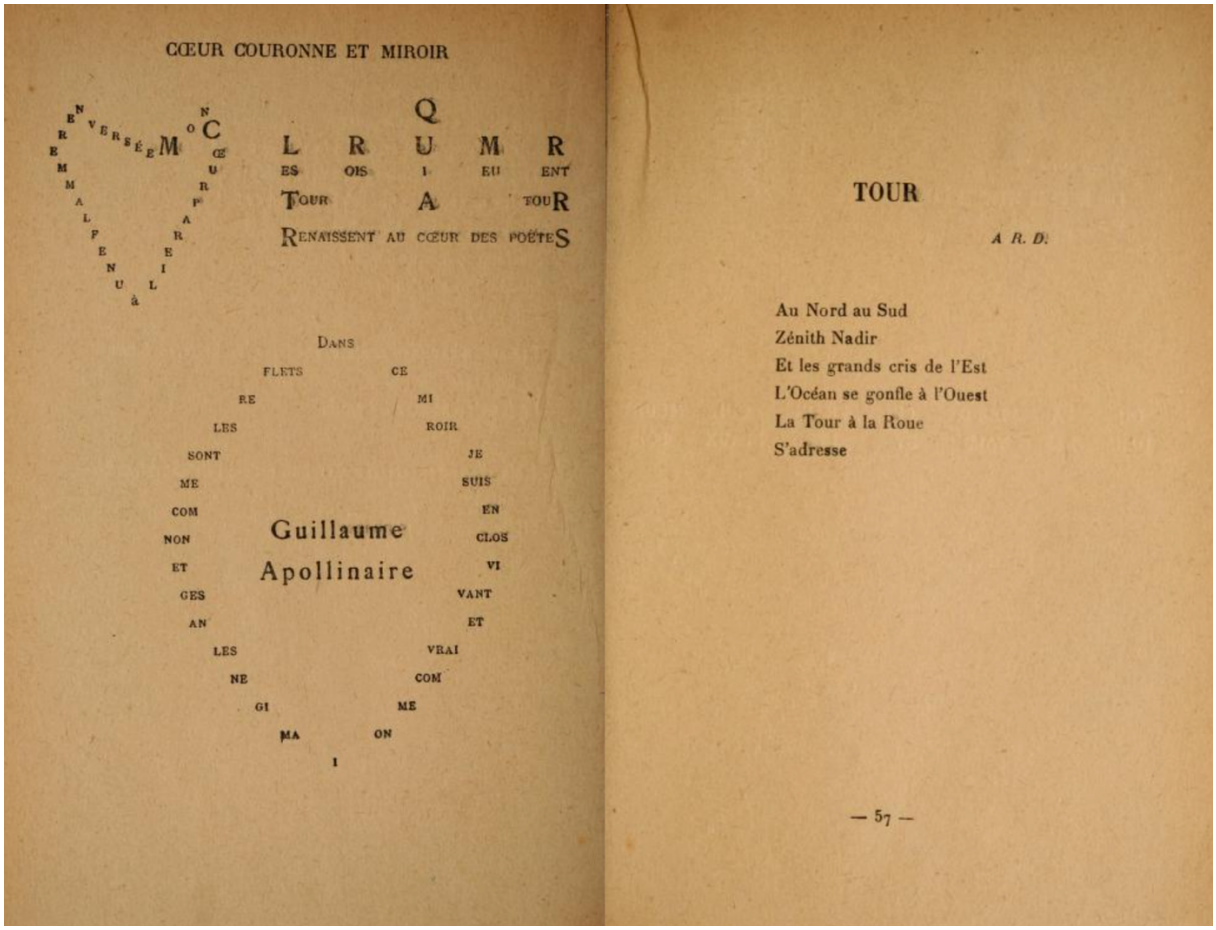
Mallarméan poetics have also significantly influenced the visual arts. In 1912, Picasso's *La bouteille de Suze* (Bottle of Suze) marked an evolution in Cubism by transitioning from depicting objects within a static space to creating distinct objects on the picture plane. This shift involved collage techniques that demanded a disruption of traditional visual narratives, similar to the interpretive breaks seen in poetry. In these collages, objects are connected through poetic analogies and verbal associations.

[40] Marinetti, F. T. *Manifeste Technique De La Littérature Futuriste.* Milan, 1912.
[41] Quoted in Butler, *Early Modernism*. p. 172.

Figure 2. Picasso, *La bouteille de Suze* (Bottle of Suze) 1912. Mildred Lane, Kemper Art Museum. https://www.kemperartmuseum.wustl.edu/collection/search-results/wu-3773-pablo-picasso-spanish-18811973-la-bouteille-de-suze-bottle-of-suze-1912

Apollinaire's *Calligrammes* (1918) provides another example of Mallarmé's influence, showcasing the visual arrangement of words on a page, epitomising the idealisation of free verse. The poet uses typography to sketch commonplace objects to explore the interplay between words, objects, and space (Figure 3). He emphasises that the psychological impact of these images does not hinge on their being composed of coherent language fragments.

Instead, their coherence derives from an ideographic logic prioritising spatial arrangement over grammatical logic, offering an experience wholly divergent from traditional narrative forms.


CŒUR COURONNE ET MIROIR

Q

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Et les grands cris de l'Est
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— 57 —

Figure 3. Apollinaire, Guillaume. *Calligrammes; poèmes de la paix et da la guerre (1913-1916),* (1918), Paris, p. 57.

Mallarmé's influence within French philosophy is noteworthy, touching thinkers from Sartre and Lacan to Derrida, Barthes, Rancière, and Kristeva, who all evolved their philosophies by engaging with Mallarmé's innovative concepts. This influence extended to music in the latter half of the twentieth century, with composers like Boulez and Cage drawing on Mallarmé's literary forays into concepts of chance, discontinuity, and open form. This transmedialisation between disciplines does not suggest a mere adaptation of poetry to musical settings but points to a deeper analogy of semiotic transformation. Maccalla observes in his study of "Pli selon Pli"

that it wasn't Mallarmé's attitude toward music that influenced Boulez. Instead, Mallarmé's broader vision concerning the essence and architecture of the work has significantly impacted musical innovation post-1945.[42]

2.5 Boulez's Third Piano Sonata

The French composer Pierre Boulez (1925-2016) nurtured a profound interest in literature and poetry, manifesting in his compositions inspired by the works of poets such as René Char, Henry Michaux, Mallarmé, and e. e. cummings. Throughout his career, he penned a series of critical essays that explored beyond the traditional musical adaptation of poetry. These essays explored the notion of 'transmutation' in poetry and music, looking at the transformative potential of poetic techniques on musical expression. Boulez had a particular fascination with the idea that the principles underlying poetry could invigorate and transform the language of music.

However, the French poetry of the end of the nineteenth century represented a touchstone in the development of Boulez's musical thought. He regarded Mallarmé as an innovator and a central figure in the evolution of European culture and often reflected on Mallarmé's use of language, poetic style and innovations:

> I think that poetry has never, neither in expression nor in structure, gone so far. So far, that after that even the surrealist movement, while it could find other paths, could never go further than Mallarmé in restructuring the French language. Therefore, Mallarmé remains a kind of a satiric poet because the form of his poems, the structure

[42] McCalla, James. *Between its Human Accessories: The Art of Stephane Mallarme and Pierre Boulez*. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 1976, p. ii.

> of his poems, is not easy to crack; it's very condensed and the syntax of the French language is completely reformed. Reformed in the literal sense of re-formed: formed again. I think that was what interested me at the outset; these poets' radical view of the French language which brought to me a radical view of musical language.[43]

Boulez's instrumental compositions, notably his Third Piano Sonata, exhibit the influence of Mallarmé's innovative approaches, marking a departure from conventional forms through their embrace of novel structural techniques. The Sonata explores indeterminacy, open form, and the visual distribution of notation, mirroring Mallarmé's "formal, visual, physical, and indeed decorative presentation of the poem."[44] This engagement with space, however, pertains not to sonic or metaphorical notions of musical space—such as pitch relationships, intervallic dimensions, or spatialised sound—but rather to the visual domain of the score itself. In his article "Sonate, que me veux-tu?" (Sonata, What Do You Want of Me? 1960), Boulez articulates his response to the visual layout of "Un Coup de Dés", which he saw as a revelation crucial to his musical ideology.

The Sonata's notational layout disrupts conventional reading and performance practices, requiring the performer to navigate a score that is structured in an open, non-linear format (Figure 4). The placement and spacing of notation directly influence interpretation, as performers must make decisions regarding the sequencing and execution of musical material. This indeterminate aspect, akin to Mallarmé's fragmentation and dispersion of text across the

[43] Loselle, Andrea. *Poetry and Music: A Roundtable Discussion with Pierre Boulez.* 1993, p. 5.
[44] Boulez, *Orientations,* p. 147.

page, shifts the performer's role from merely executing a fixed composition to actively engaging with the material in a dynamic, interpretative process.

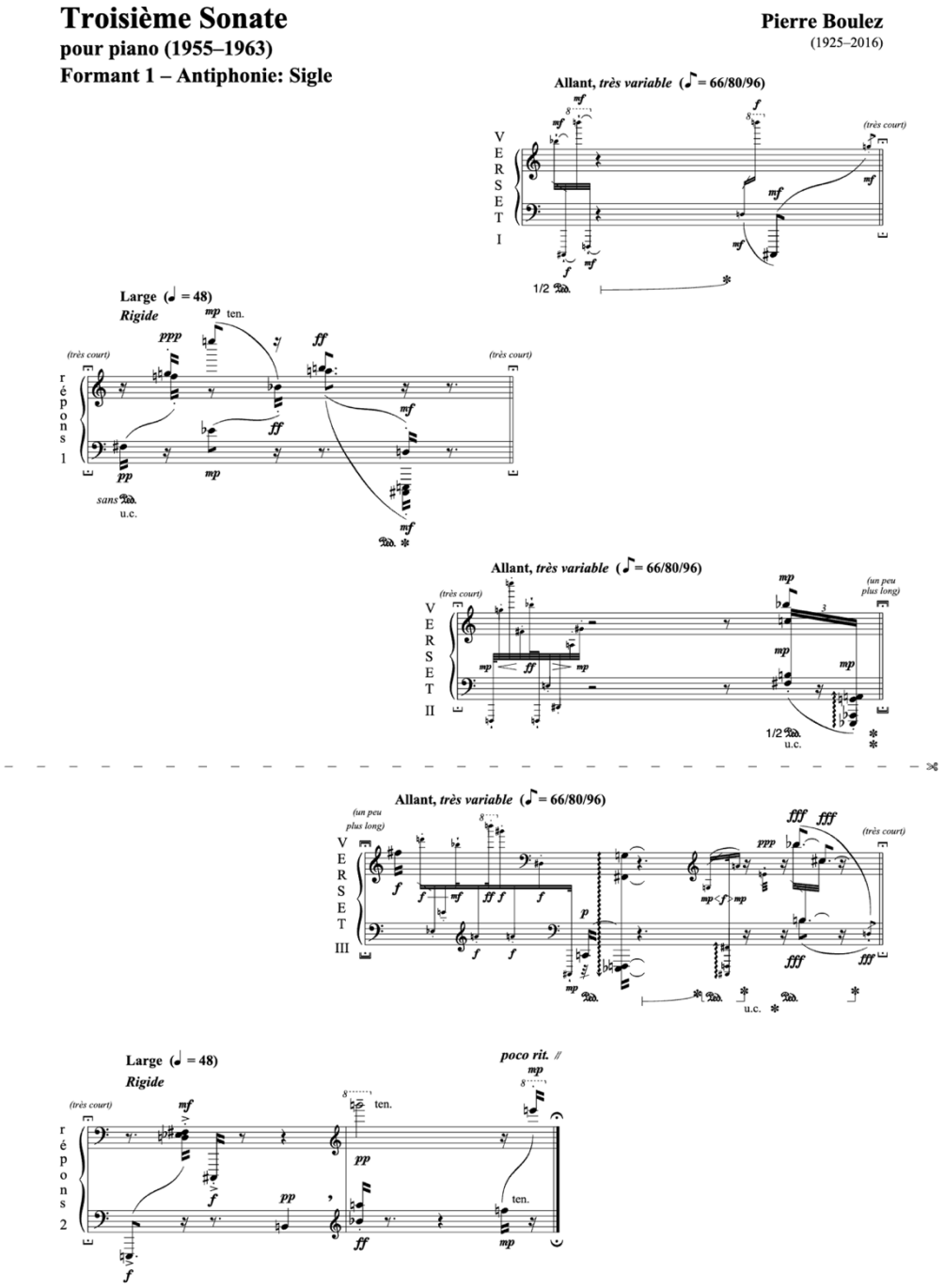


Figure 4. Boulez, "Antiphonie: Sigle", Third Piano Sonata. Universal Edition.

Boulez's Third Piano Sonata, composed between 1955 and 1963, is an instrumental piece that does not present any literal text but is based on literary and poetic concepts that have defined the piece at the most fundamental structural level. Composed of five *formants,* Boulez explains: "I find the concept of works as independent fragments increasingly alien, and I have a marked preference for large structural groups centred on a cluster of determinate possibilities."[45]

The Sonata underwent a prolonged and complex development, shaped by multiple conceptual influences that led to its continuous revision. Initially conceived in 1954 as part of a broader orchestral and pianistic project, the Sonata's development took a decisive turn following Boulez's discovery of Jacques Scherer's book on Mallarmé's "Livre" in 1957. In a letter to Stockhausen, Boulez expressed his astonishment at how Scherer's analysis aligned with his own evolving ideas, prompting a significant reworking of the *formants* and reinforcing the Sonata's open structure. This revelatory moment, however, was only the latest in a series of conceptual shifts:

> I sent you three days ago this extraordinary book on the Livre of Mallarmé. I found it on returning from Berlin and I was absolutely stupefied and taken back by the conclusions which overlap exactly with what I was in the process of finding in the Third Sonata. Everything is there. Crazy – and he thought of all that in 1890! This has pushed me ahead. It is a miraculous encounter. And I am even reworking my formants, for the idea of density haunts me. The form of the Sonata dictates itself. It will be of a duration which I no longer dare to foresee.[46]

[45] Ibid., p. 148.
[46] Quoted in O'Hagan, P. Sonate, *Que me Veux-tu*. "Pierre Boulez and the Piano: A Study in Style and Technique," 2017. p. 262.

The *formants*—"Antiphonie," "Trope," "Constellation," its retrograde counterpart "Constellation-Miroir," "Strophe," and "Séquence"—offer performers a variable order of execution, emphasising an indeterminate, non-linear conception of musical form: "Each of these *formants* can be used with a greater or lesser degree of determinacy according to the degree of liberty taken in relation to the overall form or local structure."[47] Boulez's compositional approach in this work draws inspiration from Mallarmé's *Livre*, an unfinished project that proposed an open and interactive method of poetic composition, as well as from James Joyce's syntactic complexity and structural fluidity. Boulez acknowledges this literary influence directly: "Literary affiliations played a more important part than purely music considerations. In fact, my present mode of thought derives from my reflections on literature rather than on music."[48]

A sketch transcribed from Boulez's 1957 letter to Stockhausen (Figure 5), serves as a conceptual outline of the Third Piano Sonata, highlighting the growing complexity of its structure. By this stage, Boulez had moved beyond the rigid, pre-determined frameworks of his earlier works, instead embracing a more fluid, open-ended form. This shift reflects his deepening engagement with Mallarmé's literary techniques, particularly the poet's emphasis on multiplicity and reader participation. Unlike compositions built on strict serial matrices, the Third Piano Sonata prioritises aesthetic flexibility, allowing the performer a degree of interpretative freedom.

[47] Ibid., p. 149.
[48] Ibid., p. 143.

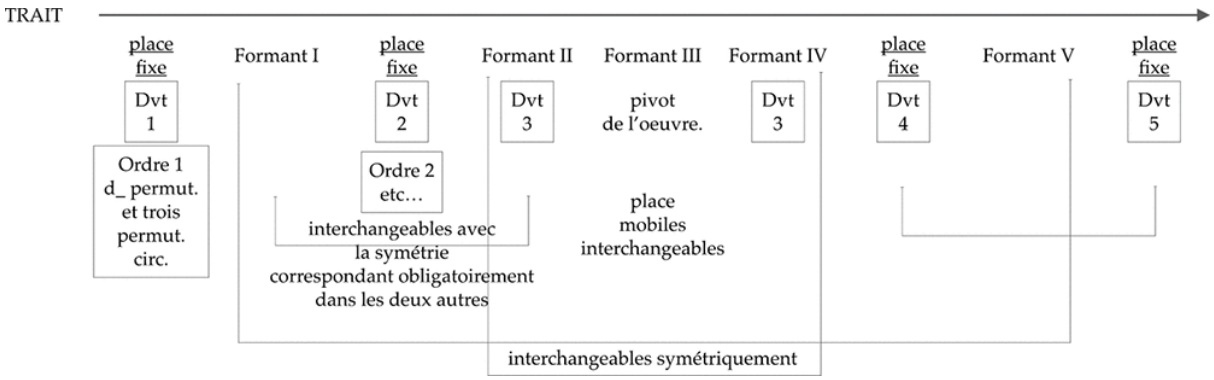


Figure 5. Boulez, Salem, Oxford University Press, 2023.

2.6 "Constellation mirror"

Boulez's "Constellation-Miroir" exemplifies his integration of Mallarméan techniques, particularly the notion of open form. As the retrograde counterpart to the unpublished "Constellation", the work is structured into six distinct sections—*Mélange, Points 3, Blocs II, Points 2, Blocs I,* and *Points 1*—each reinforcing a dynamic interplay between singularity and multiplicity. This organisation allows for a fluid and mobile approach to form, challenging the idea of linear progression. Boulez likens this structural mobility to navigating an intricate, unknown city, where the performer actively determines their pathway through a complex network of possibilities.

Boulez's commitment to open-form composition and controlled indeterminacy is not only embedded in the work's conceptual framework but is also materially reinforced through its typographical layout. The movement is distributed across nine large-format pages, upon which 58 segments of varying lengths are arranged in a nonlinear way. Boulez employs a colour-coded system to differentiate between two primary types of musical material: *Points*—isolated single-note figures—are printed in green (Figure 5), while *Blocs*—chordal or arpeggiated clusters—

are printed in red (Figure 6). The *Mélange* section, as its name suggests, integrates both elements. This visual differentiation is not merely a guide but an active component of the work's interpretative logic, reinforcing the inseparability of visual and musical perception. The general form of the Sonata is based on a symmetrical disposition in which "Constellation" and "Constellation-Miroir" play a dual role—it is both static and mobile, situating the work as its fulcrum or gravitational core.[49]

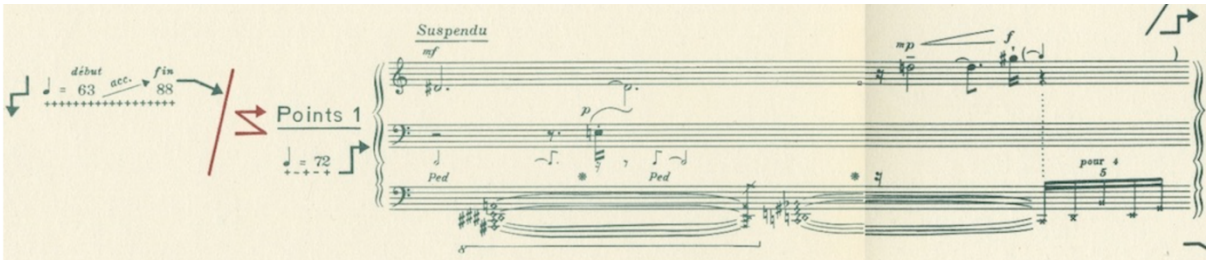


Figure 5. Boulez, "Constellation-Miroir", Third Piano Sonata, Universal Edition.

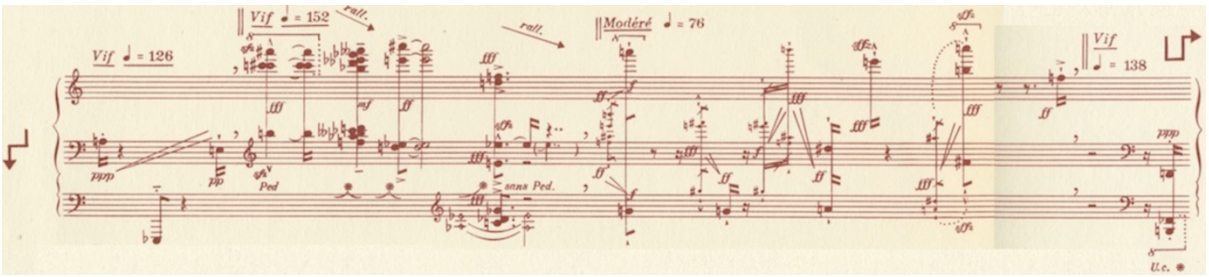


Figure 6. Boulez, "Constellation-Miroir", Third Piano Sonata, Universal Edition.

The pathways through the movement are delineated by signs placed before and after each segment, marking the available routes for progression (Figures 5 and 6). These navigational markers establish a dynamic and flexible structural framework, allowing the performer to chart a unique course through the work within pre-established constraints. In addition to these route

[49] Ibid., p. 151.

indicators, “Constellation-Miroir” features two types of tempo indications that further enhance its indeterminate nature. The first type consists of fixed tempo markings, typically found within the *Blocs* sections, which often dictate rapid and abrupt shifts in speed within a short span. The second type, more directly tied to the work’s mobile form, operates on an “if… then” principle. This layered system of conditional tempo ensures that interpretative choices influence not just the order of segments but also their expressive character. Through this interplay of structural mobility and conditional constraints, Boulez creates a work that is simultaneously fluid and rigorously organised. This can lead to adjustments in tempo—either gradual changes throughout or a complete shift to a new, consistent pace—as well as variations in dynamics.[50]

2.7 ‘Indeterminate choice’

Boulez, referencing Mallarmé’s notes on the *Livre* (posthumously published in 1957—a coincidental year to the premiere of his Third Sonata in Darmstadt), demonstrated an understanding of the poet’s syntactical innovations, foundational to evolving formal musical constructions. For Mallarmé, it was crucial to conceive a work that engages audiences with freedom of choice, fostering an interactive readership, as he did with his unfinished ‘Le Livre’. Boulez found it enlightening that his own compositional philosophies mirrored those found in Mallarmé’s posthumous notes:

> Here we find, in opposition to the concept of history as enslaved to succession in irreversible time, an intelligence capable of mastering a subject by reconstructing it in all directions, including the reverse of temporal succession. The same double

[50] Ibid., p. 151.

> movement can show, at one end, a book perfectly composed and at the other a collection of sheets that is essentially external, a simple album fact.[51]

Anne Trenkamp, in her analysis of "Constellation-Miroir"[52] highlights the significance of controlled chance in shaping the work's structure. She argues that Boulez does not embrace pure randomness but constructs a framework of possibilities within which the performer operates. This controlled indeterminacy allows for structural flexibility while maintaining coherence, ensuring that each performance is unique yet remains within a predefined set of parameters. This controlled system of choice aligns with Boulez's broader rejection of Cage's purely chance-driven methods.

Peter O'Hagan further contextualises Boulez's approach by examining the relationship between notation and performance,[53] arguing that "Constellation-Miroir" destabilises conventional performance practices by introducing an element of visual ambiguity. The interplay between *Points* and *Blocs* is not strictly determined but fluid, demanding interpretative engagement from the performer. This aligns with Boulez's broader aesthetic goal: to challenge fixed performance conventions and encourage an interactive relationship between the score and performer. Boulez articulates this in *Alea*,[54] where he critiques Cage's use of pure chance and instead advocates for a model of 'indeterminate choice'. The work's notation invites the performer into an active dialogue with the score, reinforcing Boulez's belief that musical structure should remain in constant flux without relinquishing compositional control. However,

[51] Ibid., p. 147.
[52] Trenkamp, Anne. "The Concept of 'Alea' in Boulez's 'Constellation-Miroir'." Music & letters 57.1, 1976.
[53] O'Hagan, Peter. *Pierre Boulez and the Piano: A Study in Style and Technique.* London, Routledge, 2017.
[54] Boulez, Pierre, David Noakes, and Paul Jacobs. "Alea." *Perspectives of new music* 3.1, 1964.

as O'Hagan rightly pointed out, Boulez's notion of mobility does not equate to an embrace of chance as an autonomous force; rather, he envisions a system in which the performer's choices remain informed and deliberate, functioning within a structured environment rather than an unrestricted, random field. This distinction is crucial in understanding Boulez's opposition to Cage's philosophy, as well as his desire to maintain a degree of authorial control over the direction of freedom within the performance.

The partially controlled freedom and the indeterminate procedures employed in the *formants*, particularly regarding the overall architecture of the piece, engender what Boulez refers to as 'indeterminate choice'. The element of indeterminacy in Boulez's compositions served as a vital component of his serial-derived music systems: it significantly broadened a fundamental compositional technique that possessed a distinct capacity for introspective expression.[55] In conversation with Celestin Deliège, Boulez explained a factor that led him to embrace mobility: "I wanted the performer confronted by a work to be able to find himself in a completely fresh situation every time he tackled it."[56] While Boulez allows for a range of interpretations concerning the *formants* during the performance, he retains control over the direction of that freedom and its limits:

> Personally, I have never been in favour of chance. I do not think that chance has much to contribute on its own account. So, my idea is not to change the work at every turn nor to make it look like a complete novelty, but rather to change the viewpoints and perspectives from which it is seen while leaving its basic meaning unaltered.[57]

[55] Whitney, Kathryn. *Determining Indeterminacy*. Ed. Professor Peter Franklin, DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 2000, p. 19.
[56] Deliège, Célestin. *Pierre Boulez: Conversations with Célestin Deliège*. London: Eulenburg, 1976, p. 81.
[57] Ibid., p. 182.

2.8 Conclusions

Boulez's Third Piano Sonata serves as an intersemiotic translation of Mallarmé's poetics into music, embodying what Boulez described as "a musical equivalent, both poetic and formal, to Mallarmé's poetry."[58] His artistic premise is a translation of the structural and semantic innovations of Mallarmé's poetry into a non-verbal medium. In doing so, Boulez explores the latent musicality within Mallarmé's work, engaging with its fragmentary syntax, spatialised text, and indeterminacy.:

> I am personally a great believer in such reciprocal influences between literature and music, not only by means of a direct and effective collaboration but quite as much by the transmutation of modes of thought that had hitherto seemed to be confined to one or another of these two means of expression.[59]

Boulez methodically excavates Mallarmé's literary work through his musical compositions, dissecting both the chosen poems and Mallarmé's critical essays. His approach seeks to unravel the obscurity of Mallarmé's complex language, interpreting the poems in a musical context.[60]

The parallels between Mallarmé's visual poetics and Boulez's notated score become evident in the typographical layout of "Constellation-Miroir." Just as Mallarmé's "Un Coup de Dés" disperses language across the page, disrupting linear reading and engaging the reader in an active process of meaning-making, Boulez's score challenges conventional musical syntax through its network of pathways, graphical differentiation between *points* and *blocs*, and

[58] Deliège, *Pierre Boulez*, p. 94.
[59] Boulez, *Orientations,* p. 195.
[60] Walden, *Musical Portraits,* p. 45.

structured yet flexible indications of tempo and sequence. The Third Piano Sonata demands a similar interpretative engagement from the performer, who must navigate the composition's structural ambiguities, making informed choices within a carefully constructed framework of controlled indeterminacy.

Boulez refines and controls indeterminacy, ensuring that aleatoric procedures reinforce rather than weaken structural integrity. "Constellation-Miroir" thus exemplifies Boulez's broader aesthetic approach: a music of dynamic yet controlled fluidity, where indeterminacy functions as an alternative mode of organisation rather than an absence of structure.

Boulez's engagement with Mallarmé extends beyond aesthetic parallels; it constitutes a methodological transposition that reconstructs the poet's principles in a new medium. His approach does not merely interpret Mallarmé's texts through music but instead generates a musical experience that mirrors the poet's structural logic. In doing so, Boulez not only reimagines musical form but also challenges the very principles by which it is perceived and constructed.

3

Sensemayá: intersemiotic translation in a song without words

Far from being a sterile similarity between two languages that have died out, translation is, of all modes, precisely the one called upon to mark the after-ripening of the alien word, and the birth pangs of its own.
The Translator's Task, Walter Benjamin.

This chapter examines *Sensemayá* (1938) by Silvestre Revueltas and its relationship to Nicolás Guillén's poem, "Sensemayá: Un canto para matar una culebra" (1934). Building on the discussion of intersemiotic translation in the previous chapter, this analysis considers how *Sensemayá* engages in a process of translation in which rhythm, orchestration, and melodic contour reinterpret the poem's linguistic and performative dimensions within a non-verbal medium.[61] While Boulez's engagement with Mallarmé in "Constellation-Miroir" and the Third Piano Sonata revolved around structural and spatial concerns, Revueltas's treatment of Guillén's poem foregrounds a different approach of intersemiotic transformation—one rooted in prosody. This chapter also examines how *Sensemayá* integrates Afro-Cuban cultural elements, particularly the role of rhythm in evoking the poem's ritualistic invocation.

Walter Benjamin's notion of translation as a process that captures the deeper 'intention' of the original text provides a useful framework for understanding *Sensemayá*.[62] In this way,

[61] Campbell, M., and Ricarda V. *Translating Across Sensory and Linguistic Borders: Intersemiotic Journeys between Media*. 1st ed. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019.
[62] Benjamin, Walter. "The Task of the Translator", *Selected Writings*. Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1923.

Sensemayá does not merely *represent* Guillén's poem in musical form; it actively reconfigures its affective and performative dimensions, allowing verbal and musical systems to intersect in a dynamic way. This chapter, therefore, aims to synthesise existing analytical perspectives on *Sensemayá* while offering a new interpretative framework that accounts for its intersemiotic translatability. By tracing how Revueltas translates Guillén's poem into a distinct semiotic code—one that retains its ritualistic and prosodic essence while reshaping its mode of expression.

3.1 Introduction

Written for orchestra, the piece does not present any literal text but represents the translation of the literary and poetic constructions that define the piece at the most fundamental and structural level. The connection between music and poem is evident in the insistent, incantatory rhythms and the orchestration, which mirrors the poem's ritualistic invocation and percussive chant-like repetitions. Specifically, the poem's prosodic elements—its rhythmic stress patterns and phrasing—serve as a foundation of the musical motifs and overarching rhythmic structures. The score will be analysed regarding its relationship to the poem and other relevant aspects of the musical construction as a direct response to the text. Recognising the shared political convictions of Revueltas and Guillén illuminates their works' thematic and stylistic coherences. Consequently, the socio-political undercurrents and the artists' biographical context through which this study will examine the confluence of their artistic expressions.

3.2 Prosody as a resource in composition

The study of music in relation to a verbal composition can be approached through linguistic methods and articulated by analogous terms and concepts. Despite music and language constituting two different semiotic systems, they are characterised by their parallel graphic and acoustic nature. A musical and a verbal composition are constructed from minimal units; in this regard, both discourses can be articulated, segmentable or continuous in their real-time unfolding.[63] Music and spoken language both consist of complex auditory signals that are organised in line with an underlying structure.[64] Adorno reflects on the similarities of music and language:

> Music resembles language in the sense that it is a temporal sequence of articulated sounds which are more than just sounds. They say something, often something human. The better the music, the more forcefully they say it. The succession of sounds is like logic: it can be right or wrong. But what has been said cannot be detached from the music.[65]

Prosody is the study of measurable acoustic structures in language and poetry.[66] It concerns pitch or intonation, duration, stress, and juncture. In Ancient Greek, prosody was fundamental in the study of metre, poetry, and music.[67] In their seminal work *A Generative Theory of Tonal*

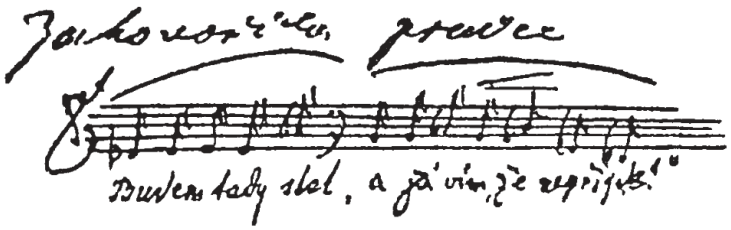
[63] Agawu, Kofi. *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music*. Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 24.
[64] Heffner and Slevc. "Prosodic Structure as a Parallel to Musical Structure", *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 6, 2015, p. 1962.
[65] Adorno, Theodor W. "Music and Culture: Music, Language, and Composition", *The Musical Quarterly,* vol. 77, no. 3, 1993, p. 401.
[66] Winslow, R., and R. Winslow. *Prosody*. 4th ed. Princeton University Press, 2012.
[67] Howatson, M. C. *Pro'sody*. 3rd ed. Oxford University Press, 2011.

Music (1983), Lerdahl and Jackendoff point out the similarities between music and prosody lie mainly in their structure: rhythms, intonation, and stress. Another definition given by the field of linguistics concerns the study of the suprasegmental phonetic features of language.[68] Burgos's exhaustive study, "Language Prosody as a Resource in Musical Composition",[69] explores the notion of prosody and its relationship to musical composition. As there are many analogies between prosodic elements of language and music, prosody is the closest element of language to musical sound (as opposed to semantic or even pragmatic meaning).

Some composers have relied on prosodic elements of speech as a relevant resource in music composition. One of the most representative examples is Janáček's 'speech melodies.' Over thirty years, Leoš Janáček (1854-1928) systematically recorded people talking with the aim of analysing and notating down the melodic inflexions in the Czech language. The composer was fascinated with trying to understand a speaker's emotional states via their speech. Whenever he notated a speech melody, he would annotate it with a short description of the intention behind the words. The 'speech melodies', developed from 1897, became a crucial tool in his compositional repertoire. They are clearly reflected in his opera *Jenufa* (1903). Figure 1 is an example of his annotated speech melodies. We can notice the melodic contour and the syllabic structure matching the rhythms.

[68] Winslow, *Prosody, 2012.*
[69] Martinez Burgos, M. *Language Prosody as a Resource in Musical Composition.* PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 2020.

(She said curtly)



Budem tady stát, a já vím, že nepřijde!

(We're going to stand here, and I know that he won't come!)

Figure 1. *Budem tady stat, a já vím, ze nepreijde!* (Christiansen, 2004, p. 14).

The American composer Frederic Rzewski (1938-2021) brought a different approach. He applied some prosodic structures as another fitting analogy to the compositional process. His piece, *El pueblo unido jamás será vencido* (The people united will never be defeated, 1975), is a virtuosic set of 36 solo-piano variations based on a Chilean protest song. Rzewski made a transposition of metre, rhythm, and pitch from the verbal system of the Spanish language to music. The hour-long piece represents the mass mobilisation of working-class people of the 70s in Chile through the idea of repetition.[70]

Speakings (2008), an orchestral piece by Jonathan Harvey (1939-2012), is another innovative example. The piece's primary aim was to 'make an orchestra speak'.[71] The British composer made an inventive and unusual translation of the spoken language. He used a computer-assisted composition program to provide musical material for instrumental writing. The

[70] Rzewski, Frederic. Nonsequiturs: Writings and Lectures on Improvisation, Composition, and Interpretation, 1965-1994. Köln, Germany: MusikTexte, 2007.
[71] Nouno et al. *Making an Orchestra Speak,* Ircam-Centre Pompidou, 2009.

principle of 'shape vocoding' captures parallelisms from speech complexities as the point of departure of the piece. This is expanded upon in chapter 4.

Similarly, Silvestre Revueltas creates a musical setting from verbal utterances through an intuitive approach. In his orchestral piece *Esquinas* (1931), Revueltas constitutes a national identity by representing the cries of Mexican street vendors and thus portraying the urban landscape. He extracts linguistic units and prosodic elements from these street calls, embedding their repetitive patterns into a modernist musical language that reflects the Mexican zeitgeist of the time.[72]

3.3 Silvestre Revueltas: biographical background

As previously mentioned, in order to closely analyse the relationship and particularities between the poem "Sensemayá" and the orchestral piece *Sensemayá,* it is crucial to mention Revueltas and Guillén's social-historical context. Their alignment on the political and social views respective to Mexico and Cuba profoundly influenced their artistic values.

Silvestre Revueltas was born in Durango, Mexico on December 31, 1899. He studied violin and composition at the National Conservatory of Music in Mexico City (1913-16). He continued his studies in Texas and Chicago in the United States (1916–23). In 1930, he began to compose large-scale works for orchestra, among *Esquinas* (1930), *Ventanas* (1930), and *Colorines* (1930). Deeply moved by the Republican cause, Revueltas travelled to Spain in 1937, where he was involved in social causes and conducted some of his orchestral pieces. Revueltas died in

[72] Kolb, Roberto, *Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940): Catalogo de sus Obras*. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, 1998, p. 81-83.

1940 from a case of pneumonia linked to his severe alcoholism. During the last part of his life (1929-2940), he wrote approximately 50 original works that constitute the central part of his oeuvre.[73]

For much of the 20th century, Revueltas's music was narrowly framed within Mexican nationalism, often interpreted as a reflection of folkloric traditions. However, some scholars have challenged this view, highlighting his engagement with modernist currents.[75] This perspective is particularly relevant to *Sensemayá*, which, while drawing on Afro-Cuban cultural elements, also reflects modernist techniques.[76]

3.4 Revueltas and Guillén: friendship and politics

There are multiple studies on the political and social dimensions of Revueltas's oeuvre and his ethical commitments. Towards the latter part of his life, Revueltas dedicated his talent and creativity to social justice, asserting that: "The artist of his time, of his hour, stands with the longings and the struggle of the working class"[78] He was affiliated to LEAR (La Liga de Escritores

[73] Kolb, R. *Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940): Catalogo de sus Obras*.

[75] Garland, Peter, *In Search of Silvestre Revueltas: Essays* 1978-1990 (Santa Fe, NM: Soundings Press, 1991); and *Silvestre Revueltas* (México, D.F.: Editorial Patria, 1994). Yolanda Moreno Rivas, *Rostros del nacionalismo en la música mexicana: un ensayo de interpretación* (México, D.F.: UNAM, Escuela Nacional de Música, 1989). Julio Estrada, *Silvestre Revueltas: totalidad desarmada,* Revista del Instituto Superior de Música, de la Universidad Nacional de Litoral no. 7 (Junio 2000): 11-33; and Canto roto: Silvestre Revueltas (México, D.F.: Fondo de Cultura Económica/UNAM/Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2012). Roberto Kolb Neuhaus, "Dos por medio y cuatro por un real, mirando que el tiempo está muy fatal: el pregón en la semiosis musical de Silvestre Revueltas," *Tópicos del Seminario* no. 19 (Enero-Junio 2008): 131-156; and *Contracanto: una perspectiva semiótica de la obra temprana de Silvestre Revueltas* (México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2012), among other writings. Eduardo Contreras Soto, *Silvestre Revueltas Baile Duelo* y Son (México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2003).

[76] Madrid, Alejandro. "¿Influencias o elementos de retórica?: Aspectos de centricidad en la obra de Silvestre Revueltas". *Heterofonía*, no. 122, CENIDIM, 2000, p. 19.

y Artistas Revolucionarios or the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists), a group of pacifist militant artists and intellectuals. LEAR aimed to make the arts accessible to the working class in Mexico, using literature, painting, music, theatre, and other forms of artistic expression as tools in the fight for democracy.[79]

Revueltas served as president of the organisation from May 1936 to February 1937, when the Spanish Civil War broke out. In response to which, LEAR actively supported the Republicans and organised a delegation that travelled to Spain in solidarity.[80] In January 1937, Revueltas invited the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén to a congress for artists and writers hosted by LEAR in Mexico City. During his visit, the poet recited some of his poems at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. During the closing ceremony, he delivered a speech condemning the oppression of the Cuban people under U.S. policies. It thus became clear that the two artists shared similar political ideals and a vision of what an artist should stand for:

> A logical consequence of the political leanings of Silvestre Revueltas and Nicolás Guillén was a close identification with the people and with their culture, which, in turn, translated into the assimilation of popular culture into their artistic production.[81]

Consequently, Guillén remained in the country for three months during which he wrote, published, and participated in literary and social gatherings. According to Revueltas' daughter Eugenia, her father heard Guillén recite "Sensemayá" and other poems for the first time in one

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[78] Quoted in Gallardo-Diaz, Elsy. *Afro-Caribbean Stylistic Elements as Topics in the Music of Silvestre Revueltas: Conveying a Political Discourse in "Caminando", "no Sé Por Qué Piensas Tú", and "Sensemayá",* 2016, p. 23.

[79] Revueltas, Eugenia. *La Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios y Silvestre Revueltas,* in *Diálogo de Resplandores: Carlos Chávez y Silvestre Revueltas,* ed. Yael Bitrán and Ricardo Miranda, México, D.F.: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 2002, p. 176.

[80] Zambrano, Helga. "Reimagining the Poetic and Musical Translation of Sensemayá", *Ethnomusicology Review,* vol. 19, 2014, p. 3.

[81] Gallardo-Diaz, *Afro-Caribbean Stylistic Elements,* p. 31.

of those *tertulias*. Hearing the poem directly from the author allowed Revueltas to grasp the poem's rhythmic structure and stresses.[82] "Revueltas did not miss a word and was attentive to his reading".[83] Their friendship strengthened not only through their shared political ideals but their artistic kinship.

Guillén dedicated his poem *Fusilamiento* from the collection *Cantos para soldados y sones para turistas* (1937), to Revueltas. In turn, Revueltas set three poems by the poet to music. Two of them, *No sé por qué piensas tú, soldado*, and *Caminando*, were adapted as songs. The third, *Sensemayá*, became an intrumental piece based on Guillén's collection *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934). Originally composed for a small ensemble in 1937, *Sensemayá* was later expanded into an orchestral version.[84]

Guillén integrates political content into his writing, both prose and poetry. The poem *Caña* (Sugar cane) from the collection *The Songoro Cosongo* (1931) portrays the black man as a victim of Yankee imperialism within a system of economic and racial exploitation. *La cancion del bongo* (The song of the bongo drum) challenges the fallacy of racial purity and segregation.[85] The collections *Cantos para soldados y sones para turistas* and *West Indies Ltd.* condemn racial discrimination. In his dissertation, Gallardo-Diaz argues that the oppression and exploitation of Cuban minorities underpins Guillen's oeuvre:

[82] Crumrine, Austin T. *An Analysis of the use of Tuba in Selected Works by Silvestre Revueltas*, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses, 2020.
[83] Quoted in Crumrine, *An Analysis of the use of Tuba,* p. 25.
[84] Hoag, Charles K. "Sensemayá: A Chant for Killing a Snake*", Latin American Music Review,* vol. 8, no. 2, 1987, p. 173.
[85] Ellis, Keith. "Caribbean Identity and Integration in the Work of Nicolas Guillén"*, Caribbean Quarterly,* vol.51, no. 1, 2005, p. 1.

> His poems denounce political issues such as poverty, racial discrimination, repression, social inequality, systematic exploitation, and political and social corruption. However, the central theme of Guillén's oeuvre was anti-imperialism, as the Cuban dictatorship and the foreign capitalists imposed an unbearable "burden of oppression and exploitation [on] all ethnic groups in the lower strata of the society," particularly on blacks.[86]

The set of poems *West Indies Ltd.* was published in Cuba in 1934, shortly after the fall of the Machado regime by the coup d'état led by the pro-American Batista. In this work, Guillén expresses his social and political concerns for other Caribbean countries, advocating for political unification.[87] The original edition's cover features a caricature of a black man laboring in the sugar cane harvest *Zafra* (Figure 2).

[86] Gallardo-Diaz, *Afro-Caribbean Stylistic Elements*, p. 12.
[87] Keith, "Caribbean Identity", p. 2.

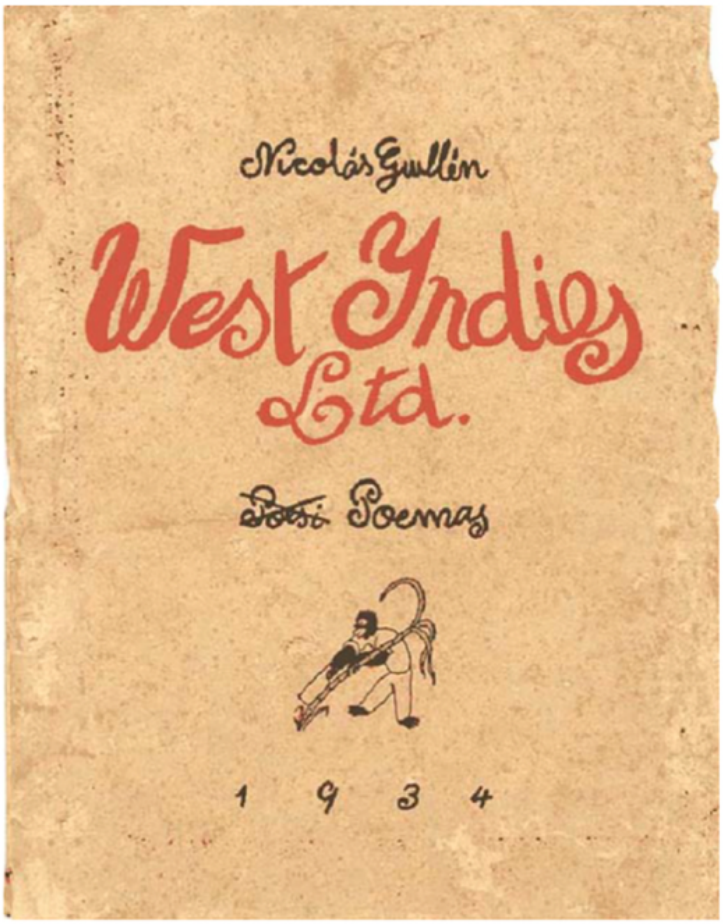

Figure 2. Cover of the *West Indies, Ltd.* (1934).

3.5 Afro-Caribbean stylistic elements in Guillén and Revueltas

Afro-Caribbean stylistic elements can be found in Revueltas' music, particularly in the three pieces based on Guillén's poems composed in 1937: *Sensemayá, Caminando,* and *No sé que piensas tú.* The first version of *Sensemayá*, written for a chamber ensemble, is dedicated to the poet. Revueltas' incorporation of Afro-Caribbean elements was driven primarily by political motivations; the stylistic features in these pieces reference specific social, cultural, and political contexts.[89] Some of these stylistic elements are the Afro-Cuban religious rituals and music, and

[89] Ibid., p. X.

the Afro-Caribbean popular music such as the *Rumba* and Cuban *Son,*[90] a genre that most influenced Guillén's poetry.[91]

The word *sensemayá* combines *Sensa* (providence) and *Yemaya* (Afro-Cuban goddess of the seas and queen mother of earth).[92] The poem "Sensemayá, Canto para matar una culebra" (A chant for killing a snake) is inspired by the celebration of the *Día de Reyes,* an African ritual procession commemorating the liberation of enslaved Cubans. It depicts an Afro-Caribbean ritual snake killing, a practice of the Cuban Mayombe sect that later became a popular pantomime in Havana's black carnival during the nineteenth century.

In "Sensemayá", Guillén alternates two types of stanzas. The first one is the *estribillo* "Mayombe-bombe-mayombé presented four times and alternates with three *canto* or narrative stanzas. The word *Mayombe* is of Bantu origin and refers to the name of a region on the western coast of Africa. It is also the name of an Afro-Cuban sect called *Palo Mayombe,* which means black magic. The *estribillo* serves as a refrain of a repetitive African-ritualistic chant and is set into music as a bass ostinato of a 7/8 measure, with the accent in the final beat (the seventh). In the piece, this repetitive structure resembles a trance-induced element of African ritual music.[95]

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[90] *Son* is a syncretic Cuban song genre, representing a fusion of African and Hispanic elements, from which *salsa* developed. (Grove Music Online).

[91] *Rumba* is a popular recreational dance of Afro-Cuban origin. It originated in the dances of the Kongo cult; the *columbia* and *guaguancó* were mimetic dances, danced with extensive hip and shoulder movements and improvised acrobatics, and the *rumba yambú* and *rumba de tiempó España* were imitations of old people and housewives. In Cuba the rumba is defined by its accompaniment, most often comprising *conga*, *tumbadora*, *quinto* or *salidor* drums and claves and *palitos* or *cáscara* (stick-beaten resonant object). (William Gradante and Deane L. Root, Grove Music Online).

[92] Zambrano, *Reimagining the Poetic and Musical Translation of Sensemayá*, p. 3.

[95] Gallardo-Díaz, *Afro-Caribbean Stylistic Elements,* p. 50.

3.6 Analysis: introduction

In the previous section, we discussed the convergence between Guillén's and Revueltas' political ideologies and historical background that has shaped their common artistic value. This section integrates the analytical facets that constitute the poem's intersemiotic translation to reveal Revueltas' methodology. The text is positioned into a different semiotic system through the transformative process, both spatial and temporal. Perteghella et al explore the potential of intersemiotic practices of poetry translation to a distinct artistic media:

> The translational process of engaging creatively with the materiality of the text—and the voice of its producer—is illustrated here through exploring how poetry translation in particular can become an artistic practice engaging with different media at once and how it can conceptualise the intersemioticity which is present in our contemporary modes of communication and representation.[96]

[96] Perteghella, Manuela, Ricarda Vidal, and Madeleine Campbell. "The Case of the Poem in Motion: Translation, Movement and the Poetic Landscape." Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018, p. 64.

***Sensemayá**, Canto para matar a una culebra.*	***Sensemayá**, Chant to kill a snake*
¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé!	¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé!
La culebra tiene los ojos de vidrio; la culebra viene y se enreda en un palo; con sus ojos de vidrio, en un palo, con sus ojos de vidrio.	The snake has eyes of glass; The snake comes and curls around a stick; with its eyes of glass, around a stick, with its eyes of glass.
La culebra camina sin patas; la culebra se esconde en la yerba; caminando se esconde en la yerba, caminando sin patas.	The snake walks without feet; The snake comes and hides in the grass; walking it hides in the grass, walking with no feet.
¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé!	¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé!
Tú le das con el hacha y se muere: ¡dale ya! ¡No le des con el pie, que te muerde, no le des con el pie, que se va!	You hit it with the axe, and it dies: hit it now! Do not kick it with the foot, it will bite you, Do not hit it with the foot, it will flee!
Sensemayá, la culebra, sensemayá.	Sensemayá, the snake, sensemayá.
Sensemayá, con sus ojos, sensemayá.	Sensemayá, with its eyes, sensemayá.
Sensemayá, con su lengua, sensemayá.	Sensemayá, with its tongue, sensemayá.
Sensemayá, con su boca, sensemayá.	Sensemayá, with its mouth, sensemayá . . .
La culebra muerta no puede comer, la culebra muerta no puede silbar, no puede caminar, no puede correr. La culebra muerta no puede mirar, la culebra muerta no puede beber, no puede respirar no puede morder.	The dead snake cannot eat; the dead snake cannot hiss; it cannot walk, it cannot run. The dead snake cannot see; the dead snake cannot drink; it cannot breathe, it cannot bite.
¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! *Sensemayá, la culebra…* ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! *Sensemayá, no se mueve…* ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! *Sensemayá, la culebra…* ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! *Sensemayá, se murió.*	Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! Sensemayá, the snake . . . Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! Sensemayá, doesn't move. . . Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! Sensemayá, the snake . . . Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! Sensemayá it died![1]

Table 1. "Sensemayá" poem and the English translation. Zohn-Muldoon, p. 139.

Revueltas explores the performative potential of the text through semantic, syntactic, and phonetic perspectives. Considering the piece as a translation from the verbal system into music, an analytical framework must be grounded in linguistic constructs such as prosodic intonation, syllabic rhythm, and meter. From this approach, I aim to reconfigure the cross-comparative critical analysis by incorporating insights from various studies.[97]

3.7 Analysis: an intersemiotic translation of *Sensemayá*

Initially scored for chamber orchestra on May 11, 1937,[98] *Sensemayá* is one of the Revueltas' most well-known pieces. The instrumentation comprises piccolo, E-flat clarinet, B-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, two trumpets in C, trombone, xylophone, tom-tom, suspended cymbal, *maracas, güiro, claves,* violins and double bass. Examination of the original manuscript—available in the digital library Silvestre Revueltas[99]—reveals a meticulous association of specific verses with the music. Thus, the rediscovery and premiere of *Sensemayá's* chamber version in 1995 allowed scholars to conduct comparative studies with the final better-known orchestral version.

In *Sensemayá's* original manuscript, textual fragments are inscribed underneath the music in two distinct sections. The first corresponds to the poem's first stanza or *estribillo, "¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé!"* while the second coincides with the fourth stanza*, "La Culebra tiene los*

[97] See the Works of Charles Hoag (1987), Peter Garland (1991), Ricardo Zohn-Muldoon (1997), Roberto Kolb (1998), Helga Zambrano (2014) and Gallardo-Díaz (2016).
[98] Kolb, R. *Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940): Catálogo de sus Obras*. .
[99] Departamento Editorial, Facultad de Música (FaM), *SENSEMAYÁ. Autógrafo*, objeto digital: Biblioteca Digital Silvestre Revueltas (BDREV). En *Portal de datos abiertos UNAM* (online), México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. Available in: http://datosabiertos.unam.mx/FaM:BDREV:MU_53_AUTOGRAFO

ojos de vidrio" (Figures 4 and 5). Revueltas employed a similar approach in his piece *Esquinas* (1931), where he subtracted the prosodic elements from the vocal calls of the street vendors and integrated them into the non-verbal musical discourse. Scholars such as Mayer-Serra and Hoag have examined the relationship between the text's rhythmic and phonetic qualities and its musical setting.[100]

Hoag published one of the first critical studies of *Sensemayá*. He discusses the melody, rhythm and harmonic development in relation to the poem. He emphasises the influence of Stravinsky in Revueltas' music, particularly the ostinatos that characterise works such as *Sensemayá* and *Caminos*, paralleling those in *The Rite of Spring*. Hoag interprets the 7/8 bass ostinato, with its accent on the seventh beat, as a transformation of the octosyllabic *estribillo* "Mayombe-bombe-mayombé" (Figure 3).[101]

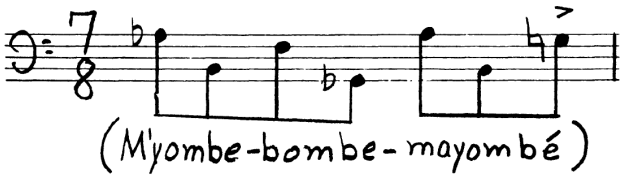

Figure 3. *Sensemayá* ostinato, Hoag, 1987.

Garland, unlike Hoag, had access to the original manuscript, where he identified two instances in which Revueltas annotated textual fragments alongside corresponding musical phrases (Figures 4 and 5). This discovery led him to propose that the piece was composed in structural

[100] Suggested in their works *Silvestre Revueltas and Musical Nationalism in Mexico* and *Sensemayá: A Chant for Killing a Snake.*
[101] Hoag, Charles K. "Sensemayá: A Chant for Killing a Snake", p. 174.

parallelism with the poem, suggesting that the music aligns more closely with the poem than previously thought.

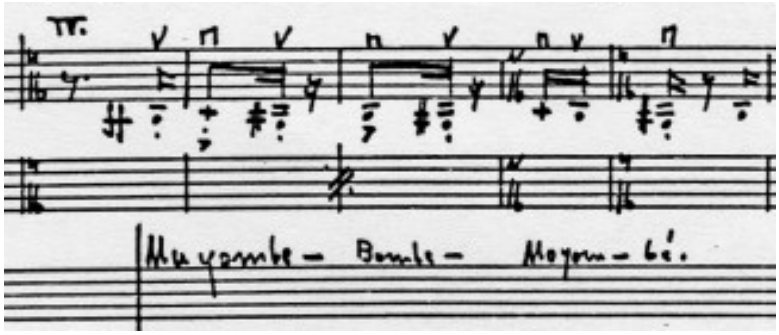

Figure 4. The *Estribillo* is annotated on the manuscript of *Sensemayá*, m. 97-100. Gallardo-Díaz, 2016.

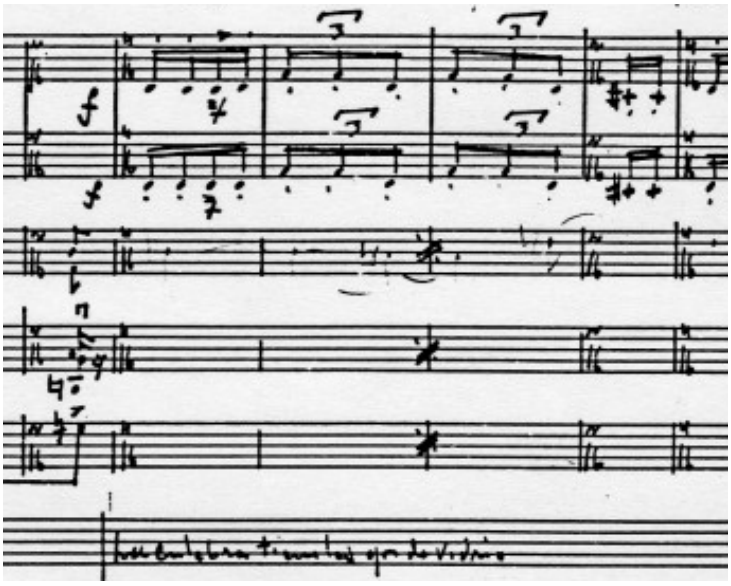

Figure 5. The fourth verse is annotated on the manuscript of *Sensemayá*, m. 113-116. “La culebra tiene ojos de vidrio”. Gallardo-Díaz, 2016.

Kolb and González concur with previous scholars[102] on how Sensemayá closely follows the syntactic structure of Guillén's poem. They demonstrated that, although Revueltas explicitly notates only the poem's opening lines in the manuscript, some other sections correspond to the poem's verses and musical structure.[103] They also argue that Revueltas' composition functions as an intersemiotic translation of Guillén's poem, preserving its rhythmic and thematic essence while integrating additional layers of musical representation, including mythological and ritualistic elements. These elements are evident in the piece's opening ostinato—a half-tone trill played by the bass clarinet and percussion. Here, the snake is represented kinaesthetically through a *legatissimo* articulation, evoking the serpentine, undulating motion of the reptile. This oscillation is a recurring element throughout the piece:

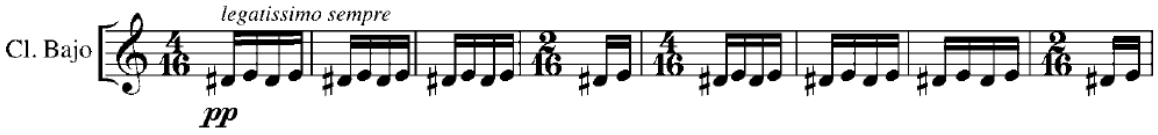

Figure 6. Music depiction of the snake, represented by the bass clarinet. Kolb, Gonzalez 2011, p. 292.

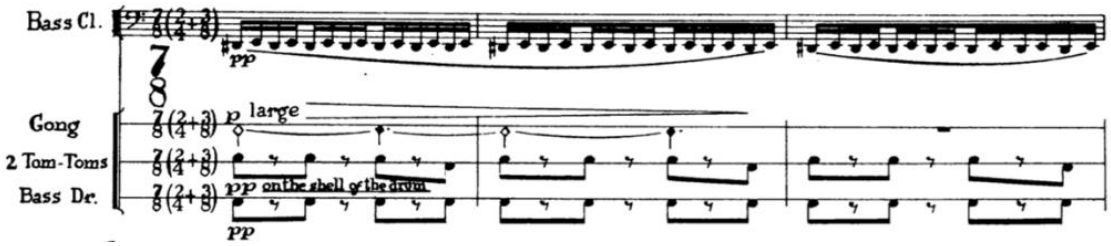

Figure 7. *Sensemayá*, m 1-3.

[102] Garland (1994) and Zohn (1998).
[103] Kolb, Roberto, and Gonzalez Aktories. *Sensemayá, entre rito, palabra y sonido.* México: Bonilla Artigas y UNAM, 2011, p. 280-301.

Zohn-Muldoon provides a detailed analysis of the musical setting of Guillén's poem, recognising Revueltas's method of embedding the text within the musical structure to shape thematic development. He meticulously establishes a syllable-to-note correspondence, annotating the text beneath the music. Building on Garland's work, Zohn-Muldoon frames the piece as a programmatic embodiment of the poem. He argues that this integration of poetic structure into music form is part of what he calls the "wonderful cycle of transliteration."[104]

However, his use of the term *transliteration*—which traditionally refers to converting one writing system into another—needs further consideration. While Zohn-Muldoon's approach captures the structural parallels between text and music, it risks reducing Revueltas's composition to a mere transfer rather than an interpretive transformation.[105] Expanding on this idea, Jakobson's framework of *intersemiotic translation*—the transposition of different sign systems—offers a more nuanced perspective. Rather than a transliteration, *Sensemayá* can be seen as an intersemiotic translation that reinterprets the poem's rhythmic and thematic essence through the distinct expressive possibilities of music.

In the following figure, the author sets the correspondence between the prosodic accents of the poem—indicated in parentheses—from the *estribillo* and the music counterparts:

[104] Zohn-Muldoon. "The Song of the Snake: Silvestre Revueltas *Sensemayá*", *Latin American Music Review,* vol. 19, no. 2, 1998, p. 155.
[105] Zambrano, *Reimagining the Poetic and Musical Translation of Sensemayá*, p. 2.

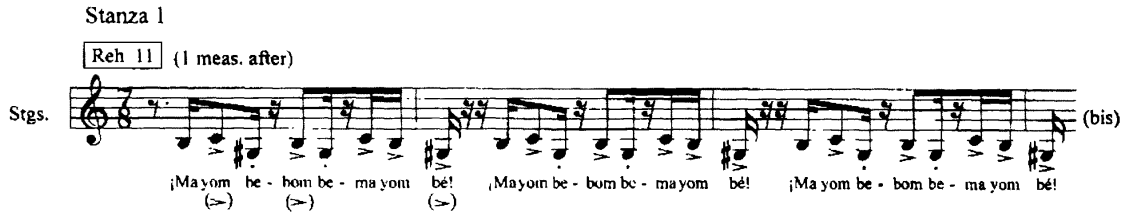

Figure 7. The *estribillo* ¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé! m.46-49. Zohn-Muldoon, p. 136.

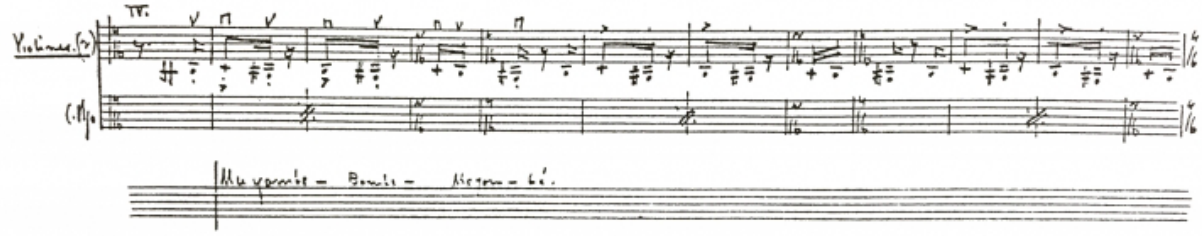

Figure 8. Sensemayá, "Mayombé" from manuscript, m.97-117.

In stanzas two, six and seven, Zohn-Muldoon deduces Revueltas' prosodic setting of the verses, rhythms, stresses and intonation into music. He conducts a meticulous correlation analysis between the syllabic rhythm and the musical notes. Within these stanzas, the portrayal of the snake is dichotomous; it is depicted as both vital, with movements that the music mimics, and as lifeless. Zohn-Muldoon's insights further illuminate how the musical score embodies the syllabic structure of the poem. The instrumental recitation of the verses stands as a perfect formulation of the syllabic construction of the poem, as evidenced in Figures 9, 10, and 11. Each figure illustrates how each stanza introduces new orchestral elements.

The poem's original language, Spanish, features verses with different syllabic metrics and an irregular rhyme scheme. It employs two types of rhyme: *rima abrazada* (enclosed rhyme, ABBA) when the first and last line of a stanza rhyme, and *is rima cruzada* (alternating rhyme,

ABAB) where the rhyming lines alternate. The accompanying tables for stanzas 2, 4, and 6 provide the syllabic count for each verse and the stress distribution across syllables.

Stanza 2	Meter	Stress
La culebra tiene los ojos de vidrio;	12	3, 5, 8, 11
la culebra viene y se enreda en un palo;	12	3, 5, 8, 11
con sus ojos de vidrio, en un palo,	10	3, 6, 9
con sus ojos de vidrio.	7	3, 6
La culebra camina sin patas;	10	3, 6, 9
la culebra se esconde en la yerba;	10	3, 6, 9
caminando se esconde en la yerba,	10	3, 6, 9
caminando sin patas.	7	3, 6

Table 2. Syllabic count and stress distribution of stanza two.

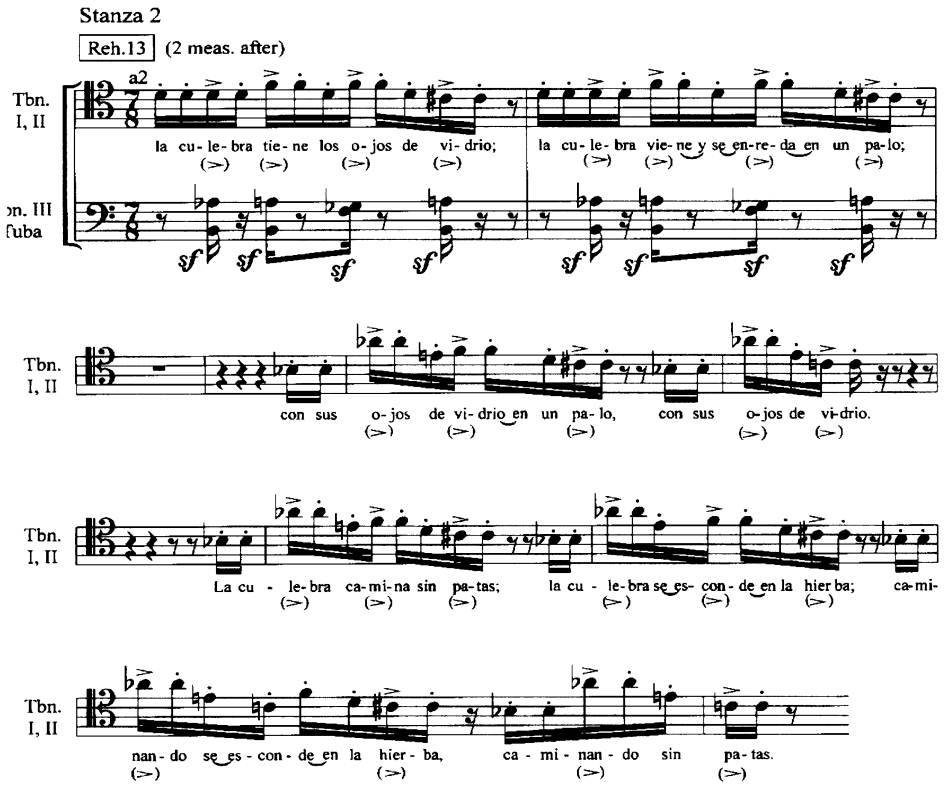

Figure 9. Stanza 2. Revueltas, *Sensemayá*, m.55-65. Zohn-Muldoon, p. 137.

Stanza 4	Meter	Stress
Tú le das con el hacha y se muere:	10	3, 6, 9
¡dale ya!	3	3, 5, 8, 11
¡No le des con el pie, que te muerde,	10	3, 6, 9
no le des con el pie, que se va!	9	3, 6

Table 3. Syllabic count and stress distribution of stanza four.

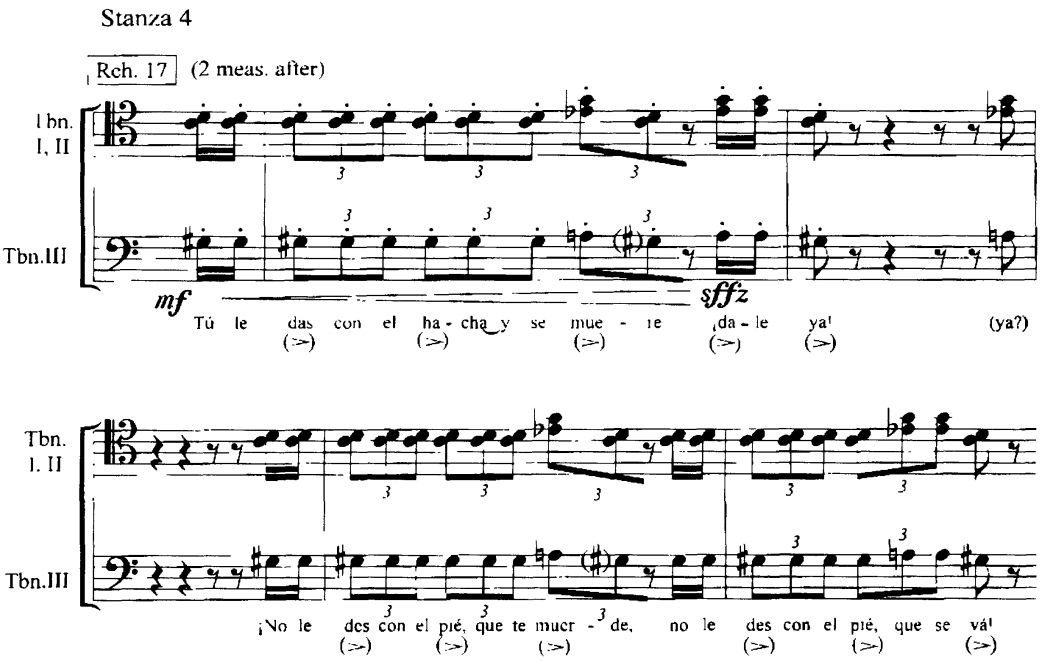

Figure 10. Stanza 4. Revueltas, *Sensemayá*, m.71-75. Zohn-Muldoon, p. 140.

Stanza 6	Meter	Stress
La culebra muerta no puede comer,	11	3, 6, 9
la culebra muerta no puede silbar,	11	3, 5, 8, 11
no puede caminar,	6	3, 6, 9
no puede correr.	5	3, 6
La culebra muerta no puede mirar,	11	3, 5, 8, 11
la culebra muerta no puede beber,	11	3, 4, 8, 11
no puede respirar	6	2, 4, 6
no puede morder.	5	2, 5

Table 4. Syllabic count and stress distribution of stanza six.

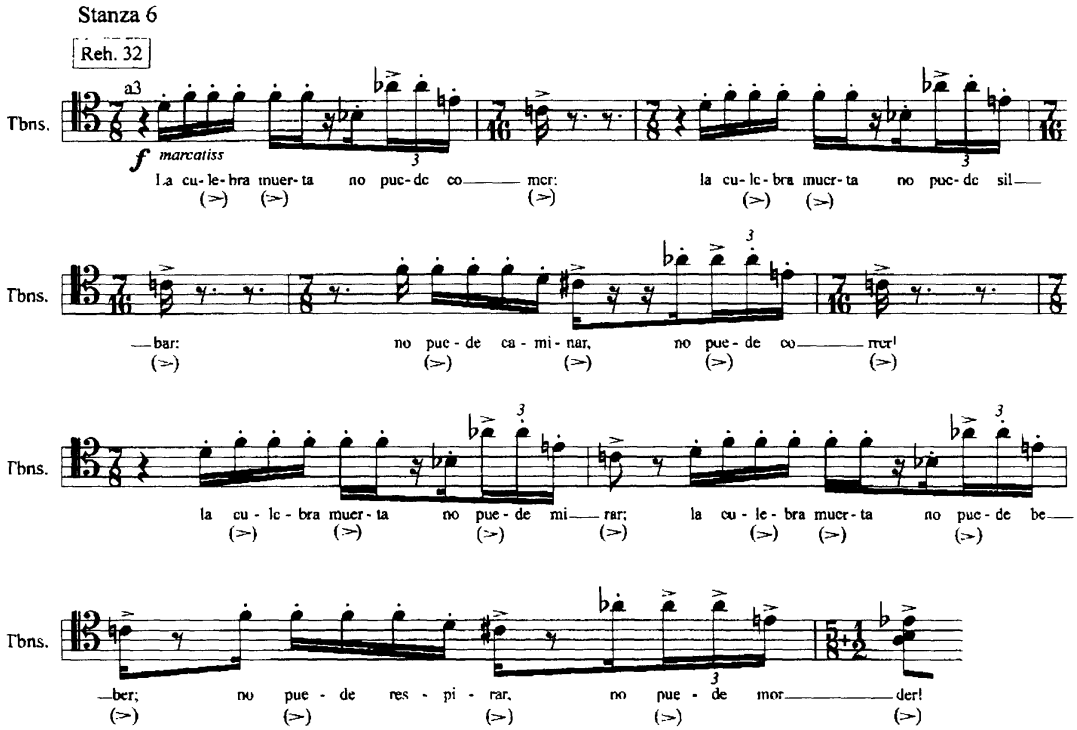

Figure 11. Stanza 6. Revueltas, *Sensemayá*, m.133-142. Zohn-Muldoon, p. 142.

The sixth stanza (corresponding to m. 33) marks the portrayal of the snake's death. The depiction of the snake by the semitone trill ostinato disappears from this point and appears again at the end of the piece. This motif re-emerges at the composition's conclusion, which may symbolize a final acknowledgement of the snake's existence.[106] The seventh stanza intercalates narrative elements (borrowed from the fifth stanza) with the *estribillo,* differentiating narrative sections in italics from the rest in regular typeset. From rehearsal mark 34 onwards, it can be perceived as an epilogue celebrating the snake's death.

[106] Zohn-Muldoon. "The Song of the Snake: Silvestre Revueltas *Sensemayá*", p. 153.

Sensemayá's formal construction is generated by the ostinatos and the superimposed layers of those as a repetitive pattern. The overall form is ternary, in which two larger sections prepare an ostinato for the shorter middle section at m. 22. However, the piece's climactic ending unfolds from m. 34 to 36, as it is conducted by the counterpoint of the two rhythmic patterns, *Sensemayá* and *¡Mayombe—bombe—mayombé!.* Zambrano concludes that the end of the piece is the culmination of contrapuntal rhythmic patterns:

> The rhythmic complexities herald back to the accentual characteristics of "Sensemayá"—most specifically the "mayombé" meter—but expand and transform this to embed similar and divergent overlapping rhythmic patterns that are also unified in the poem.[107]

3.8 The task of the translator

Expanding through the lens of Benjamin's *The Task of the Translator*, Jakobson's framework of intersemiotic translation offers a more dynamic perspective than the restrictive transliteration model that Garland and Zohn-Muldoon apply to *Sensemayá*. Transliteration implies a one-to-one correspondence between the sound elements from one written system to another. Intersemiotic translation recognises that meaning is not merely transferred but transformed when moving between sign systems. In this way, intersemiotic translation aligns more closely with Benjamin's vision of translation as an act that liberates the "pure language"[108] embedded in the original, rather than simply replicating its structure.

[107] Zambrano, *Reimagining the Poetic and Musical Translation of Sensemayá*, p. 18.
[108] Benjamin, W. *The Translator's Task,* 1923, p. 80.

Benjamin argues that a translation must engage with the *intentio*—the translator's intended effect—of the original in a way that transforms and enriches it. He proposes that a translation should not simply be an imitation of the source text but should allow the "pure language" of the original to resonate through the new medium. Garland's and Zohn-Muldoon's one-to-one correspondence between syllables and notes aligns with what Benjamin describes as a misguided attempt at preserving the original's form while neglecting the deeper, transformative potential of translation. In doing so, these scholars constrain Revueltas within a rigid interpretive framework, treating the composition as a static extension of Guillén's poem rather than a dynamic reinvention.

Benjamin's metaphor of translation as "fragmented vessels"[109] that must fit together without necessarily being identical is particularly useful in reconsidering Zohn-Muldoon's approach. Instead of recognising *Sensemayá* as a work that engages in a complementary dialogue with Guillén's poem—shaping and being shaped by it—Zohn-Muldoon limits the relationship to a direct, linear transmission. This perspective fails to acknowledge Revueltas's creative license to modify, expand, and even challenge the poetic structure in musical form.

In this vein, Revueltas contextualised the poem's historical, social, and political aspects within a cultural framework to convey its meaning. His composition does not merely mirror Guillén's text but reinterprets it through a musical language that amplifies its themes of ritual, resistance,

[109] "Translation, instead of making itself resemble the meaning of the original, must lovingly, and in detail, fashion in its own language a counterpart to the original's mode of intention, in order to make both of them recognisable as fragments of a vessel, as fragments of a greater language."
Benjamin, W. *The Translator's Task,* 1923, p. 78.

and power. Revueltas engages in an intersemiotic act that transcends simple correspondence, allowing *Sensemayá* to function as both a translation and a cultural commentary.

3.9 Conclusions

In *Sensemayá*, Revueltas engages with Guillén's poem in a multidimensional way, not only setting its syllabic structure to music but reinterpreting its rhythmic and thematic essence through orchestral composition. Rather than functioning as a transliteration of the poem, *Sensemayá* demonstrates how intersemiotic translation repositions texts within new cultural and temporal contexts, enabling both artists and translators to explore the interplay between verbal and non-verbal signs. This transformative process reinforces the idea that the idiosyncrasies of verbal and musical expressions are not isolated but engage in a symbiotic relationship, enhancing the understanding and appreciation of each medium.

Walter Benjamin's reflections on translation offer a useful framework for understanding this phenomenon. He argues that "it is the task of the translator to release in his language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work."[110] Revueltas's *Sensemayá* exemplifies this notion, not by rigidly preserving the poem's structure but by reimagining its meaning through a different semiotic system. His composition contextualises the poem's historical, social, and political dimensions within a musical framework, amplifying its underlying tensions and expanding its expressive potential.

[110] Benjamin, W. *The Translator's Task,* 1923, p. 80.

This perspective also challenges Zohn-Muldoon's reading of *Sensemayá*, which privileges transliteration and, in doing so, constrains Revueltas's agency as a translator. By reducing the relationship between the poem and the composition to a direct one-to-one mapping of syllables to notes, Zohn-Muldoon treats *Sensemayá* as an extension rather than a transformation of Guillén's text. This reading fails to account for the creative liberties Revueltas takes—liberties that align more closely with an intersemiotic approach to translation. Rather than enforcing rigid equivalence, intersemiotic translation allows for a dialogue between different sign systems, enabling each to enrich the other. In this way, *Sensemayá* functions as more than a musical setting of a poem; it becomes an artistic reinvention that, in Benjamin's terms, allows both the poem and the composition to emerge as fragments of a greater language.

4

Rede ohne Worte: Ablinger's *Speaking Piano and A Letter from Schoenberg*

The preceding chapter suggested an example of intersemiotic translation exemplified in Silvestre Revueltas' composition, *Sensemayá* (1938), and its correlation with Nicolas Guillén's poem, "Sensemayá: Un canto para matar una culebra" (1934). Framed within an intersemiotic process, the study explores how the verbal intricacies of *Sensemayá* are translated into the non-verbal realm of music. Drawing inspiration from Walter Benjamin's *The task of the translator*, the analysis emphasises the importance of capturing the intention behind the language rather than relying on merely verbal resemblances. Instead, the sonic elements are crafted as counterparts to the original mode of intention, enriching both forms of expression.

This chapter examines Ablinger's *A Letter from Schoenberg,* as another example of intersemiotic translation between the domain of music and speech. Recorded speech is used as sound material and transcribed to acoustic instruments using computer-assisted techniques. Ablinger, in his artistic pursuit, embarks on the recontextualisation of spoken language into a non-verbal medium of expression. His exploration encompasses intricate inquiries into the relationship between language and music, probing the realms of sound and speech under the umbrella of what he terms 'phonorealism'[113]. Ablinger's oeuvre uses recorded speech as the compositional object, a unique view to navigate the intersection of language and music from a foundational standpoint.

[113] Ablinger, Peter. *Phonorealism,* 2005, https://ablinger.mur.at/phonorealism.html

4.1 From *Musique Concrète* to Spectralism

Numerous composers have incorporated recorded sound and electroacoustic studio techniques into their practice, leaving an indelible mark on the realm of electroacoustics, particularly when engaging with instrumental elements. Pioneering figures in this innovative approach include Varèse, Xenakis, Ferrari, notably Schaeffer and Henry, who collectively forged the path known as *musique concrète*. Their work involved the transformative recontextualisation of environmental sounds onto acoustic instruments facilitated by computer-assisted analysis. This method expanded the creative horizons of these composers and catalysed others seeking to explore the rich intersection of electronic and acoustic realms. In his treatise, Schaeffer reflects on the sound object. It was postulated that a sound object can present different spectral detail, behaviour and development, as well as dynamic level characteristics:

> The analysis of a single musical sound into a series of partials consequently depends on the same property of the ear that enables it to distinguish different musical sounds from each other, and it must necessarily carry out both analyses in accordance with a rule that is independent of whether the sound wave is coming from one or several instruments.[114]

Within this realm, spectral music emerged in the 1970s as an influential genre, rooted in the analysis and transformation of recorded sound. This musical style is characterised by compositions that intricately transcribe the acoustic properties of sound, or sound spectra, as generative material for acoustic instruments. As noted by Grisey, spectral music provides a

[114] Schaeffer, Pierre, Christine North, and John Dack. *Treatise on Musical Objects: An Essay Across Disciplines*, Anonymous Translator, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press, 2017, p. 132.

unique formal organisation and sonic material, directly grounded in the physics of sound as revealed through scientific exploration and microphonic access.[115] 'Instrumental synthesis' serves as the foundational technique in spectral music, where instrumental pitches are derived by mapping them from the sound source of the partials. The transformative process of recontextualising environmental sounds onto acoustic or electronic instruments, facilitated by computer-assisted analysis, has proven to be a great compositional technique for numerous composers. Among the first spectralists, we find Murail, Dufourt, and Grisey, but the exploration of liminality extended beyond this group. Messiaen significantly influenced many of these composers, while Saariaho relocated to Paris in the 1980s and embraced their aesthetic principles.

Can we consider that Ablinger's composition technique falls into the realm of spectral music? According to Barret, Ablinger's approach exhibits certain similarities with the *école spectrale.* However, Ablinger's emphasis leans more towards utilising spectral analysis and re-synthesis as a means of reproduction rather than the conventional creation of an 'original' in traditional musical production.[116] However, Flore situates *Quadraturen* and *Voices and Piano* within the post-spectral lineage: "Ablinger's treatment of the recorded speaking voice in his works *Voices and Piano* and *Quadraturen* can be thought of as an extension of spectral thinking on liminality".[117] Grisey viewed the 'spectral adventure' not just as a technique but more as an attitude,[118] emphasising its broader impact on musical thought and expression, including the

[115] Grisey, Gérard, and Joshua Fineberg. "Did You Say Spectral?", *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2000, p. 1.
[116] Barret, Douglas. *Peter Ablinger: Music and its Others*, p. 8.
[117] Flore, Rebecca. "Liminality and the Voice in the Works of Peter Ablinger", in Bauer, Amy, Liam Cagney and William Mason, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Spectral Music*, Oxford University Press, 2022, p. 2.
[118] Grisey, Gérard, trans. Joshua Fineberg. "Did You Say Spectral?", *Contemporary Music Review,* vol. 19, no. 3, 2000, p. 3.

renewal of modernist thinking in the later twentieth century.[119] Cross discussed the continued relevance of the term 'spectral music' beyond its initial context in 1970s Paris, appealing for diversity in the collective exploration of sound: "Through this spectral node flowed all other kinds of music, which flowered in all sorts of new and varied directions".[120]

4.2 A brief history of the singing machine

Research on electronic speech reproduction has been underway since the early twentieth century. During the 1930s, American engineer Homer Dudley secured a patent for the Vocoder or Voder (VOice CODER), a device designed to analyse speech and its electronic signal by dividing it into frequency sections called sub-bands. The data collected on each sub-band can be analysed and transformed, resulting in pitch transformations, time shifting, or spectral shaping.[121] The process resulted in the creation of a synthetic reproduction of the human voice. Twenty years later, Bell Labs developed a computer music project to make a computer sing. Composer Max Mathews utilised technology in the early 1960s to pioneer singing synthesis.[122] From these experiments sprang numerous methods of speech synthesis. In human speech's electronic or acoustic translation, spectral analysis plays a fundamental role, serving as an intermediary step between the speech recording and its final musical reproduction. For Flore, employing the voice as a compositional element can be conceptualised as a form of instrumental speech synthesis:

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[119] Cross, Jonathan. "Introduction: Spectral Thinking"*, Twentieth Century Music*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2018, p. 8.
[120] Ibid., p. 7.
[121] Dudley, Homer. "The Automatic Synthesis of Speech", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences - PNAS*, vol. 25, no. 7, 1939, p. 377-383.
[122] Cook, Perry R. "Singing Voice Synthesis: History, Current Work, and Future Directions", *Computer Music Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1996, p. 38-46.

> Post-spectral works that use the voice as a compositional object can be imagined as a sort of instrumental speech synthesis, the recreation of the phonetic features of human speech through instrumental means. In each of these works, spectral analysis serves as an intermediary step between the source recording of speech and its musical interpretation as the finished work, mediating between speech and music.[123]

4.3 Recorded speech as a compositional object

The use of recorded speech as a compositional object has emerged as a practice within contemporary music. Across different decades and technological advancements, composers have explored translating speech into instrumental and electronic forms, revealing methods ranging from manual transcription to computer-assisted techniques. This section examines examples of this practice, illustrating how different composers have navigated the relationship between speech and music.

Françoise-Bernard Mâche stands out as one of the first composers to implement the spectral analysis of speech in acoustic composition. In *Le son d'une voix* (1964), Mâche used his own spoken recording of a poem by Paul Éluard as the basis for transcription into a mixed instrumental ensemble. Mâche's creative process involved the study of a spectrogram, suggesting a systematic approach that likely included listening and manual transcription augmented by the insights provided by spectrographic frequency information.

Jonathan Harvey's *Speakings* for orchestra and electronics (2008) is another example of implementing recorded speech as a compositional object. In his work, Harvey's aim was to

[123] Flore. "Liminality and the Voice in the Works of Peter Ablinger", 2022, p. 3.

make an orchestra 'speak', integrating real-time analysis and computer-generated orchestration.[124] The concept of 'shape vocoding'[125] captures parallelisms from speech complexities in live sound processing. Harvey elucidated the relationship between music and speech, explicitly focusing on the emotional tones that make up their semantic construction:

> Speech and music are very close and yet also distant. In *Speakings* I wanted to bring together orchestral music and human speech. It is as if the orchestra is learning to speak, like a baby with its mother, or like first man, or like listening to a highly expressive language we don't understand. The rhythms and emotional tones of speech are formed by semantics, but even more they are formed by feelings.[126]

In *Speakings,* real-time analysis and complex algorithms were fundamental to the translation process from verbal utterances to music—the program *Orchidée*[127], developed at IRCAM, analysed speech and orchestration settings.

In another example, Luke Lewis' *The Echoes Return Slow* (2022), similarly engages with recorded speech but focuses on historical and ethnographic material. Drawing from Alan Lomax's 1950s field recordings of Welsh miners' songs and spoken testimonies, Lewis employs computer-assisted transcription to extract phonetic and rhythmic patterns from the voices. Unlike Harvey's synthesis of speech and orchestration, Lewis's approach emphasizes the

[124] Nouno et al. *Making an Orchestra Speak,* Ircam-Centre Pompidou, 2009.
[125] Refers to an audio signal processing technique developed at IRCAM that enables the manipulation of the sound produced by an instrument or orchestra to adopt qualities associated with the human voice. This technique involves modifying the spectral characteristics of the original sound to achieve the desired effect.
[126] Harvey, Jonathan. *Speakings*, Programme notes, 2008.
https://www.fabermusic.com/music/speakings-5282
[127] *Orchidée*, Intelligent Assisted Orchestration, is a software created by IRCAM and further developed by Carmine-Emanuele Cela.

preservation and transformation of speech's sonic identity within a historical and cultural context.[128]

Steve Reich has also incorporated recorded speech into pieces such as *It's Gonna Rain* (1965), *Come Out* (1966), and *Different Trains* (1988). His interest lies in the natural melodic and rhythmic qualities of speech, treating recorded voices as 'documentary' musical material.[129] This concept is akin to Rostand's characterization of Mâche's *Le son d'une voix* as a 'sound photography'[130], drawing parallels to the medium of photography and invoking the notion of 'phonography' within sound art. Similarly, Ablinger's *Quadraturen* was termed 'phonorealism', influenced by Gerard Richter's visual art: "the aural equivalent of visual photorealism, wherein an artist reproduces a photograph as realistically as possible in another medium such as drawing or painting".[131]

These examples illustrate different transformations of recorded speech as a compositional object. Mâche, employing spectrogram analysis, translated speech into instrumental music, pioneering an early form of spectral transcription. Reich, in contrast, emphasised the natural rhythmic and melodic qualities of recorded speech. Harvey and Lewis extended this process by using real-time analysis to transform speech into orchestral composition. Ablinger, meanwhile, pushed this concept toward hyperrealism, blurring the boundary between recorded speech

[128] I met Luke Lewis at Oxford University in 2022, shortly after the premiere of his piece. During our conversation, he explained the creative process behind the composition. You can listen to it on YouTube: https://youtu.be/ryUneAKCXPw?si=eq8dRv0pfu86LqWs

[129] Reich, Steve. *Writings on Music 1965–2000: 1965-2000*, New York. Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 198.

[130] Quoted in O'Callaghan, James. "Mimetic Instrumental Resynthesis", *Organised Sound: An International Journal of Music Technology,* vol. 20, no. 2, 2015, p. 235.

[131] Quoted in Flore. "Liminality and the Voice in the Works of Peter Ablinger", 2022, p. 5.

and performed sound. By drawing connections between these methods, we can observe intersemiotic translation at work, as composers not only borrow from linguistic structures but also redefine the boundaries between verbal and non-verbal expression.

4.4 Peter Ablinger's *Speaking Piano*

Austrian composer and sound artist Peter Ablinger (b. 1959) has challenged the established contours of audible expression throughout his career. His extensive portfolio of electronic compositions, gallery installations, and conceptual works consistently employs clever and disconcerting approaches to disrupt conventional notions of auditory perception. Ablinger's exploration raises questions about the nature of voice, the boundaries of music performance, and the interplay between noise and information.

Ablinger's *Voices and Piano* (1998–), *Quadraturen* (1995–2004) and *Weiss/Weisslich* (1980-1999) explore the boundaries between music and speech.[132] These pieces utilise spoken word recordings as foundational elements, organising the musical structure based on various aspects like harmony, rhythm, form, and timbre. Through spectral analysis, Ablinger extracts the acoustic elements of the voice and orchestrates them for instruments and electronics. *Voices and Piano* and *Quadraturen* investigate the intersection of music and spoken language, blurring the lines between human and machine, and challenging the listener's ability to perceive the sounds as distinct elements. Therefore, while *Voices and Piano* involve a human element in the interpretation, *Quadraturen III* appears to link acoustic elements with musical automata.

[132] Barrett, G. D. *After Sound: Toward a Critical Music,* London, Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 111.

Voices and Piano (1998-) written for Nicolas Hodges, is an extensive and ongoing cycle of compositions, each focused on a single recorded voice—primarily from well-known celebrities[133]—and piano. Ablinger conceptualizes *Voices and Piano* as a song cycle.[134] The cycle is based on spoken voices, drawn from speeches, interviews, and readings, where the piano does not serve as a conventional accompaniment. Rather, the piano part becomes a form of competition or comparison with the voice, acting as a temporal and spectral scan of the spoken material. The piano part translates the continuous flow of speech into the discrete structure of music, functioning like a rough, gridded photograph of the voice through spectral analysis, as shown in Figure 1.[136]

4.5 Peter Ablinger's *Quadraturen*: sonic 'pixels'

Quadraturen (1997-2004) comprises a series of electroacoustic installations and concert pieces made for computer-controlled pianos, white noise, ensembles, or orchestras. Notably, in *Quadraturen IV* (1998) and *V* (2000), the MIDI data was transcribed for instrumental ensemble, *Quadraturen I* (1997) and *II* (2002) are set for white noise, while *Quadraturen III* (2004), an open work "a series within the series" involves a computer controlled piano.[137] In contrast to

[133] The voices are: Marina Abramovic, Amáunalik, Guillaume Apollinaire, Antonin Artaud, Carmen Baliero, Bonnie Barnett, Georges Bataille, Pina Bausch, Jorge Luis Borges, Bertolt Brecht, Jacques Brel, Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, John Cage and Morton Feldman, Angela Davis, Heimito von Doderer, Marcel Duchamp, Hans Eisler, Forough Farrokhzad, Morton Feldman, Renate Fuczik, Diamanda Galás, Alberto Giacometti, Che Guevara, Setzuko Hara, Roman Haubenstock-Ramati, Josef Matthias Hauer, Mila Haugová, Martin Heidegger, Billie Holiday, Lola Kiepja, Erzsébet 'Kokó' Kukta, Alvin Lucier, Anna Magnani, Mao Tse-tung, Miro Marcus, Agnes Martin, Humberto Maturana, Agnes Gonxha Bojaxiu (Mother Theresa), Roman Opałka, Kati Outinen, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Ezra Pound, Ilya Prigogine, Jean-Paul Sartre, Arnold Schoenberg, Libgart Schwarz, Hanna Schygulla, Nina Simone, Gjendine Slålien, Gertrude Stein, Antoni Tàpies, Andrej Tarkowski, Cecil Taylor, Valentina Tereshkova, Lech Wałęsa, Orson Welles, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Alenka Zupančič. Ablinger, Peter. *Voices and Piano*, 1998. https://ablinger.mur.at/voices_and_piano.html.

[134] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ablinger, Peter. *Quadraturen*, 1997, https://ablinger.mur.at/docu11.html.

the approach taken in *Voices and Piano*, where piano accompaniment is added to speech recordings, *Quadraturen* opts for an acoustic translation of the recorded speech.

The innovative methodology behind *Quadraturen* revolves around the concept of acoustic photographs, referred to as 'phonographs', capturing sound moments from sources such as street noise, speech, or music. The chosen 'phonograph' serves as a unique snapshot, with its frequency and time acting as coordinates on a grid consisting of slight noise 'squares'. The grid's dimensions, exemplified by intervals like 1 second by 1 second, create a dynamic sonic canvas:

1. The first step is always an acoustic photograph ("phonograph"). This can be a recording of speech, street noise, or music.
2. The time and frequency of the chosen "phonograph" are dissolved into a grid of small "squares" whose format may, for example, be 1 second (time) to 1 second (interval).
3. The resulting grid is the score, which is then reproduced in different media: on traditional instruments, computer-controlled piano, or in white noise.[138]

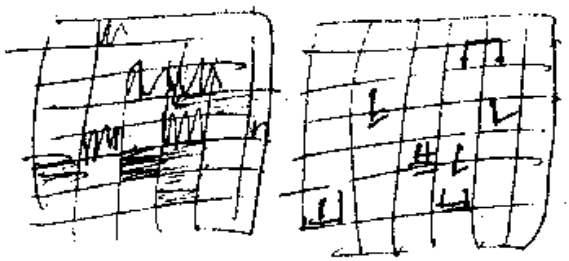

Figure 1: Peter Ablinger. Spectral analysis grid for *Quadraturen.*

[138] Ibid.

When translating these phonographs into performances by instruments other than an automated system, a deliberate slowing down of the grid is required to ensure playability. Ablinger's artistic objective is to bridge the gap between abstract musical structures and moments of immediate recognition, exploring the interplay between musical qualities and 'phonorealism'—the act of observing reality through the medium of music:

> My main concern is not the literal reproduction itself but precisely this border-zone between abstract musical structure and the sudden shift into recognition, the relationship between musical qualities and "phonorealism": the observation of "reality" via "music".[139]

In Ablinger's perspective, the instrumental reproduction of 'phonographs' can be likened to the precision of a photo-realist painting. Much like the graphic arts technique of *Quadraturen*, where grids transform photos into prints, Ablinger's composition method weaves a complex yet accessible tapestry of auditory experiences.

4.6 Phonorealism

Ablinger's concept of "phonorealism" redefines the boundaries of language, music and reality by translating recorded speech or environmental sounds into musical form. This process begins with what he calls an 'acoustic photograph'—a phonograph-like recording that is analysed and broken down into a grid of time and frequency units.[140] By translating this grid into musical notation, Ablinger does not seek to create a perfect reproduction of the original sound but rather a musical abstraction that allows for comparison. Unlike electronic music, which might

[139] Ibid.
[140] Ablinger, Peter. *Phonorealism,* 2005, https://ablinger.mur.at/phonorealism.html

achieve more precise sound reproduction, Ablinger's use of traditional instruments highlights the structural and perceptual differences between sound and music, engaging the listener in a process of recognition.

Inspired by photorealism[141] in the visual arts, Ablinger's grid-based transcriptions create a 'frozen' version of speech or environmental sound, much like a photograph captures a moment in time. However, because musical instruments have limitations in their ability to reproduce the full spectrum of recorded sound, the performance of these transcriptions introduces distortions and approximations. The result is not a perfect facsimile but an auditory illusion that fluctuates between recognition and abstraction. This perceptual play is central to Ablinger's philosophy: music becomes an exploration of what it means to perceive, interpret, and construct reality through sound.

Phonorealism challenges the idea of music as an expressive medium and reframes it as a site of comparison between reality and its translation. By working with recordings of speech or everyday sounds, Ablinger highlights the thresholds of musicality. His work does not just replicate the external world but interrogates the act of listening itself—drawing attention to how we process, recognise, and reconstruct sound in our minds. In doing so, phonorealism engages with fundamental questions surrounding language, music, sound, and speech to unravel the intrinsic connections between these elements.

[141] A 20th-century art that aims to imitate the same level of detail and realism found in photography by using the means of painting. Ibid.

4.7 *A Letter from Schoenberg*

Peter Ablinger's *A Letter from Schoenberg*, part of his *Quadraturen III* series, exemplifies his concept of phonorealism. In his work, Ablinger deconstructs an archival recording of Schoenberg reading his own letter[142] and reconstituting it through a computer-controlled player piano. He creates a perceptual space in which listening oscillates between abstraction and recognition. Using spectral analysis and resynthesis techniques akin to those used in the Itinéraire school of French spectral composers, Ablinger focuses on reconstructing an existing phonographic reality. In this process, he explores the threshold at which sound, when broken into discrete units, shifts from being perceived as abstract musical material to becoming intelligible speech. This method echoes the way visual images are pixelated and reconstructed in the graphic arts, a technique Ablinger explicitly references in his *Quadraturen* series.

What distinguishes *A Letter from Schoenberg* from other works in the *Quadraturen III* cycle is the way it challenges the audience's perceptual engagement. The player piano functions as a medium through which recorded speech is reinterpreted. Without the original phonograph present, the piece demands an active form of listening: the audience is given the transcribed text of Schoenberg's letter, and when reading along the piano clusters becomes recognizably spoken language. This interplay between visual and auditory perception forces the listener to execute a kind of perceptual fusion, wherein meaning emerges through the act of interpretation. The experience is neither purely musical nor purely linguistic but exists in a liminal space between the two. As such, the piece reconfigures the traditional roles of both

[142] Schoenberg's written protest against a 1950 *Dial Records* release of his compositions. The scathing message, written by Schoenberg himself, is a forceful reaction to a recording of his 1942 piece, *Ode to Napoleon*. This recording, unfortunately, deviated from his original vision by featuring a female voice instead of the intended male performer, prompting Schoenberg to express his discontent in a letter.

music and language, demonstrating how speech can be mapped onto the acoustic and temporal structure of music.

A Letter from Schoenberg breaks down both language into its fundamental components—tones, frequencies, and time units—before translating it to a musical form. Walter Benjamin argues that translation does not seek to replicate an original text's meaning but to reveal the linguistic afterlife inherent within it, exposing the ways in which language exists beyond its immediate communicative function.[143] Similarly, Ablinger's work does not merely reproduce Schoenberg's letter, but reinterprets it through an alternative sonic medium, decontextualising and contextualising its temporal and phonetic components. In this process, the letter occupies an intermediary space where its meaning must be reconstructed through the listener's perceptual engagement. Just as Benjamin describes the "pure language" that emerges through the gaps between translation and original, *A Letter from Schoenberg* suggests that the 'reality' of speech is something that can be accessed not through direct representation but through the interplay of form and recognition. By fragmenting and reconstituting the spoken word into a musical structure, Ablinger demonstrates that both language and music are mediated realities, whose essence is not in their fixed forms but in their potential for reinterpretation.

[143] Benjamin, W. *The Translator's Task,* 1923, p. 82-84.

Mister:

You must have sold
quite
a number of records
of my Violin Phantasy,
of the Trio,
and other things which you...
but which you issued without my consent.
I tell you,
you will hear from me also about these things,
and I hope it will cost you very much money.

Yours...[144]

4.8 Technical development of the speaking piano

The initial thoughts for pursuing the technical implementation emerged upon encountering the whole tone filter at the Experimental Studio in Freiburg, Germany, in 1995. This piece of equipment featured a 'freeze' function akin to a visually and analytically spectral screen. This screen could be conceptualised as a grid of whole tones. The notion of consecutively sequencing numerous such spectral screens, creating a 'broken continuity', was sparked by exploring a single frozen moment. This approach led to the idea of digitally reconstructing both sound and time.[145]

[144] Ablinger, Peter. Fragment from *A Letter from Schoenberg reading piece with player piano*, 2004. https://ablinger.mur.at/txt_qu3schoenberg.html. The original recording of Schoenberg's reading letter can be found in the Arnold Schönberg Center, http://www.schoenberg.at/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=983&lang=en.
[145] Ablinger, Peter. *Quadraturen,* 1997, https://ablinger.mur.at/docu11.html.

Figure 2. *Millitron Autoklavierspieler* 2nd generation. Ritsch, 2010.

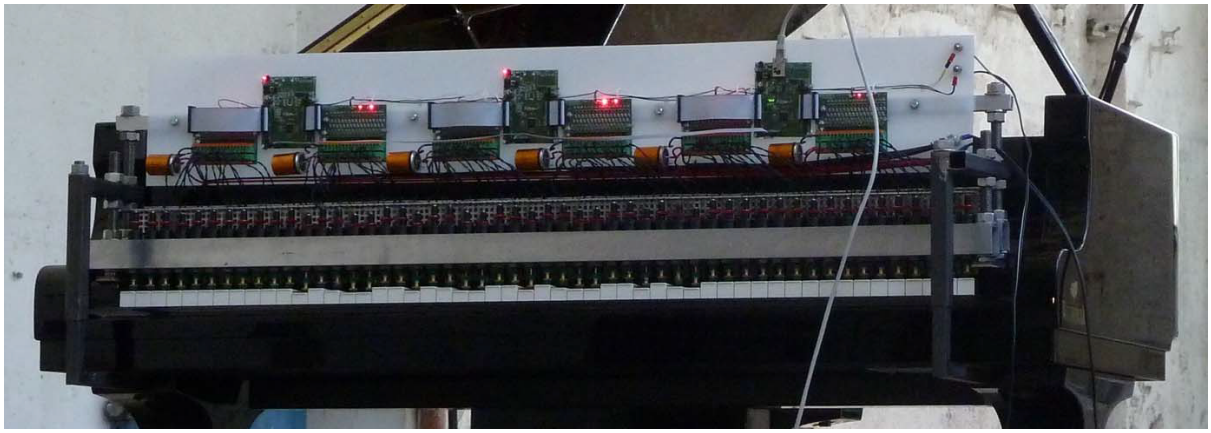

Figure 3. *Rhea Autoklavierspiele* 3rd generation. Ritsch, 2010.

Envisioning the reconstruction of a voice using a piano proved challenging. A piano operates via a mechanism that generates sound depending on the velocity of a key attack, so the noise associated with the initial attack produces resonance, resulting in rich overtones. Winfried Ritsch built the computer-controlled player piano by modelling it after Trimpin's *Vorsetzer,* a key-playing device equipped with 88 electro-magnetic 'fingers' *hubmagneten* that can be affixed to any standard or grand piano. It's important to note that the distinctive feature of this computer-controlled piano player lies not in the piano itself but in the key-playing *Vorsetzer* – the mechanism controlled by the computer that constitutes the entire construction. This unique computer-controlled piano player possesses the capability to simultaneously play all 88 keys, each at varying dynamics. Additionally, it can execute poly-dynamic attacks in rapid succession up to 16 per second,[146] beyond the possibilities of a human pianist.

Given the piano's inability to reproduce the nuanced melodic inflections of the human voice, rapid attacks become essential. The ear perceives the swift articulations, while the eyes perceive the written words. Both of which are synthesised by the brain to produce an uncanny perception of speech within the robotic sound of the piano. Without the visual aid, it becomes much harder—but not impossible—to perceive the sounds as discrete words.[147] Through this intricate process, and with greater exposure, the listener gradually acquires and improves their ability to interpret the piano as if it were 'speaking.' As Chico Mello describes, the 'talking piano' operates as a mimetic machine:

[146] Ibid.

[147] Note attacks sound around every 50 milliseconds, much faster than the boundary of 100 milliseconds that Justin London sets as "the shortest interval that we can hear or perform as an element of [a] rhythmic figure".

> The sudden comprehensibility of single words, whenever the piano becomes the faithful representation of language, equally has the effect of a phantom's abrupt appearance: the close-up reality of the voice is a ghostly apparition – as though the "forbidden" border between dream (music) and reality (language) had been crossed.[148]

Each note results from the breakdown of the speech components into frequencies extracted from Schoenberg's voice recording.[149] Barret makes an interesting analogy, likening each piano attack to sonic pixels: "a composite sound image is formed, similarly, by combining many individual elements, in this case, piano tones activated across the range of the keyboard".[150] In her study, "Liminality and the Voice in the Works of Peter Ablinger", Rebecca Flore makes a spectrogram analysis[151] of the fragment "You in spite of my protest" in *A Letter from Schoenberg* and from the original voice memo *You in spite of my protest* to illustrate and contrast the spectral information present in both:

> This comparison demonstrates that while the "piano speech" from "A Letter from Schoenberg" is indeed some sort of enhanced, non-human version of the speech, it nonetheless carries much of the acoustic information of the human speech, including timings, volume changes, and vowel formants.[152]

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[148] Mello, Chico. *Between representation and self-reference MIMESIS AND NOISE in Peter Ablinger*. Shaker Verlag, 2010, p. 3.
[149] The spectral analysis software design was made in collaboration with Thomas Musil and the Institute of Electronic Music (IEM, Graz).
[150] Barrett. *After Sound: Toward a Critical Music*, 2016, p. 111.
[151] The spectrogram analysis is made with Praat software designed for phonetic analysis.
[152] Flore. "Liminality and the Voice in the Works of Peter Ablinger", 2022, p. 7.

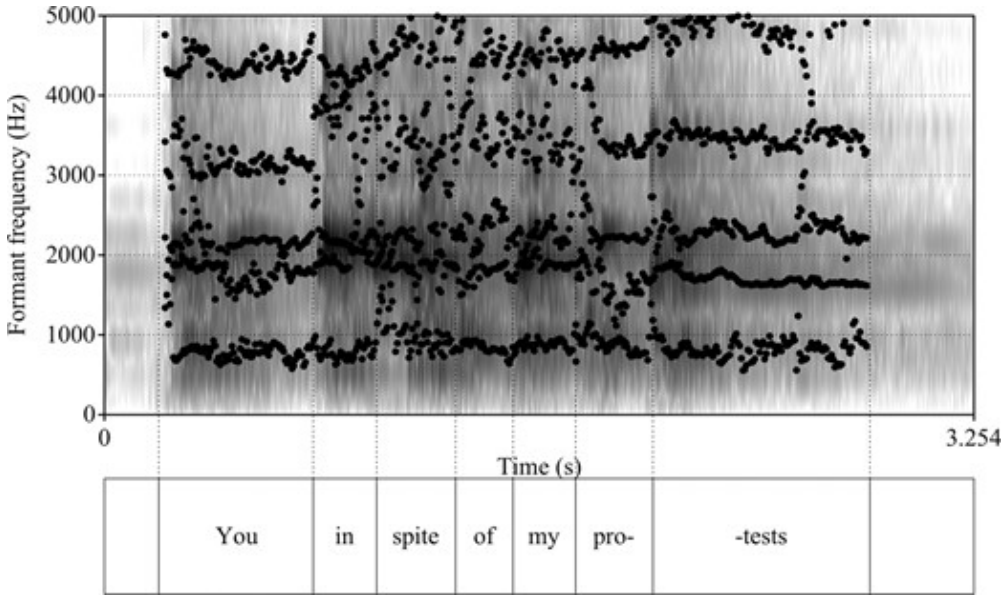


Figure 4. Spectrogram analysis of "You in spite of my protest" in *A Letter from Schoenberg*, *Quadraturen III*, 0:00–0:05. Flore. "Liminality and the Voice in the Works of Peter Ablinger", 2022, p. 6.

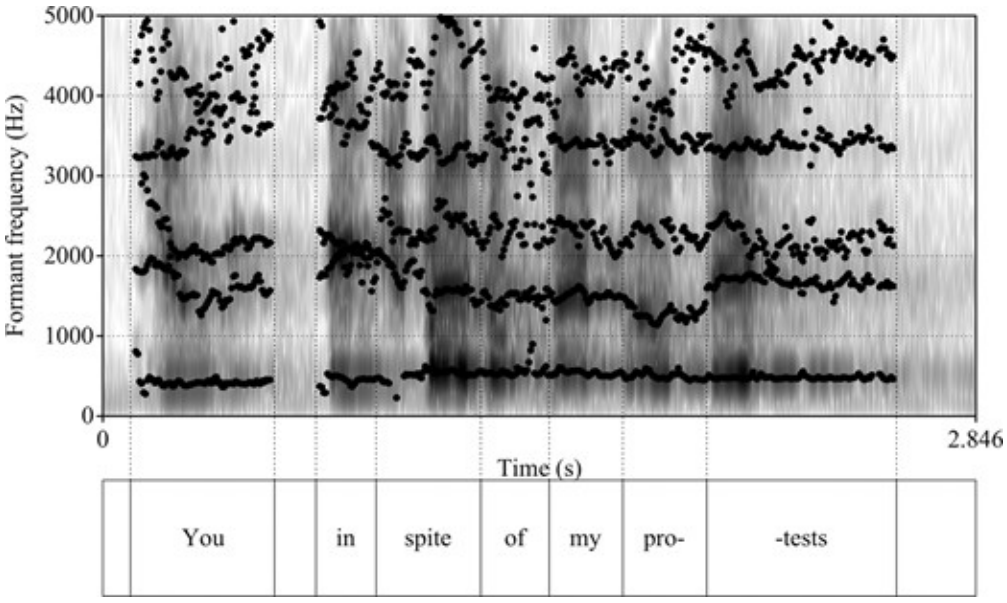


Figure 5. Spectrogram analysis of "You in spite of my protest" from "VR48: Brief, Los Angeles, An Ross Russell, New York," Arnold Schoenberg Center, 0:03–0:05. Ibid.

Fiore's analysis underscores how *A Letter from Schoenberg* operates within a liminal space, where speech is not simply transcribed into music but is instead reconstituted through an instrumental medium that both preserves and transforms its acoustic features. The piano's rigid grid of discrete pitches, constrained by twelve-tone equal temperament, introduces an abstraction, yet the spectrographic evidence suggests that key phonetic markers—such as vowel formants and temporal articulation—remain intact. This paradox, wherein the piano articulates speech, reveals a fundamental tension in Ablinger's *Quadraturen III*: the voice is both present and absent, spectral yet perceptible. By engaging the listener in an active process of auditory reconstruction, the work compels us to interrogate the very nature of perception, challenging conventional distinctions between music and language.

4.9 An intersemiotic interpretation of Ablinger's *A Letter from Schoenberg*

In *A Letter from Schoenberg,* Ablinger embarks on the semiotic translation from verbal to nonverbal sign systems. The resulting work explores the acoustic medium accompanying the textual discourse, given that the performance incorporates a projection of Schoenberg's letter. Within this context, both sign systems coexist and interact meaningfully.

The letter's text is displayed as part of the *A Letter for Schoenberg* installation, as noted by Ablinger: "For player piano and an audience reading the text while hearing the piece".[157] This indicates Ablinger's intention for the semantic dimension to hold significance as one experiences the piece. When closely listening to the piano and simultaneously reading the provided text, Schoenberg's speech becomes distinguishable solely through the piano's sound.

[157] Ablinger. *Quadraturen*. https://ablinger.mur.at/docu11.html#qu3.

According to Barret, the legibility of the sound undergoes a transition, where the piano tones initially may seem purely abstract. Still, upon recognising a word or phrase, the sound transforms into intelligible speech:

> In this reduplication, which links two differing symbolic worlds (music and language), various cognitive perceptions are questioned. Thus, the occasional intelligibility of the spoken, or rather 'played' texts [is] perceived musically as recurring irritations or even hallucinations—the decoding of words encumbers the purely musical reception pushing it into the background.[158]

According to Flore, *Quadraturen* employs a perceptual illusion that engages listeners in recognising speech-like sounds as musical sounds. However, true semantic comprehension remains elusive until a corresponding text is provided.[159]

Following Jakobson's *Linguistic aspects of translation*, intersemiotic translation occurs when different semiotic systems transform from one to another. In this case, the verbal signs are interpreted using a system of non-verbal signs.[160] Phonorealism falls within this category, as its computer-assisted translation generates speech through non-verbal mediums like piano, white noise, or an instrumental ensemble. The resulting output remains intelligible as a form of verbal expression, particularly when heard alongside the text of the original speech recording. Listeners demonstrate greater accuracy in identifying voices when they comprehend the

[158] Quoted in Barrett. *After Sound: Toward a Critical Music*, 2016, p. 111.
[159] Flore. "Liminality and the Voice in the Works of Peter Ablinger", 2022, p. 7.
[160] Jakobson. *Linguistic Aspects of Translation*, 1959, p. 232-239.

language being spoken, with this advantage believed to hinge on their knowledge of phonology, which governs the sound structure in their language.[161]

It is evident that for Ablinger, the verbal language is the source code for the composition process, while the targeted code is musical language, which, due to its instrumental nature, cannot directly convey words. However, upon closer examination, the axis of semiotic activity begins with the outline of Schoenberg's thoughts—an intangible sign system—translating into its textual rendering—a tangible sign system—represented by the letter. Subsequently, the text is further translated into verbal signs, namely speech. From here, Ablinger's semiotic translation starts a cross-media transformation of speech. Figure 6 shows that all signs contribute to a semiosic[162] chain, forming a sequence of interpretative signs.

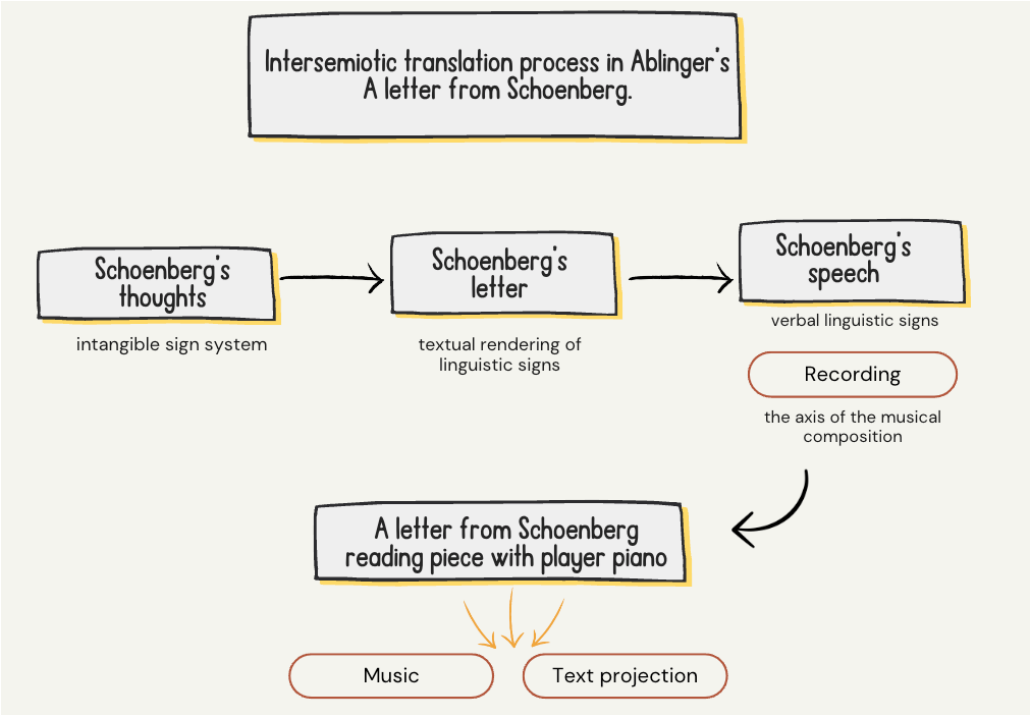


Figure 6. Graphic of the intersemiotic translation process in Ablinger's *A Letter from Schoenberg*.

[161] Perrachione, Tyler et al., *Human Voice Recognition Depends on Language Ability*, 2011, p. 595.
[162] The process of signs.

During the transformation process, the role of the translator is crucial to elucidate the equivalence between texts. Equivalence, in this context, denotes the recurring stipulation found in any text within translation theory for a correspondence between the source text and the target text.[163] This means that each part of the original text should have an equivalent part in the translated text, making them interchangeable regarding their logical or situational meaning.

In *A Letter from Schoenberg,* three varieties of equivalence facilitate their transcodification:

1. Formal equivalence: maintaining the rhythmic and temporal structure of speech.
2. Linguistic equivalence: involves a literal, word-by-word translation, maintaining suprasegmental features like duration and tone from the source language to create a natural rendition in the target language.
3. Semantic equivalence: conveys the meaning from the original text through the 'speaking piano', which is reinforced by the projection of the original text.

Just as photorealism aims to depict visual reality with meticulous precision, Ablinger's concept of phonorealism seeks to achieve a similar effect with sound—striving to create sonic representations of reality through music. The question is whether music can convey similarly faithful renditions of reality as visual media. While photorealism operates within the relatively stable perceptual domain of vision, phonorealism navigates the more fluid and temporally dependent realm of auditory perception. The cognitive effort required to recognise speech

[163] Gorlée, Dinda L. *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation: With Special Reference to the Semiotics of Charles S. Peirce*, 1st ed, Boston, 1994, p. 170.

from synthesised sound complicates the idea of direct imitation, positioning phonorealism not as a mere act of mimesis but as a process of transformation. In this context, imitation refers to the recurring stipulation in translation theory that there must be a matching identity between source text and target texts across various codes.[164]

Imitation resonates with translation theory, particularly the concept of equivalence as explored by Gorlée. Translation is often thought to require a correspondence between source and target text across various semiotic codes, a principle that has been described through different models of equivalence, such as formal, communicative, and dynamic equivalence[165]. However, Gorlée challenges this notion, arguing that translation is not merely an act of mirroring but a process of semiotic reconfiguration, where meaning is reinterpreted rather than replicated. In this sense, Ablinger's phonorealism does not attempt to duplicate speech but rather reconstructs it through musical and technological mediation.

4.10 Conclusions: a tool is a tool

When embarking on the composition of a piece based in another art form, it's prudent to prioritise the transformative potential of any text, drawing upon intersemiotic theories for guidance. As Barthes expressed, "Any text is an intertext; other texts are present in it, at varying levels, in forms more or less recognisable: the texts of the previous culture and those of the surrounding culture; any text is a tissue of bygone new quotes."[166]

[164] Ibid., p. 171.
[165] Ibid., p. 170.
[166] Quoted in Kubilay, Aktulum. "What Is Intersemiotics? A Short Definition and Some Examples" *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity,* vol. 7, no. 1, 2017, p. 33.

The semiotic interpretation of Ablinger's *A Letter from Schoenberg* is an interesting journey through converting linguistic signs into non-linguistic ones, inspired by Jakobson's seminal work, "Linguistic Aspects of Translation". This translation, expressed through mediums like piano, white noise, or instrumental ensemble, is encapsulated by the term 'phonorealism'. While verbal language serves as the source code for the composition, the targeted code is musical language, which is unable to convey words. This process begins with the intangible signs of Schoenberg's thoughts translated into tangible text, further evolving into verbal signs or speech.

The translator's role is crucial to establishing equivalences between the source and target texts. Ablinger employs three varieties of equivalence to facilitate transcodification: formal and linguistic equivalence, semantic equivalence conveyed by the 'speaking piano', and imitation reminiscent of photorealism. This exploration raises questions about music's ability to convey perfect images of reality across various codes, echoing the ongoing debate in translation theory about achieving true equivalence.

5

No oyes ladrar a los perros: the sonic *'realismo mágico'*

"Can one narrate time – time as such, in and of itself? Most certainly not, what a foolish undertaking that would be. The story would go: 'Time passed, ran on, flowed in a mighty stream', and on and on in the same vein. No one with any common sense could call that a narrative. It would be the same as if someone took the harebrained notion of holding a single note or chord for hours on end – and called it music"
Thomas Mann.[167]

In the preceding chapters, I have examined three distinct approaches to intersemiotic translation in the music of Revueltas, Boulez, and Ablinger, illustrating different music settings from literary texts.

Boulez's Third Piano Sonata, influenced by Mallarmé's stylistically innovative poetry, demonstrates an intersemiotic transformation, where literary aesthetics inform compositional structure rather than serving as a direct narrative reference. By integrating open form, spatial distribution, and indeterminacy, Boulez extends Mallarmé's literary aesthetics into music.

Revueltas's *Sensemayá*, in contrast, offers a rhythmic and prosodic translation of Guillén's poem, capturing its performative and ritualistic essence through orchestration and melodic contour. This approach foregrounds the intersection of music and Afro-Cuban cultural

[167] Mann, Thomas. *The Magic Mountain* (*Der Zauberberg,* 1924), New York: George Macy, 1962.

elements, engaging with Walter Benjamin's notion of translation as a process that conveys the deeper 'intention' of a text.

Ablinger's *A Letter from Schoenberg* explores the intersemiotic translation of recorded speech into instrumental music, challenging the boundary between recognition and abstraction. Through computer-assisted transcription, Ablinger maps the temporal and spectral features of spoken language, encoding them on the piano. His concept of 'phonorealism' extends beyond mere imitation, engaging in a multimodal transformation where speech is reconstituted as musical material. This process foregrounds questions of equivalence—formal, linguistic, and semantic—by encoding speech into the piano's articulation while simultaneously reinforcing its intelligibility through the projection of the original text.

Building upon these approaches, this chapter offers a critical reflection on the compositional process of my instrumental piece *No oyes ladrar a los perros*, exploring nonlinear storytelling in music. My compositional approach draws inspiration from the temporal structure, aesthetic, and narrative techniques of the eponymous short story by Juan Rulfo. By engaging with the methodologies and techniques examined in the previous chapters, my model for intersemiotic translation in music prioritises structural, prosodic, and sonic reconfiguration. This chapter aims to synthesise these perspectives, positioning my own compositional practice within the broader discourse on the musical rendering of literary texts.

5.1 I received a commission from the LA Phil!

No oyes ladrar a los perros (Don't you hear the dogs barking, 2019-2022) for large ensemble and organ was commissioned as part of the Pan-American Music Initiative by the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel, commemorating five years of celebrating the vision and creativity of artists from across the Americas. The piece was scheduled for its premiere during the 2021 and 2022 seasons, but unfortunately, both concerts were cancelled due to the SARS-CoV2 pandemic. Finally, in 2022, I was notified that the piece would premiere during the 2023 season. At that point, after all the difficulties brought on by the pandemic, I decided to start the piece over again.

The composition process unfolded in two distinct stages. The initial one occurred between 2019 and 2020, during which I began reflecting on the text-music connection between Juan Rulfo's oeuvre and my own work. Simultaneously, as I progressed with my critical writing, I realised the need to strengthen the connection. I therefore seized the opportunity presented by the two cancellations to embark on a complete reworking of the piece in 2022.

During the revision process, I embraced greater risks, particularly in exploring timbral nuances and in terms of the ensemble-organ balance. However, the most significant aspect of the reconsideration lay in the way I approached the textual equivalences during the intersemiotic translation process. This involved an examination of the original text and Rulfo's style and narrative. By reimagining the music-text relationship more clearly, I aimed to craft a composition that honoured Rulfo's oeuvre and played with the auditor's spatiotemporal perception.

5.2 "El llano en llamas"

"No oyes ladrar a los perros" is a short tale that forms part of *El llano en llamas* (The Burning Plain), a collection of short stories by Juan Rulfo. Published in 1953, this marked Rulfo's debut into the literary world. Set in post-revolutionary rural Mexico, the stories vividly portray the harsh realities of countryside life, including poverty, violence, and social upheaval. Rulfo, born in 1917 in rural Jalisco, personally witnessed the struggles of peasant life and the impact of the Mexican Revolution. Throughout each narrative, Rulfo explores the limits of human existence, offering universal readers the opportunity to extract moral lessons from his compelling tales.

El llano en llamas and *Pedro Páramo* marked a significant moment in Latin American literature. Rulfo's innovative narrative techniques, such as nonlinear storytelling and stream-of-consciousness narration, stylistically known as magic realism, broke new ground in the literary world. The collection is widely regarded as a masterpiece of Latin American literature and has had a lasting influence on subsequent generations of writers.

5.3 Magic realism

Magic realism,[168] characterised by the blending of fantastical elements with everyday reality, evokes a sense of wonder and ambiguity. In this literary tradition, reality and imagination are

[168] The term '*Magischer Realismus*' (magic realism) first emerged in Germany in the 1920s, describing Weimar Republic paintings that sought to reveal the mystery beneath surface reality. In the 1940s, the concept evolved in Latin America as lo *real maravilloso* (marvellous realism), reflecting a fusion of realist and magical perspectives shaped by the region's diverse cultural expressions in art and literature. By the 1950s, *realismo mágico* (magical realism) was introduced to Latin American fiction and has since become the predominant term for narrative fiction that seamlessly incorporates magical elements into a matter-of-fact realist framework. Bowers, Maggie Ann. *Magic(al) Realism*. 1st ed. New York, Routledge, 2004, p. 2.

so intricately interwoven that the reader accepts the fantastical as natural. This blending does not distort reality but rather enhances its expressive potential, reflecting the complexity of human perception. In magic realism, the elements of reality and imagination are so elaborately interwoven that the reader accepts them, in such a way that all artificial and imaginary incidents in the storyline seem real and natural.[169] This tradition distinguishes Juan Rulfo's magic realism by its poetic sensibility, psychological depth, and ability to dissolve the boundaries between the real and the imaginary.

Since the 1930s, Latin American writers have employed magic realism to transcend the limits of the fantastic and engage with socio-political realities.[170] The genre's evolution can be traced through texts such as Alejo Carpentier's *El reino de este mundo* (1949) and Gabriel García Márquez's *Cien años de soledad* (1967). In addition to these canonical works, lesser-known yet significant novels—such as José de la Cuadra's *Los Sangurimas* (1934), Demetrio Aguilera-Malta's *Siete lunas y siete serpientes* (1970) and Alicia Yánez Cossío's *Bruna, soroche y los tíos* (1972)—explore issues of race, class, and gender through a magic realist lens.

Although often associated with Latin America, magic realism is not confined to a specific geography. Instead, it functions as a narrative mode frequently used to articulate the experiences of those situated on the margins of political and cultural power.[171] Rulfo's work aligns with this tradition, as his stories often focus on rural communities marked by hardship, loss, and the haunting weight of the past. Like Gabriel García Márquez's *Macondo*, Rulfo's

[169] Rajabi, Ayyub, Majid Azizi, and Mehrdad Akbari. "Magical Realism: The Magic of Realism." Rupkatha journal on interdisciplinary studies in humanities, 2020, p. 1.
[170] Angulo, Maria-Elena. *Magic Realism: Social Context and Discourse*. Boca Raton, FL: Routledge, 2018.
[171] Bowers, Maggie Ann. *Magic(al) Realism*. 1st ed. New York, Routledge, 2004.

fictional landscapes exist at the periphery of dominant political and social structures. These liminal spaces serve as sites where magic realism flourishes, enabling a narrative that disrupts conventional perceptions of time, space, and reality.

Rulfo's literary legacy, particularly his fluid treatment of time, space, and perspective, directly informs the narrative of my piece *No oyes ladrar a los perros*. Just as magic realism invites readers to navigate shifting realities, my composition seeks to evoke a similar effect through sound. Inspired by Rulfo's use of fragmented timelines and shifting perspectives, the piece unfolds as a series of interconnected sonic vignettes, each offering glimpses into different facets of the story.

While magic realism has been extensively explored in literature, its implications in music remain underexamined. However, Rajabi et al. highlight the philosophical underpinnings of realism and its evolving interpretations, suggesting that realism itself is not a fixed concept but rather a dynamic response to shifting perceptions of truth.[172] This aligns with the possibility of a 'magic realist music'—one that, rather than simply juxtaposing reality with the surreal, engages in a continuous dialogue between the two, much like Rulfo's narrative techniques.

5.4 Intersemiotic translation in my composition practice

Expanding upon the previous chapter's discussion, intersemiotic translation, as per Jakobson's concept of the third type of translation, is understood as transposing linguistic text signs into non-linguistic codes. This categorisation of intersemiotic translation recognises that source and

[172] Rajabi et al. "Magical Realism: The Magic of Realism." 2020, p. 1.

target texts can manifest in any medium, whether verbal, visual, or multimedia. Within this framework, the translation process encompasses a range of modalities, including converting verbal language into visual media. For instance, examples may span from art forms like painting, sculpture, and photography to audible expressions such as music. Moreover, intersemiotic translation extends to multimedia formats such as music theatre, cinema, and opera.

The notion of intersemiotic translation significantly influenced my approach to the composition of a musical piece based on a text. Specifically, when composing instrumental music inspired by a text, intersemiotics provided me with a structured framework for comprehending how a text can be translated across different media. Moreover, it explores the intricate relationship between the text and the music in a dynamic and multifaceted manner. Rather than translating the text into a musical representation, adaptation, illustration, or interpretation of its content, I sought to engage with the text from another perspective, drawing inspiration from the temporality of its narrative and aesthetic qualities to inform my compositional choices.

Despite music and language comprising distinct semiotic codes, they share a commonality in their parallel graphic and acoustic properties. Both musical and verbal (literary) sign systems are constructed from minimal units, allowing for articulation, segmentation, or continuous unfolding in real time. As Jakobson noted: “strictly discontinuous, as physicists would say, granular structure. They are composed of ultimate discrete elements, a principle alien to

spatial semiotic systems".[173] In essence, both forms of discourse consist of intricate acoustic signals arranged according to an underlying structure that takes place in time.

By examining the fundamental traits shared by music and language, we can identify equivalences between these two systems. As discussed in the previous chapter, one such characteristic is the phonetic aspect, encompassing rhythms, intonation, and stress. This aspect is explored in compositions such as Revueltas' *Sensemayá* and my own pieces, *Federico García Lorca se llamó polvo se llama* (2016) and *Haikus* (2016). However, in the context of *No oyes ladrar a los perros,* I leverage the temporal nature inherent in both music and literature as a shared foundation. This involves an analysis of the text's stylistic attributes, including its imagery, symbolism, and the non-linear narrative structure characteristic of Rulfo's works.

5.5 The role of the translator

I have previously discussed the role of the translator in the translation process. As a composer, when taking a text as a source, there are many 'equivalences' in which the translation can be made. We use the notion of equivalence as the correspondence between the source text and the target text across different linguistic or semiotic codes. However, from a semantic perspective, each translation inevitably introduces new pathways and contextualisations. Thus, when opting for specific equivalences, we must grapple with the associations present in the target language, which can pose significant challenges in managing the full scope of translation.

[173] Quoted in Gorlee, Dinda. *Intercode Translation: Words and Music in Opera*, p. 239.

Translation can extend beyond linguistic conversion to incorporate various media, such as visual, auditory, and interactive elements. By doing so, it creates a more immersive and dynamic experience for its audience, transcending linguistic barriers and engaging with diverse modes of expression: "Translation must be allowed to open up and develop its own multimedia discursive realm".[174] This comprehensive approach acknowledges the existence of various potential versions of the target texts, thereby helping to alleviate the biases and preconceptions that a static, intralingual translation can sometimes introduce.[175]

When contrasting my interpretation of the text's stylistic attributes and the non-linear narrative structure characteristic in Rulfo's works with the approaches of the three composers previously discussed, I find affinity with Boulez's creative methodology. Boulez believed in the reciprocal influences between literature and music, not only through collaboration but also in what he termed the "transmutation of modes of thought".[176] This procedure is evident in his Third Piano Sonata, inspired by Mallarmé's poetry. The established equivalences or 'transmutations' between literature and music are apparent at stylistic and formal levels. This translation process led to significant structural innovations in musical thinking, including adopting open form, spatial distribution, and indeterminacy.

For Boulez, the connection between poetry and music extends beyond merely evoking emotional responses. The composer has endeavoured to deepen this connection by exploring

[174] Scott, Clive. "Synaesthesia and Intersemiosis: Competing Principles in Literary Translation". *Intersemiotic Journeys between Media*, 2019, p. 4.
[175] Pollitt, Kyra. "Affordance as Boundary in Intersemiotic Translation, from Some Insights". *Working with: Intersemiotic Journeys between Media.* 1st ed. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019, p. 186.
[176] Boulez, Pierre, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, and Martin Cooper. *Orientations: Collected Writings*. London: Faber and Faber, 1986. p. 175.

how poetry influences the fundamental aspects of musical composition and structure. In other words, they have sought to integrate the essence and form of poetry into the very foundations of musical invention: “The relationship between poem and music is not only on the plane of emotional significance: I have tried to push the alliance still further, to the very roots of the musical invention and structure.”[177]

5.6 Structure, repetition, and temporality

The story deals with the theme of the wayward son, and the complexity of family bonds. The elderly father carries his injured son to the nearest village for medical attention. This act symbolises the enduring bond between father and son and the complexities of familial duty, guilt, and responsibility, exploring the profound emotional struggles of both characters. Their shared history and unresolved conflicts emerge as they journey together, highlighting tensions beneath the surface of their relationship. Through poignant dialogue and vivid imagery, Rulfo captures the essence of familial love and sacrifice, inviting readers to reflect on the enduring power of kinship amidst adversity.

In the story, the primary sensory experiences centre around vision and hearing. The story begins with evocations of sound and sight, as exemplified by the opening line: “You up there, Ignacio: can’t you hear something, can’t you see a light?”. These sensory elements persist throughout the narrative, serving as a recurring motif that enhances the story’s cohesion. The moon, a symbol of sight, is a constant presence, while the anticipated barking of dogs, symbolising hearing, foreshadows a positive outcome—their arrival in Tonaya. The father’s

[177] Ibid., p. 175.

opening line, represented by a central gesture, the solo organ, a melodic line that builds up ascending (Figure 1), further underscores the thematic importance of these sensory motifs.

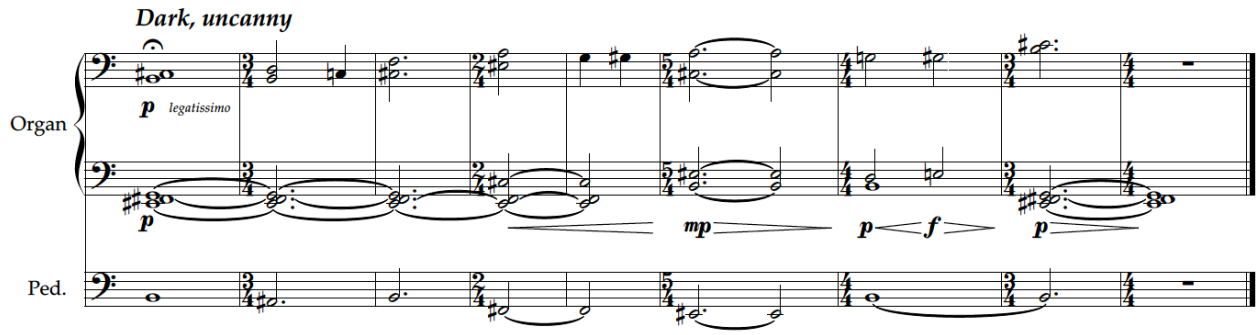


Figure 1. Vega, *No oyes ladrar a los perros,* m. 1-9.

In Rulfos' story, the frequent repetition of the verbs 'to hear' and 'to see' establishes a rhythm in the narrative development. Moreover, it emphasises the significance of auditory and visual perception throughout the tale. 'To hear' is mentioned ten times, whereas 'to see' is mentioned fifteen times. As the story opens, the father inquires of his son whether he perceives anything visually or audibly. This question recurs six times as the narrative unfolds:

> "You up there, Ignacio: can't you hear something, can't you see a light?"
> "No, I can't see anything."
> "We must be close now."
> "Yes, but I can't hear a thing."
> "Look carefully."
> "Nothing."
> "You poor thing, Ignacio."

A fundamental sound element in the story is the barking of dogs, hence the tale's title. In rural areas, particularly at night, the sound of these loyal animals remains a distinct indicator of the proximity of a nearby village. This explains the father's persistent questioning regarding the audible presence of the dogs. Carrying his son on his shoulders, the father once again inquires if the barking of dogs can be heard, signalling their approach to the village of Tonaya. However,

the son's position atop the father's shoulders impedes the father's ability to hear clearly, as the child's legs are wrapped around his ears:

> "You sitting up there with your ears in the air, can't you hear the dogs barking?"

I have chosen to employ the organ as a symbolic representation of the son being carried by the father. By physically positioning the organ above the ensemble, it looms over the stage like the son atop the father's shoulders. I intend to draw the audience's attention upwards, mirroring the narrative's focus on the father's burden of carrying his injured son. Additionally, the visual elements in the performance, such as lights and colours illuminated by the organ's pipes in motion, enhance a multisensory experience for the audience, further immersing them in the themes and imagery of Rulfo's tale.

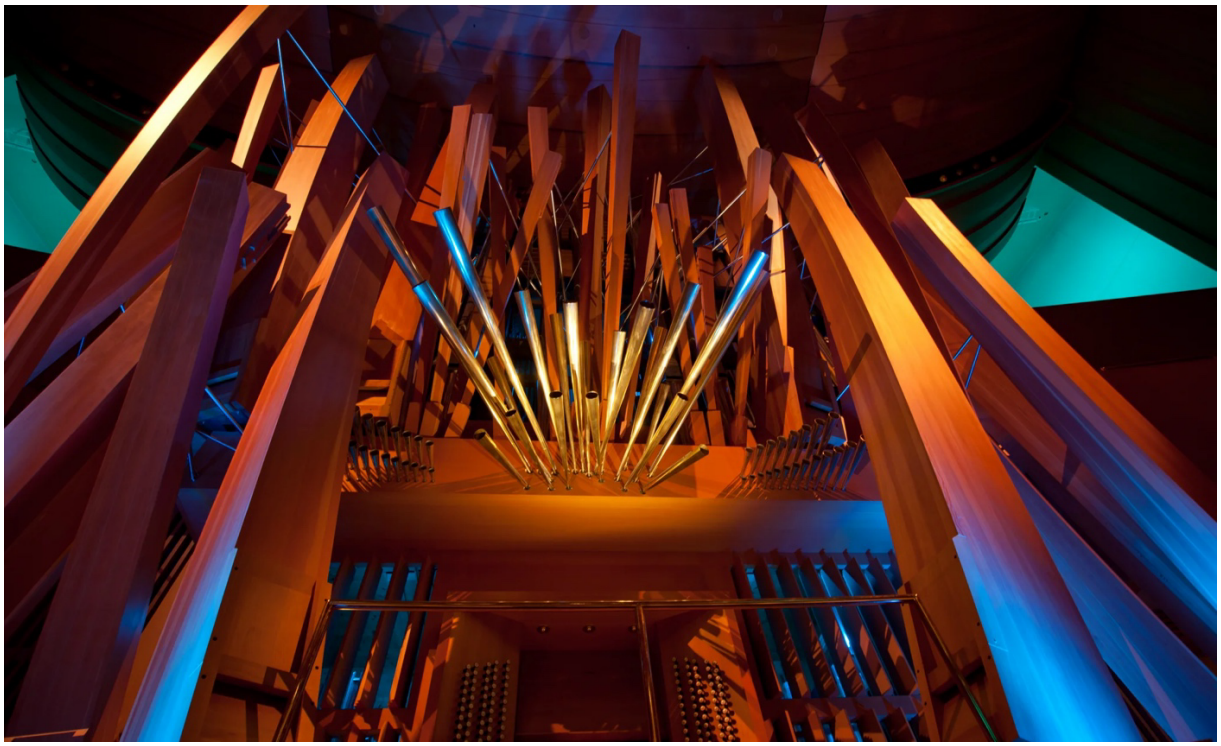


Figure 2. The Walt Disney Concert Hall Organ.

For the last time, the father asks his presumably dead son, referring to the dogs, "And you didn't hear them, Ignacio?" which contrasts with the sentence that opens the story: "You up there, Ignacio: can't you hear something, can't you see a light?". If the father-son conversation is taking place in the present time of the narrative, why change the tense of a verb with such symbolic significance within the story as the verb "to hear"? And what sense does it make for the father to ask such a revealing question in the past tense, if he is using the present tense throughout the entire dialogue?

Through repetition, the father extends the journey by creating a spatial labyrinth from the point of departure to Tonaya. We can notice that the Rulfian style relies, to a large extent, on its system of repetitions. This approach reaches a peculiar eloquence in a passage from *Pedro Páramo*, where the verbs and nouns are repeated in a manner reminiscent of a minimalist score: "I heard the sound of words from time to time, and I noticed the difference. Because the words I had heard until then, until then I knew, had no sound, they didn't sound; they were felt; but without sound, like those heard during dreams".[178]

5.7 Analysis

The duration of *No oyes ladrar a los perros* is approximately 10 minutes long. All the instruments are acoustic, and the amplification is optional to find the balance in the general sound. The instrumentation includes flute (piccolo), oboe, clarinet (bass cl.), bassoon, horn in F, trumpet, trombone, percussion I (vibraphone, glockenspiel, bass drum, temple blocks, two tom-toms), percussion II (tam-tam, crotales, tubular bells, wood blocks, two bongos, guiro),

[178] Quoted in Villoro, Juan. "Lección de arena, Pedro Páramo". *La ficción de la memoria*. Ed. Federico Campbell. México: Ediciones Era, 2003, p. 409-420. My own translation.

harp, piano, organ, two violins, viola, violoncello, contrabass. A notable characteristic of the Walt Disney Concert Hall is the 6134-pipe organ, positioned prominently at the back of the stage (Figure 1).[179]

One of my primary considerations in Rulfo's style is exploring time. The piece's narrative utilises repetition as a rhetorical device, which has implications for the perception of time. These techniques give rise to a nuanced experience of temporal variation, wherein the narrative unfolds with a sense of differential temporality, inviting listeners to engage with time in multifaceted ways.

For the composition process, I opted for a formal strategy centred on creating a structure of repetition and variation that unfolds in a spiral-like manner, starting from the core of the piece (Luminoso m.128-141) and expanding outward (Figure 3). This entails a series of fragmented passages or sections, constructed by timbre, which are subsequently repeated according to their timbral components. In this approach, the rationale behind repetition appears to be rooted in narrative organisation. Structurally, I draw inspiration from novels such as *Pedro Páramo*, *Ulysses* and *In Search of Lost Time*, all of which showcase an interplay between the past and the present. These novels rely on circular/spiral structures, where events from the past continually influence and shape the ongoing narrative.

[179] Architect Frank Gehry and organ builder Manuel Rosales collaborated on the visual design of the organ. Image taken from https://www.laphil.com/about/watch-and-listen/the-walt-disney-concert-hall-organ.

Measure	Tempo and character indication
128-141	Luminoso
121-127	Rhythmic
142-170	Static, timeless
114-120	Uncanny
171-190	Luminoso
105-113	Secretively
180-190	Can't you see a light? Spirited, sparkling
98-104	Dynamic
191-207	Intense
92-97	Energic
208-218	Lontano e intimo, sempre piano (song quotation)
85-91	Rhythmic
219-233	Intense
77-84	Energic
234-245	Can't you see a light? Dark, ironic
66-75	Can't you see a light? Spirited, sparkling
245-269	Static, timeless
51-65	The large, dark shadow
270-276	Lento
33-40	Uncanny
277-294	And you didn’t hear them?
21-32	Can’t you see a light? Spirited, sparkling
1-20	Dark, with the sensation of loneliness

Figure 3. The order in which each section of *No oyes ladrar a los perros* was composed.

The temporal nature of musical material necessitates a principle of constant renewal. However, this process is not arbitrary, it is intricately linked to rhythm, which serves as its internal framework. Rhythm is not merely an uninterrupted flow of time but rather a pulsating, punctuated force. To maintain rhythm, the material in question cannot remain consistently and massively present; instead, it must undergo continuous renewal.[180] As a result, rhythmical material can be more effectively regarded based on timbral and textural attributes.

I explore three primary modes of repetition within the piece. The first mode involves rhythmic repetition (Figure 4), where certain rhythms are repeated within a section, each exploring a different timbral palette. The second mode centres on a recurrent theme (Figures 5 and 6), accentuating contrasting textures' juxtapositions in different contexts.

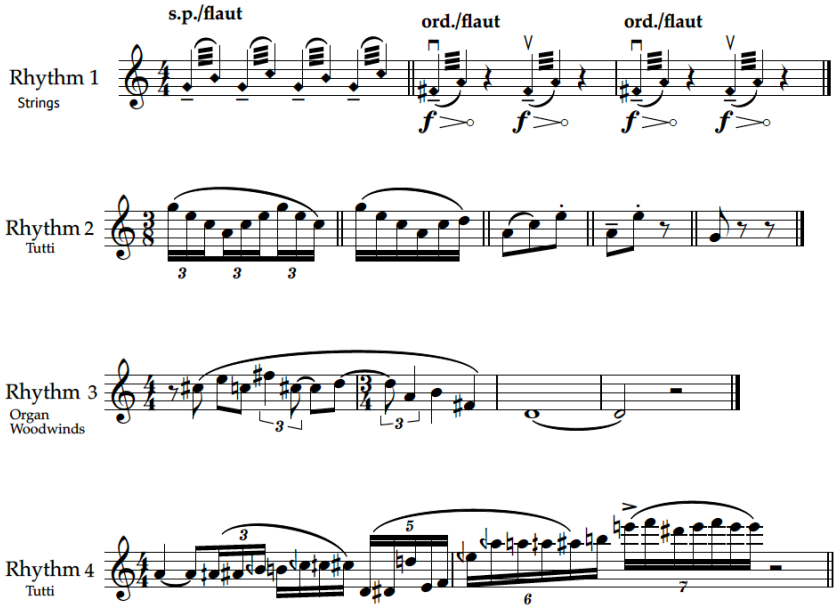


Figure 4. Vega, *No oyes ladrar a los perros*. Generative rhythmic material.

[180] Stambaugh, Joan. "Music as a Temporal Form." *The Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 61, no. 9, 1964, p. 265–80.

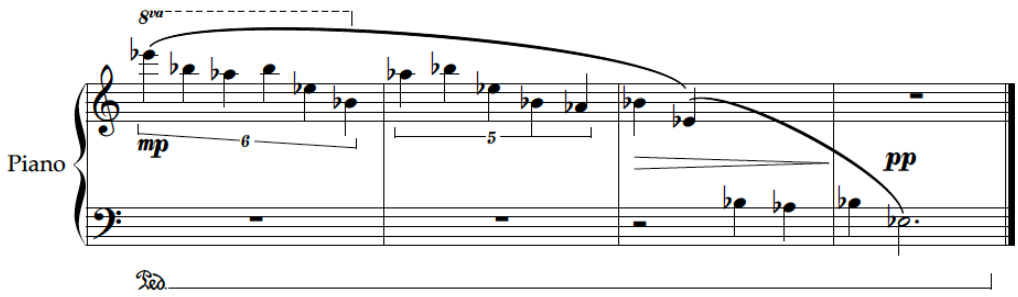


Figure 5. Vega, *No oyes ladrar a los perros.* The piano theme is repeated five times in different sections.

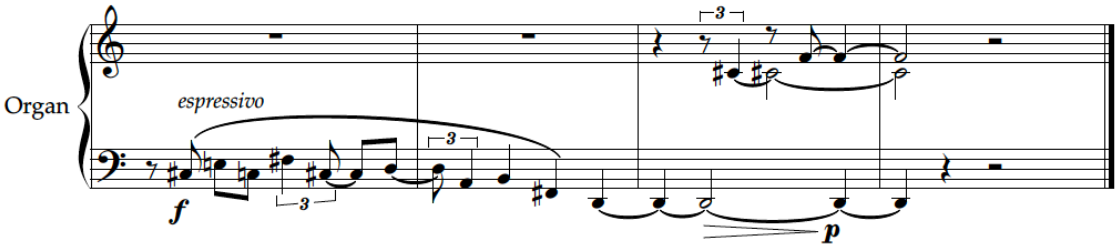


Figure 6. Vega, *No oyes ladrar a los perros.* The piano theme is repeated and varied in different sections.

Lastly, the third mode entails the repetition of entire sections within the composition, such as the following section: *Can't you see a light? Spirited, sparkling* (figure 6). This type of *ritornello* is variated three times (m.21, m.66 and m.180), while a fourth variation, *Can't you see a light? Dark, ironic* (m.234) is presented in a different character and slower tempo.

The perception of silence goes beyond mere emptiness, representing the absence of sound. Silence gains significance through its juxtaposition with moments of sound, both preceding and following it. In this context, the silences within music hold as much importance as the sounds themselves. They serve to punctuate the auditory landscape, adding depth and contrast and influencing the overall emotional and aesthetic experience of the composition. Rulfo's

constructive style auditory-inspired, characterised by a rural speech tends to immerse the text in a time that seems to float outside of reality. This idea is transparently perceived in the classic dialogue of the couple in the tale *Luvina*, who listen and attempt to unravel what is happening around them. The passage sounds like a recited responsory, structured around a question:

> —What is it? She said to me.
> —What is what? I asked him.
> —That noise, there.
> —It's silence...[181]

The instrumentation features a varied set of percussion instruments performed by two players. These instruments offer a diverse range of sounds that either complement or enhance others. They include metallic colours such as the tam-tam and vibraphone, deep and indistinct pitches from instruments like bass drums, temple blocks, and tom-toms, as well as rhythmic patterns typically synchronised with the harmonic trills by the strings. Additionally, rhythmic patterns may be executed by other instruments, along with attacks produced by the *col legno* and pencil technique by the strings.

[181] Rulfo, Juan, et al. "Luvina from El llano en llamas", *Prairie Schooner*, vol. 31, no. 4, 1957, p. 300–306.

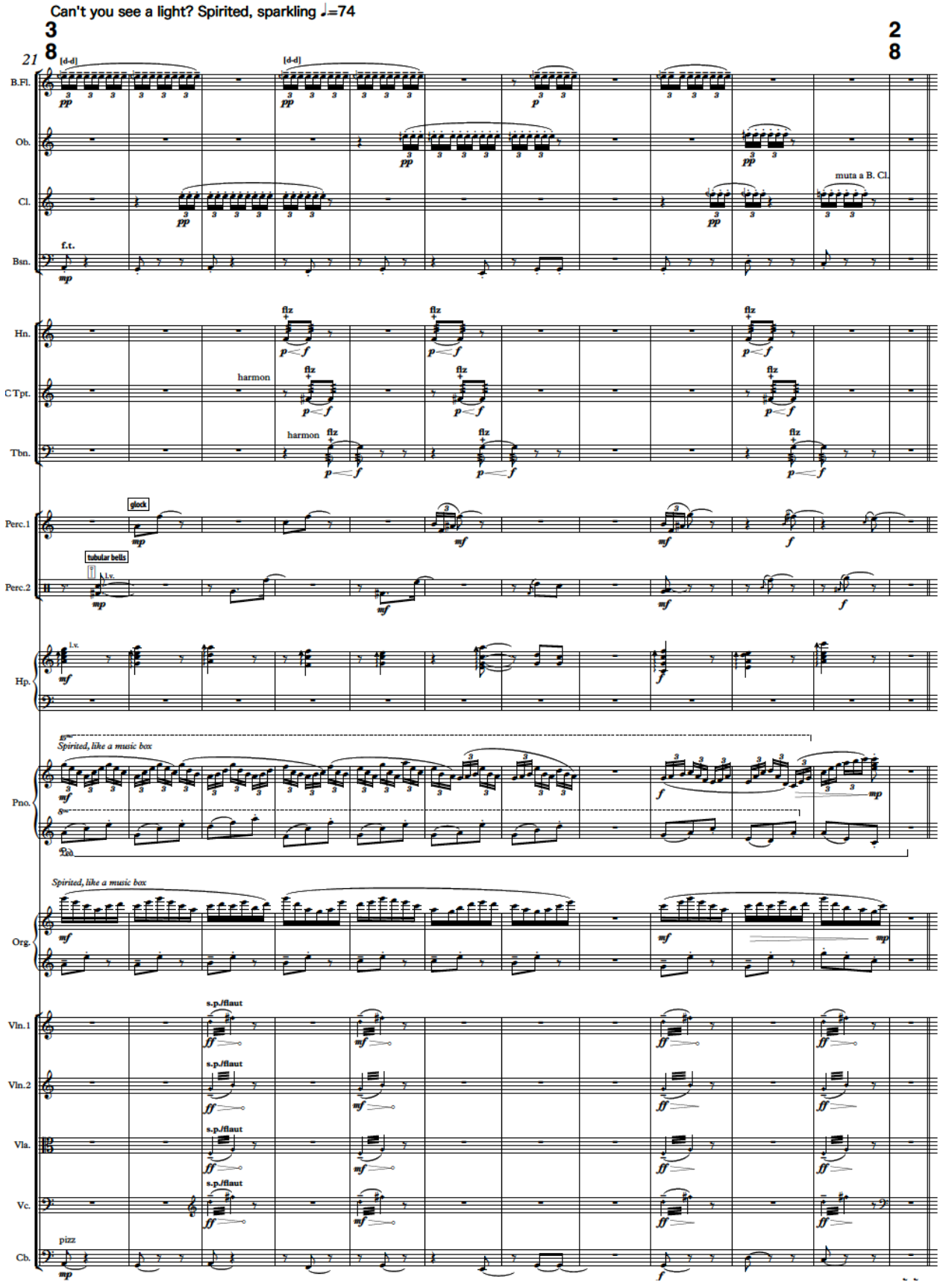
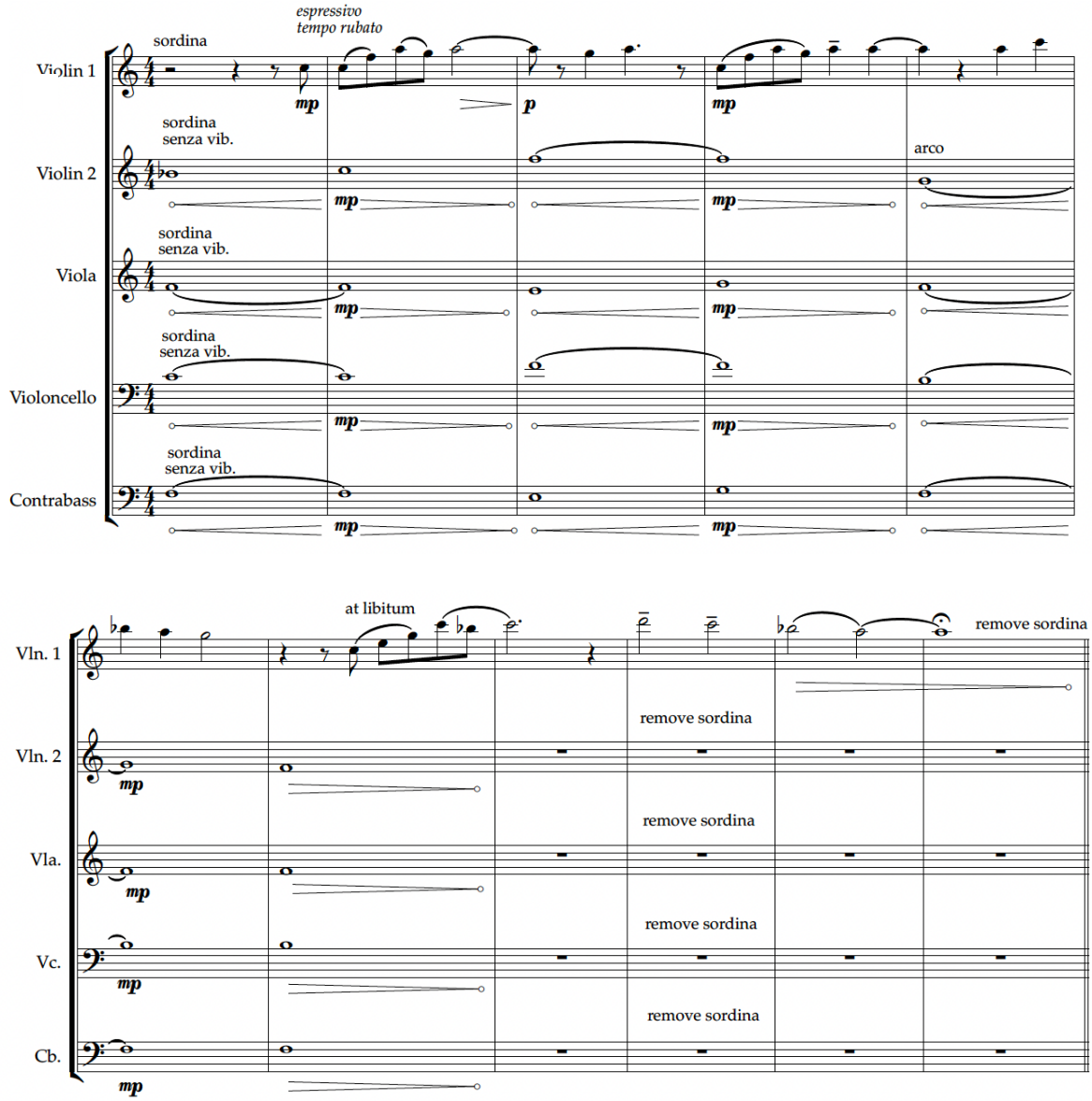


Figure 7. Vega, *No oyes ladrar a los perros*, m. 21-32
The *Can't you see a light* section presents four variations throughout the piece.

Echoing Rulfo's narrative style, I integrate memory to induce an internal discontinuity within the narrative flow by referencing the ranchera song *Amanecí en tus brazos* (I woke up in your arms).[182] This fragment, drawn from a shared musical heritage, may resonate with listeners familiar with it—particularly those with ties to Mexican or broader Latino traditions. Memory assumes a narrative voice, embodying a distinct phase of experience and contributing to the overall stylistic character of the piece.



Figures 8 and 9. Vega, *No oyes ladrar a los perros*, m. 208-218.

[182] José Alfredo Jiménez author, 1970 ca.

The exploration of repetition can be a useful rhetorical device within the composition. The pervasive use of disruptive repetition challenges established identities and forges connections that resist easy categorisation. The composition introduces asymmetries that defy a linear temporal synthesis through an array of organisational patterns, giving rise to an experience of differential temporality. Moreover, the analysis emphasises the role of the listener's memory within the piece, highlighting its function as a dynamic element that enriches the narrative landscape. By embracing repetition as a tool for narrative disruption and temporal complexity, the composition provides the audience with a multifaceted journey that defies singular interpretation.

5.8 Conclusions: the dogs were right

No oyes ladrar a los perros evokes the notion of time and space in Rulfo's writings. In musical terms, analogous phenomena can be heard, perception opens up, and the auditor is invited to cross the threshold into an oneiric atmosphere with a visual sense. The role of memory and perception is fundamental in the development of the non-linear musical narrative. The music narrative manifests itself in the way time is perceived, unravelling alternative perspectives.

Intersemiotic translation, particularly in the context of literary and musical code translation, stands out as a fascinating compositional tool. In an analogous way, certain writers are recognised for drawing inspiration from music, thereby engaging in translation to recreate the symbolically ambiguous world depicted in music. An exemplary instance of translating a musical device into a verbal system is evident in James Joyce's "Sirens" chapter from *Ulysses*. With meticulous structuring and thematic development akin to a musical fugue, Joyce intricately weaves together diverse voices, motifs, and rhythms to create a complex narrative

composition. Another example is Webern's *Klangfarbenmelodie* (tone-colour-melody) influence on Augusto de Campos' six polychromatic *Poetamenos* texts (1953). Each poem in the series incorporates up to six different colours. "Poetamenos" suggests a plurality of voices or perspectives within the poems. Each colour may represent a distinct voice or thematic element, contributing to a multivocal reading experience.

While discussing repetition as a rhetorical device in the piece, we have found identities and connections that cannot be easily summarised. These events of repetition and the many organisational patterns deployed create asymmetries in the piece that render a unilinear temporal synthesis. Using timbral and textural elements plays a pivotal role in rendering an organic progression and coherence throughout the piece. In certain instances, pitch can be perceived as a timbre component, while in others, it merges with timbre itself. Moreover, intersemiotic translation plays a significant role in the multidimensional interaction between a literary text and music, contributing to the formal structure and aesthetic of the musical composition.

6

Epilogue

6.1 Summary: lost in translation

This dissertation explores the possibilities of translating literary texts into instrumental music—what I have described as sonic translations. Guided by Jakobson's notion of intersemiotic translation, the work interrogates how composers can reimagine verbal texts through non-verbal musical forms. These concepts informed my framework for interpreting and creating compositions that are not merely inspired by literature but fundamentally shaped by its formal and expressive qualities.

Throughout this study, I have argued that the translation between two different semiotic codes can offer an opportunity for transformative learning and expression. The process extends beyond aesthetic interpretation, engaging with the semantic, syntactic and phonetic dimensions of a text. Whether using computer-assisted composition or manually transposing syllabic structures into motifs, composers enter a relationship with the source material. In doing so, they establish dynamic correspondences that move beyond surface-level adaptation, resulting in works that are both interpretive and innovative.

Jakobson's concept of intersemiotic translation—interpreted here as the recodification of linguistic signs into musical ones—provided the theoretical foundation for this exploration. More than a one-to-one conversion, this form of translation functions as an interpretive act where composers navigate one medium to another. This framework offered a way to approach the four case studies discussed in this dissertation, not only as musical artefacts but as intersemiotic dialogues with their literary sources.

Boulez's Third Piano Sonata, Revueltas' *Sensemayá, and Ablinger's A Letter from Schoenberg* all share a common foundation: the use of verbal language as source material, whether in the form of a poem or a letter. Yet, each composer adopted a different compositional strategy. In *A Letter from Schoenberg*, Ablinger places both the literary and musical sign systems side by side, allowing them to interact while maintaining their identities. The piano imitates the morphemes, words, and sentences of spoken language, facilitating their transcodification into a musical framework. Boulez, in contrast, drew on Mallarmé's linguistic experiments—especially those found in *A throw of the dice*—seeking musical equivalents to the poet's innovations.

The process of intersemiotic translation often unfolds through multiple phases, forming a complex semiosic chain of interpretive signs. Each element—such as Schoenberg's original letter, its textual transcription, and its musical realisation in Ablinger's work—contributes to a layered tapestry of meaning and expression. Here, composition is not merely the translation of words into music, but an investigation into the dynamic interplay between semiotic systems. The particularities of each system—the linguistic and the musical—are not mutually exclusive; instead, they intertwine and complement one another, enriching the overall artistic

experience. In this light, intersemiotic translation becomes a gateway to exploration, innovation, and the discovery of new creative horizons.

6.2 Equivalences between the source and the target texts

The translator's role in intersemiotic translation is not to impose a rigid one-to-one correspondence between the source and target texts—a notion which, from a semiotic perspective, is reductive. Instead, translation operates as a dynamic and interpretive process, where signs are recontextualised within different semiotic systems. While the term "equivalence" is frequently invoked in translation theory, its application is far from uniform. This process goes beyond mere linguistic conversion as it involves navigating the nuances and intricacies of multiple sign systems. It recognises that finding an equivalence between texts may not always be attainable due to the inherent differences between semiotic systems. However, the translator strives to bridge these gaps through creative adaptation, seeking to capture the original text's intended element within the target medium's constraints.

Gorlée, drawing on Peircean semiotics, challenges the idea that source and target texts can exist in perfect logical or situational interchangeability. From this viewpoint, a translation is not a mirror or mimic of the original but its interpretant sign, a subsequent link in the semiosic chain.[183] In this light, equivalence is a creative relationship shaped by the interpretive practices of the translator or composer. The compositional decisions in the four literary-musical settings

[183] Gorlée, Dinda L. *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation: With Special Reference to the Semiotics of Charles S. Peirce*, Anonymous Translator. 1st ed, Boston, 1994, p. 169-172.

explored in this thesis exemplify different modes of equivalence, not as static correspondences, but as semiotic strategies.

The types of equivalence identified in each setting are:

1. Boulez/Mallarmé: conceptual, formal, and aesthetic equivalence. Boulez's controlled indeterminacy and spatial arrangement parallel the visual dynamics of Mallarmé's radical page design and open form. Here, translation involves a formal innovation that resonates with the poem's structure.
2. Revueltas/Guillén: phonetic and symbolic equivalence. Through prosodic devices, alliteration, and rhythmic phrasings, Revueltas translates the poem to a sonic rendering.
3. Ablinger/Schoenberg: linguistic, and semantic equivalence. Ablinger translates the inflection, rhythm, and intonation of Schoenberg's speech into sonic textures, seeking to reflect the semantic core of the original through experimental audio representation.
4. Vega/Rulfo: conceptual and narrative equivalence. Vega's non-linear musical structures echo Rulfo's temporal fragmentation and narration, capturing the atmosphere and conceptual underpinnings of magic realism.

In all cases, the outcome of the translation is shaped by the composer's unique musical language and interpretive stance. Gorlée's notion of intersemiotic equivalence suggests that the convergence, association, transmutation, and confrontation of music-literary concepts and structures are influenced by each composer's personal musical language.[184] As composers

[184] Gorlée, Dinda L. "Intercode Translation: Words and Music in Opera," *Target: International Journal of Translation Studies,* vol. 9/no. 2, 1997, p. 235-270.

redefine the material, there is potential for a renewal of musical thought to emerge. This process allows for the exploration and reinterpretation of both musical and literary elements, leading to the development of innovative compositions that reflect individual artistic vision and expression. Through this interplay between different sign systems, composers can create rich and dynamic works that blur the boundaries between music and literature, offering new perspectives and insights into both art forms.

6.3 Final thoughts

This dissertation proposes a new lens through which to consider the relationship between literature and music—one rooted in the compositional act and grounded in the theoretical foundation of intersemiotic translation. By reinterpreting literary texts as musical structures, I have demonstrated that composers can engage in a form of translation that is both interpretive and generative, resulting in works that stand on their own while remaining in dialogue with their textual origins.

The original contribution of this work lies in its focus on the composer's perspective and the compositional process itself. While musicology has often prioritised theoretical or textual analysis, this study foregrounds the creative strategies by which texts are transmuted into musical form. It offers a framework that other composers and scholars can apply, not only as a method for analysis but as a toolkit for creation.

The four case studies serve as examples of this process, each revealing different dimensions of intersemiotic practice. In bringing together semiotics, translation theory, and composition, this research opens new pathways for interdisciplinary practice. More than an academic inquiry, it

is a call to creative engagement—an invitation for composers to explore the resonances between text and sound, language and timbre, structure and form. Through the act of sonic translation, we encounter not just another way of composing, but another way of expression across different semiotic systems.

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