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## **Memory. An Approach for Decentering the Historiography of Electroacoustic Music**

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### **Abstract**

Most historiographical discourses about electroacoustic music have been written following technological criteria and focussing mainly on the geocultural centres in which the Western musical canon was formulated. In this context, the presence of electroacoustic music of Latin American origin is silenced or reduced to a peripheral reference. In this paper, I propose a model for the construction of a historical narrative of electroacoustic music using the concept of medialized cultural memory. The goal of this model is to decenter historical discourses using a multiperspectivistic historiographical approach which integrates different voices equally. In this sense it will be shown, how some electroacoustic music of Latin American origin can be analytically interrelated with features of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Telemusik* (1966) and *Hymnen* (1966–1967).

### **Introduction**

The problems associated with historiographical discourses and their legitimation are not new. As a result of debates that took place primarily within the human sciences, movements like New Musicology had dealt with these issues since the 1980s in the case of the English-speaking world. In this sense, Joseph Kerman wrote about a renewed intellectual interest in Musicology which emerged out of “several strains of reaction to positivism” and of “the confrontation of musicology with theory and ethnomusicology.”<sup>1</sup> Although an exploration of the scope such “reactions” would exceed the limits of this paper,<sup>2</sup> an approach to it could depart from a delimitation of the academic and idiomatic fields one explores. In the context where I write – in which the division between historical musicology and ethnomusicology still perdures – it can be stated that the situation mentioned by Kerman does not seem to have been materialized in its fully potential. This is due not so much because of a musical-analytical positivism that still prevails in Historical Musicology,<sup>3</sup> but of a historical, lineal and teleological discourse whose main features are inherited mainly from historical narratives of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This historical discourse emerged in the same geocultural centres from which the Western musical canon was formulated. In this context, art music produced outside these centres is whether silenced or, in the best case, explored as a peripheral experience that occurred at distant places and was primarily a late reflection of canonical composers and their music. The historiography of

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<sup>1</sup> Kerman, 1985: 59.

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<sup>3</sup> For the state of the art in the English-speaking world since 1945 see Kerman, 1985, p. 31ff.

electroacoustic music shows a similar tendency when it comes to the presence of electroacoustic music produced outside the main European and North-American historical centres: The case of Latin American composers and their music is, within this context, an example of underrepresentation.<sup>4</sup> Notwithstanding, if we consider that Music History can (and should) be formulated outside the canonical centres of musicology –what indeed takes place since decades<sup>5</sup>–, and also if we presuppose that the above-mentioned situation in the German-speaking scholarship is not valid for other academic and idiomatic contexts, we would still have to face an important problem: The amount of critical studies on peripheral<sup>6</sup> electroacoustic music(s) like the Latin American case is relatively low.<sup>7</sup>

The representation of historical repertoires of electroacoustic music produced outside the main European and North-American centres seems to be conditioned by two aspects. First, one can recognise a teleological historiographical discourse based on concepts like “development” and “evolution” in music. Although these historiographical concepts are previous to the emergence of electroacoustic music in Europe in the late 1940s, they took a technological character in the case of electroacoustic music because of its means of composition, storage and reproduction. Criteria for the aesthetical value judgement of music –for instance the ideas of “originality” and “complexity”, which were keystones of Modern Music– became also associated with a technological state of the art. Therefore, if a history of electroacoustic music were based on these criteria then a big part of the repertoires produced in Latin America in the 1950s and 1960s had to be left aside, since the technological asymmetry between composers in Cologne and, for instance, those in Buenos Aires implied a limitation for the latter (This should not be understood as a creative constraint, as shown by the pioneer experiences of Jorge Antunes in Rio de Janeiro in the 1960s among others.)<sup>8</sup>

Second, the reference to a particular tradition and musical canon takes a decisive role when it comes to the underrepresentation of peripheral electroacoustic music(s) within main narratives. In the same way some European composers in the 1950s looked back to the past and found an inspiration in the work and figure of Anton von Webern, for instance, the electroacoustic pioneers in Cologne and Paris did something similar as they considered themselves as being part of a historical front within art music.<sup>9</sup> This particular tradition belonged to some composers, but not to others, who were located outside the main geocultural centres in which this music was produced for the first time. Although many non-European composers worked and produced music in these centres –eventually achieving a canonical position, like in the case of Mauricio Kagel–, the historiographical discourse based on this concept of “tradition” show a general tendency to, in the best case, include peripheral music(s)

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<sup>4</sup> In the German- and English-speaking worlds, for instance, this subject is whether absent (v. g. Ungeheuer, 2002; Supper, 2012), or receives a peripheral mention (v. g. Blumröcker, 2017). Very valuable approaches are also to be considered. See v. g. Holmes, 2016; Emmerson, 2018.)

<sup>5</sup> There are many examples of such a work. For instance, in the Spanish-speaking world one should mention the *Diccionario de la Música Española e Hispanoamericana* (1999-2001), which seems to have been inspired by works like *The new Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980). For a more contemporary example of a historical narrative see Carredano, Eli, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> I shall use this modern category for this text. To mention the problems associated with double-concepts like centre-periphery and the many modes of simplification that they imply would exceed the limits of this paper.

<sup>7</sup> The best reference because of its documentary character is the theoretical production of Ricardo Dal Farra. V. g. Dal Farra, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Lintz-Maués, 2002: 75.

<sup>9</sup> V. g. Schaeffer, 1966: 398-399.

as being part of an Otherness, which clearly functions as a conditioning aspect sometimes leading to exoticism and/or negative value judgments.<sup>10</sup>

The two above-mentioned constants are the main obstacles I recognise when it comes to the construction of historical discourses containing a multiplicity of voices, where electroacoustic music(s) of different geographical regions and cultures external to the idea of the West –that is, plain stated, the countries in West-Central Europe and North-America– are to be fairly represented. In this paper, I propose a methodological approach for constructing a historiographical narrative about electroacoustic music that includes some usually ignored historical experiences like the Latin American case. The theoretical frame I use is based on a specificity of the electroacoustic medium: The use of sound recordings that refer to their sources. I consider this feature as a “cross-aspect,” since it does not recognise any technological and/or geocultural determinants and therefore allows the integration of different electroacoustic music(s). To build up the relationships between different voices, that is, to connect different electroacoustic works in a discourse, I will use the concept of medialized cultural memory. The spatial and temporal references carried by recorded sounds and re-actualized by the listener will be conceived as a moment of the past, that is, as a type of memory stored in a medium. For the aims of this paper the idea of cultural memory is related to a typology proposed by Astrid Erll (2011), which can be located in the German-speaking tradition of cultural studies as represented by the work of Aleida Assman among others.<sup>11</sup> In the sense, recorded sounds referring to their sources can be related to the concept of medialized cultural memory because of their (1) ability to externalize human physiological memory, being therefore instruments of communication – in the same way written signs or images can transport memory in different forms and levels. Recorded sounds depend also on the (2) technologies of dissemination, which also affect the materiality of the memory content other media can transport. In the case of electroacoustic music, one must consider the technologies applied to the composition, storage, and their respective obsolescence. The latter is also related to (3) the presence of other recorded sounds available in sound archives and/or stored electroacoustic music(s), which can carry memory content [*Gedächtnismedienangebot*] as a result of (4) a creative functionalization on the sounds from the side of composers (compositional intention) or listeners (the active reception and/or interpretation of the sounds).<sup>12</sup>

These dimensions of the medialized cultural memory are able to embrace compositional, structural and receptive aspects of electroacoustic music that refers to the past. In this sense it constitutes a cross-aspect to many different music(s), which can allow the construction of narratives not based exclusively on canonical centres and/or technological criteria. It also can help to avoid the reference and the constraints associated with double concepts like tradition-innovation, centre-periphery, originality-epigonism, identity-alterity, among others. Regarding the last dimension of the medialized cultural memory it should be warned that the creative functionalization of sounds is a result of a compositional process that is located somewhere, that is, it is surrounded by a specific cultural milieu. These contexts –which are particular for each musical piece being studied– are obviously not general and cannot be considered as a cross-aspect to different electroacoustic music(s). In this sense, one should also consider which “principles of selection” of memory were used to functionalize some sounds as memory-carriers, and also pay attention to their historical and cultural variability.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> V. g. Blumröder, 2017: 134.

<sup>11</sup> V. g. Assman, 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Erll, 2004: 14-18.

<sup>13</sup> Burke, 1993: 291-292.

In the next section I will briefly mention the results of an analysis carried out on a corpus of electroacoustic music of Latin American origin. Some of its features will be compared with extracts of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Telemusik* (1966) and the second region of the electronic version of *Hymnen* (1967). This comparison is intended as a brief example of integration between different music(s) that have earned quiet different places within main historical narratives.

## Two Conjunctions of Collective Memory

Collective memory is the one transmitted through culture and constitutes as a reference to a common past for a group of people. There are some constants that were inductively recognised and indicate different types of collective memory in the corpus of electroacoustic music I studied (They are the result of a musical analysis including the four dimensions of the medialized cultural memory.) In what follows I will not present a complete analysis of each electroacoustic piece –since it would exceed the limits of this paper–; I will restrain the text to two aspects that are common between the music(s) I would like to integrate.<sup>14</sup> Since these aspects are shared, I consider them as conjunctions that help to integrate different music(s), though with different nuances and within particular historical contexts that are also to be mentioned.

1. Some references to native cultures that are recognisable in some works of Latin American origin can be considered as a cultural past externalized in recorded sounds and functionalized through the compositional process.<sup>15</sup> Electroacoustic works like *Humanofonía* (1971, 11' 13", monophonic, Guatemala City) by Joaquín Orellana, *Homenaje a la flecha clavada en el pecho de Don Juan Díaz de Solís* (1974, 13'25", estereo, Bourges) by Coriún Aharonián, or *Guararí Repano* (1968, 14'20", stereo, Caracas) de José V. Asuar, among others, they all contain an allusion to a common past in the form a natives cultures that are alluded in the music. Notwithstanding the fact, that the contexts of production of these music(s) as well as the compositional criteria in each case are not the same, I consider the electroacoustic medium and its specificity through the use of recorded sounds as a central, common aspect that allows comparative perspectives because of its cross-character nature. Moreover, this is not restraint to Latin American music. Stockhausen also used recorded sounds of native cultures which were a form of cultural memory externalized in a medium in the caso of his *Telemusik* (1966, 19'07", orig. 5 channels, NHK, Tokyo.) On the one hand one could mention the third channel of the Structure 22, where the composer includes a lullaby sang by a Javaé aborigine (Brazil); on the other, the fifth channel of the Structure 13, where he uses the sound recording of a puberty rite of the Shipibo aborigines (Peruvian Amazonia.)<sup>16</sup> These electronically processed sounds belong to a group a 22 fragments of vocal and/or instrumental music from different cultures around the world which were used as sound materials for the composition of this piece. Stockhausens aesthetical ideas were strongly criticized by some musicians and theoreticians since the 1970s, according to which the composer was not empathetic to the ritual and functional character of the sounds he used. This constitutes a point of view<sup>17</sup> that belongs to the history of the reception of Stockhausen's music and is not central for the aims of this paper: I am interested in applying

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<sup>14</sup> Since in this paper I am working with a medial concept of memory reflected in a specificity of the electroacoustic medium, I will not consider the presence of memory content in non-electroacoustic art music composed in Latin America or elsewhere.

<sup>15</sup> For an introduction see Cuevas, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Stockhausen, 1969: 16 and 30-31.

<sup>17</sup> V. g. Stenzl, 1979: 125.

another perspective with which one can construct a new historical narrative while searching, as stated above, for cross-aspects between electroacoustic music(s) composed in different contexts, using different technologies and aesthetical goals. In this sense, the parallel between the above-mentioned music(s) is not to be found, at first, in the compositional intention but in the quality of the sounds that were used, which can be considered as an externalized cultural memory that opens the field to further interpretative and/or comparative analysis.

2. References of political character through the use of recorded sounds are also capable to allude to a common past which is materialized in a medium and functionalized in a composition. Electroacoustic pieces like *Ayayayayay* (1971, 16'17'', stereo, WDR, Cologne) by Mesías Maiguashca, or *Trovas, Crónicas y Epigramas I-VII* (1977, 7 pieces, 19'36'', monophonic Buenos Aires) by Eduardo Bértola, among many others, they all contain sound recordings which can be –particularly in the case of recorded voices– recognised by listeners that belong to the group of individuals whose collective memory is being referred to. From this perspective and without going into a fully analysis of each piece, we could broaden the comparison using this conjunction and consider, for instance, the inclusion of the *Horst-Wessel-Lied* on 13'43'' in the second Region in the electroacoustic version of Stockhausen's *Hymnen* (1967, 113'59'', orig. 5 channels, Cologne.) At this point the composer included a “second German anthem,” he remembers, “which was always sang after the German anthem during the *Drittes Reich*.”<sup>18</sup> This is commented by the composer self in the second Region of the piece on 18'53'', as he considers that second anthem as “only a memory” [*es ist nur eine Erinnerung*]<sup>19</sup> implying a critical lecture since he was self a victim of that horrific past that is re-actualized in the work.<sup>20</sup>

Following this line of inquiry based on a cross-aspect between different corpora of electroacoustic music we could further include pieces like *Presque rien N°1* (1970, 21'11'', stereo, Paris) by Luc Ferrari, because of the social content of its soundscapes and the varied interpretative levels they offer.<sup>21</sup> Works like Luigi Nono's *Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz* (1966, 11'15'', monophonic, Milan) could also be a part of this comparison because of its ideological and commemorative dimension –despite of the fact that its sound materials are not recordings in the sense of the pieces I compared before. It could be also possible to expand this analysis and take into account pieces composed with digital technologies like *Extremités lointaines* (1998, 16'23'', orig. 8 channels, GRM, Paris) by Hans Tutschku, for instance, composed with sounds recorded in South East Asia and of which the composer has stated that the “connections [with the sound sources and their cultures] remain very strong.”<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusions

This approach pretends to be a contribution to decentre the discourses about the history of electroacoustic music. Considering a specificity of the electroacoustic medium which is common to different music(s) one could discuss, at another level, the history of the reception of each piece, the compositional intention behind the music, the power structures that contextualize some aesthetical ideas and choices, etc. However, I would remark the fact that a cross-aspect like the concept of medialized cultural memory and its four dimensions can help to complement (or even supersede) the historical narratives based exclusively on criteria like

<sup>18</sup> Stockhausen, 1998: 152.

<sup>19</sup> Ebd.

<sup>20</sup> About Stockhausen experiences in WWII see v. g. Blumöder, 1993: 6.

<sup>21</sup> See for instance English, 2017.

<sup>22</sup> Tutschku, 1994: 10.

technological development, canonical composers, and “historical centres” from which some sort of creative energy was irradiated around the world provoking the expansion of electroacoustic music as a compositional practice. The facticity of such a model should not obscure its condition as a construction behind which one can find intentionalities that respond and reflect structures of power at different levels –this is to be found, in fact, behind any theoretical model, even the one I propose here. These structures must be problematized by a contemporary and interculturally competent Musicology. To draw connections between Stockhausen and some composers of Latin American origin pretends to be a reaction to try and give a voice to historical experiences that are still waiting to be re-discovered and eventually integrated within comprehensive historical narratives.

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