



TRANS 18 (2014)
ARTÍCULOS / ARTICLES

***Aguacero: A Semiotic Analysis of Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia* by Leo Brouwer**
Daniel Fernando Castro Pantoja (University of California, Riverside)

| | |
|--|---|
| Resumen El presente artículo pretende demostrar la viabilidad de la teoría semiótica en la descripción musical—en especial siguiendo el trabajo del semiólogo Finlandés Eero Tarasti. En este artículo, procuro discutir la importancia de la semiótica en el análisis musical como un método que pueda conciliar el aparente conflicto entre la actividad verbal y la lógica interna de la música. Para ello, propongo un análisis musical de la obra para cuatro guitarras <i>Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia</i> escrita por el compositor Cubano Leo Brouwer, en donde utilizo la teoría semiótica derivada de la obra de Peirce, Greimas, Agawu, Tarasti, y del compositor Paulo Chagas, como centro para habilitar un diálogo más comprensivo de la obra, y de sus procesos comunicativos. | Abstract This article attempts to posit that semiotic analysis—as outlined by the Finnish semiotician Eero Tarasti—can come to be a viable and efficient exercise that conciliates the gap between verbal activity and an accurate portrayal of the inner knowledge of music. In the article, I briefly discuss the feasibility of said theory as seen through the works of Peirce, Agawu, Tarasti, Wittgenstein, and the composer Paulo Chagas. However, the main objective of this document is to provide a semiotic account of <i>Leo Brouwer's Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia</i> , following Tarasti's comprehensive outline of what a music semiotic analysis should constitute. |
| Palabras clave Semiótica Musical, Leo Brouwer, Música Latinoamericana. | Keywords Music Semiotics, Leo Brouwer, Latin American music. |
| Fecha de recepción: octubre 2013 Fecha de aceptación: mayo 2014 Fecha de publicación: octubre 2014 | Received: October 2013 Acceptance Date: May 2014 Release Date: October 2014 |

Esta obra está sujeta a la licencia de Reconocimiento-NoComercial-SinObraDerivada 4.0 España de Creative Commons. Puede copiarla, distribuirla y comunicarla públicamente siempre que cite su autor y la revista que lo publica (TRANS-Revista Transcultural de Música), agregando la dirección URL y/o un enlace a este sitio: www.sibetrans.com/trans. No la utilice para fines comerciales y no haga con ella obra derivada. La licencia completa se puede consultar en http://creativecommons.org/choose/?lang=es_ES

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International license. You can copy, distribute, and transmit the work, provided that you mention the author and the source of the material, either by adding the URL address of the article and/or a link to the web page: www.sibetrans.com/trans. It is not allowed to use the work for commercial purposes and you may not alter, transform, or build upon this work. You can check the complete license agreement in the following link: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

***Aguacero: A Semiotic Analysis of Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia* by Leo Brouwer**
Daniel Fernando Castro Pantoja (University of California, Riverside)

There seems to be a recurring problem of communication that arises within the implicit contractual agreement held between composer, performer, and audience. Does the compositional process, along with its obvious but necessary conjunctions, provide an effective path of communication to convey both extramusical and intramusical information to its audience, given the so-called “abstract” nature of music? Can a composer articulate meaning by making a deliberate compositional decision? Even further, can the analyst or musicologist communicate said meaning verbally?

It appears as if these questions, which are conspicuously central to the practice of music are often disregarded and considered a given. In its place only the syntax of such language is what is generally addressed in most analytical cases, leaving semantics aside. Fortunately enough, there has been a growing proclivity—although noticeably faint—that directly addresses issues of this sort (starting with the work of eighteenth century music theorists such as Johann Mattheson, Francesco Galeazzi, and Johann Friedrich Daube), particularly with matters related to the “persistent concern with a shadowy linguistic analogy” (Agawu 1991: 7), as articulated by the African musicologist and semiotician Kofi Agawu in the introduction to his revelatory work *Playing with Signs*.

As Agawu states in the aforementioned book,

For language to provide a useful model for musical analysis, it must do at least three things: first, it must explain the laws that govern the moment-by-moment succession of events in a piece, that is, the syntax of music. Second and consequently, it must explain the constraints affecting organization at the highest level—levels of sentence, paragraph, chapter, and beyond. It must, in other words, provide a framework for understanding the discourse of music. Third, it must demonstrate, rather than merely assume, that music represents a bona fide system of communication, and must then go on to show what is being communicated and how. (Agawu 1991: 9).

It is within the framework of the latter two items that this document is conceived, in the hopes of

providing a logical account that addresses semiotic theory, especially the one delineated by the Finnish semiotician Eero Tarasti. Consequently, the main purpose of this document is to exemplify in a clear and concrete fashion the use of semiotic analysis as outlined by Tarasti (1994: 47-58), and apply it to the analysis of a musical piece. For such purposes, I have decided to use Leo Brouwer's *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia* (Cuban Landscape with Rain), written for four guitars in 1984, as an example that serves the aforementioned objective well.

A Brief Introduction to Music Semiotics

One could make a rather obvious, but perhaps safe assumption, and posit that the utterance of musical signification is dependent on the efficiency and development of verbal activity. It is then of no surprise to encounter such a close affinity between music and semiotics when attempting to solve this conflict between the world of music and linguistics. Semiotics, in this case, can be understood as a dynamic and interdisciplinary field (involving a wide array of disciplines like linguistics, anthropology, and literary studies) that deals with "an increasingly complex apparatus of definitions aimed at distributing all of reality, the conceptual, and the experiential into various categories of signs" (Benveniste quoted in Agawu 1991: 10). Consequently, semiotics serves an enterprise in which the distinct categories of signs as understood by Charles Sanders Peirce (1998: 4-10) can be distributed to gain sense of the complexity of the communicative process. Agawu gives a very insightful description of said complexity when referring to the identity of a work, and thus, highlights the argument in pro of a mediating system that will enable to explain it (referring in other words to semiotics):

Then, depending on whether we locate it in a certain notational representation, or in a specific realization, or in an idealization of that realization, or in the interface of a specific realization and the listener's idealization, or in the composer's idealized realization - we should go on to develop the appropriate definitional apparatus. (Agawu 1991: 10).

In a similar manner, the Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein finds a similar problematic when referring to an even more fundamental issue of communication: the expression of the understanding of music. As the Brazilian composer Paulo Chagas enunciates in his soon-to-be-published book *Unsayable Music*,

Wittgenstein's thesis is that music is self-contained in the sense that it doesn't need to express something exterior because it is complete in itself. This crucial idea is that the understanding of music cannot be explained casually. Although, if there could be something through which we could express our understanding of music—such as a word we utter, or a facial expression, or a gesture we make with the hand or head—, these expressions can demonstrate understanding, they say nothing about the essence of the understanding. (Chagas 2013: 24).

The logical consequence of such affirmation is that there appears to exist yet another issue of communication, but this time dealing with the added difficulty of personal experience. The analyst or listener, is constraint within the limits of internal experience, and in spite of being somewhat able to communicate that through gestures—which can be interpreted as indexes of the internal understanding of music— it does not necessarily correlate to “listening with understanding.” In other words, gestures can be more expressive than the aesthetic valuing of a piece, as they are perhaps gesticulations of genuine emotions directly triggered by music. Nonetheless, as Chagas enunciates: "For Wittgenstein, the gesture realizes the impossibility of describing what we feel, shows the impossibility of developing a scientific aesthetic[s] to clarify music from the logical, casual standpoint" (Chagas 2013: 27). If there is an impossibility of communication then how should one proceed? This also leads into a quasi-existential inquiry: is there even a point in attempting to communicate the impossible? Luckily, Wittgenstein's conception of music, as in language, works in a contextual manner. It is then possible to convey musical information, or the inner logic of music, through verbal utterances if its significance is replicated within a particular culture. If a particular musical moment or element has been turned into a sign that through conventions of musical tradition convey some meaning, in other words, a symbol, in the Peircian sense (more of this later); then communication is attainable. As Chagas explains, "Music refers to itself, and to the specific culture - the specific time and space in which it emerges. It includes the totality of "forms of life" - all manifestations of culture of that time, architecture, movies, religion, etc" (Chagas 2013: 34). It is along these lines that this case study can be justified, as it can only be explained to work under a logical, efficient framework, which on its own is moderated by its contextual correlative.

Similarly, the French semiotician Émile Benveniste, argues that the world of signs is recognized solely within a particular context, which by definition necessarily excludes the claim

that posits the existence of universal signs. Benveniste addresses it as follows,

Taken in itself, the sign is pure identity itself, totally foreign to other signs, the signifying foundation of language, the material necessity for statement. It exists when it is recognized as signifier by all members of a linguistic community, and when it calls forth for each individual roughly the same associations and oppositions. Such is the province and the criterion of semiotics. (Quoted in Agawu 1991: 14)

Following this train of thought, Eero Tarasti argues in his book *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*, that there is a need for a mediating system of musical analysis that resolves the issue between verbal activity and an accurate portrayal of the inner knowledge of music. This issue was labeled by the American musicologist Charles Seeger, as Tarasti paraphrases in his introductory lines, as the main problem of musicology in our times. Tarasti argues that there appears to be a communication gap in the field of musicology, which relies on verbal activity as its primal form for conveying information to the "external" world, when attempting to bring knowledge of the inner logic of music. Verbal activity is thus, a limiting or perhaps foreign tool that does not provide a truthful portrayal of the complexity—some might argue for the simplicity as well—of music. This premise, of course, works under the assumption that music and verbal language are mutually exclusive.

In addition, given the plurality of musical styles present nowadays, and our overall consciousness and knowledge of musical compositional processes, there is also a need for a system that reaches beyond the technological and historical areas. This can also be evidenced by the trend that musicology has taken in the past decades that expands into the anthropological realm. Ergo, the need to design a system that encompasses all these elements and that even enters into the area of signs, and perhaps the idea of universal concepts in music (if one adheres to such concept, of course). This idea is better explained by using the study of literature (if one considers music as a narrative art that is) as a parallel example: the study of literature will prove to be a fallacious discipline if the exegesis of meaning is excluded from the core analysis. Subsequently, one could easily argue that this same logic applies to music in which it is not sufficient to only understand syntax but semantics as well. Taking this into consideration, one sees validity in Tarasti's argument in pro of a mediatory system that, even though may not offer a complete solution to the apparent musical-verbal conflict, may in fact provide a complacent result when dealing with the analysis of a particular musical work.

Fortunately, Tarasti outlines an analytical process that encompasses both the technological and ideological fields, by using semiotics as its main core for the study of music. Tarasti employs concepts developed by several semioticians including Peirce, Saussure, and Greimas, and adapts them to work under a musical framework.

It is necessary, however, to begin the analysis with a contextual approach, in terms of cultural, historical, and biographical lineaments, which will enable a more compendious understanding of the piece, and thus, permitting a sound semiotic analysis. Therefore, I will first give a brief but detailed account of Leo Brouwer's compositional output and aesthetics, followed by a summarized description of the semiotic concepts that Tarasti uses in the first two chapters of his book. Simultaneously, I will use Brouwer's *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia* as the model to accompany such descriptions, and thus, providing the reader with a fair demonstration of semiotics when dealing with musical analysis.

Leo Brouwer's Compositional Aesthetic

Juan Leovigildo Brouwer can be considered one of the most notable Cuban composers of the 20th and 21st century. Paul Century introduces this emblematic musician as follows:

Leo Brouwer — guitarist, composer, conductor, teacher, and essayist — figures prominently among the most active living Cuban musicians today. Regarded worldwide as one of the foremost living composer/ guitarists, Brouwer has contributed an essential component to the guitar's repertoire, with many of his works serving as fundamental pedagogical mainstays of the classical guitarist's curriculum. (Century 1987: 151).

Brouwer's first compositional impulses featured extended tonal/modal language, and a deep desire to fill in the "gaps" encountered in the guitar's standard repertoire (an attitude that still carries on). The latter being a defying, youthful and somewhat naïve attitude that originates from the composer's realization at a very young age of the absent contribution from the great composers of the Western tradition to the Classical Guitar's main body of literature. In his own words,

[after] learning the so-called great repertoire, the grand repertoire ... I realized that there were a lot of gaps. We didn't have *L'Histoire du Soldat* by Stravinsky, we didn't have the chamber music by Hindemith, we didn't

have any sonatas by Bartók. So, as I was young and ambitious and crazy, I told myself that if Bartók didn't write any sonatas, maybe I could do it. What a beautiful thing it would be if Brahms had written a guitar concerto! But he didn't, so maybe I can. This was the beginning of composing for me. (Kronenberg 2008: 33).

In terms of his overall compositional output and the way it is often treated and classified, Brouwer seems to fall under the recurring trend in musicology that analyzes and understands a composer's work in a biographical manner. Generally speaking, Brouwer's work is divided into three main stages. As indicated by Victoria Eli Rodriguez,

Three phases can be identified in Brouwer's work: the first, nationalistic (1955–62); the second, avant-garde (1962–7); and a third in which avant garde elements diminish and, particularly after 1980, a creative process described by the composer as 'new simplicity' emerges. (Eli Rodriguez).

Accordingly, *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia* being written in 1984 falls into the latter category. This is also reflected in the compositional style of this piece, which borrows from the aesthetic elements of minimalism, regarded sometimes as very "simplistic" in its nature.

It is important to denote that Brouwer's musical language does not feature an exclusively Cuban sound in spite of being inherently Cuban in character. In other words, his music should be perceived in a dialectical manner that synthesizes Afro-Cuban aesthetics with modern European trends. Furthermore, his overall compositional output relates to the creation of a universal language that conciliates his African-Indigenous heritage with European aesthetics, as well as the gap between "popular" and "erudite" music. As Clive Kronenberg puts it,

In this sense Brouwer endeavors to eliminate the contradiction which usually exists between the 'high arts,' centered on structural complexity, and 'the popular' which, in his words, 'are easily recognized so as not to disturb the intellectual faculties of the listener'. Through this universal undertaking, Leo Brouwer remains accessible to the general listening audience, embracing and promoting aspects of 'people's culture' while at the same time raising their critical dimensions. (Kronenberg 2008: 44).

Brouwer deliberately rejects elements that are clearly adhered to Western aesthetics, but he does so without removing the "universality" in them. Subsequently, the musical output remains somewhat "uncharacterized" as the goal is to undertake the creation of universal forms that would appeal to a platonic sense of aesthetics regardless of culture or origin. Consequently, he

gives priority to non-Western derived elements, but still preserves a rendered version of the ones that were clearly imposed by the Spanish during the colony, and that make part of his heritage regardless of its conspicuously violent history. Hypothetically, Brouwer's compositional philosophy could slightly suggest that the removal of nationalistic elements constitutes a somewhat efficient solution to the troubling issue of identity generated during the colony. This becomes evident later during his avant-garde period with compositions that make use of aleatoric elements, extended techniques and atonal harmony (e.g. *La Espiral Eterna*). However, one has to understand Brouwer's transition into the avant-garde as a Hegelian process, in which the resulting "product" does not lack identity, but on the contrary, has achieved a "universal" character. In this sense, Afro-Cuban music is delivered in a more abstract manner, which propels it into a different direction, being more accessible in a global and transcultural connotation. As we will see, this element of "nationalistic" abstraction will be conspicuously evident in *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia*.

Nevertheless, one has to place Brouwer's inherent post-modernist aesthetic, along with his compositional philosophy, within the general trend observed in Latin American musical discourse—one that attempts to conciliate the long-lasting debate of identity evinced in Latin American art music, which arises from the opposition between nationalism and universalism. In this sense, the piece under scrutiny calls for an in-depth evaluation of the material in terms of hegemonic versus non-hegemonic cultures that given the main subject of this document, unfortunately, I will not discuss at length. Nonetheless, I will insist on reflecting upon the following inquiry: is the concept of cultural *difference*, or in this case the lack of it, the most efficient solution to the troublesome yet immensely interesting problematic of identity? One cannot help but wonder if revealing the contradictions of representation could in fact uncover a more accurate portrayal of Brouwer's Latin American mind. Following this train of thought, Brouwer's attempt to "universalize" the national could be read as both an unconscious and conscious portrayal of the power play between hegemonic and non-hegemonic cultural traits—one that reveals compositional decisions that are simultaneously resisting and assimilating Western culture, and thus, fulfilling the desire to concurrently belong and oppose euro-centric socio-historical structures.

Semiotic Analysis

As stated in the introduction, I will use Tarasti's model of semiotic analysis to give a comprehensive description of the piece. Tarasti's theory, as he explains, deals primarily with the French semiotician Algirdas Julien Greimas' generative course, and in a secondary position¹ deals with the American Philosopher Charles Peirce's semiotic theory. However, one has to take into consideration that Tarasti's achievement does not strictly adhere to these theories: it is best understood as a semiotic muse. As Tarasti states, "in what follows I shall use Greimas' model only as a starting point and source of inspiration, and shall quite freely outline my own model of generation of musical meaning" (Tarasti 1994: 47). It is also imperative to understand that his approach is not as formalist as one would expect, especially when dealing with a system that is based on very rigid procedures (as it derives from linguistics). However, this is a deliberate approach as he considers that music will reveal its "true" form by employing a "softer" method that deals with a hermeneutical-philosophical discourse (Tarasti 1994: 48). Accordingly, I will first proceed by describing some of the elements present in Tarasti's theory that derive from Greimas' generative trajectory, and that deal with an analysis that begins at the deeper levels (background) and makes its way to the surface level (foreground).

Coherence Beyond Structure

As stated above, Greimas' discourse deals with the deeper levels first, which if translated to musical terms would relate to matters of form and harmonic design. For this reason, Tarasti's begins his theory with the concept of *isotopies*, which he defines as deep achronic structures that hold the piece together. In musical terms, one could relate the concept of *isotopie* to several elements such as form, musical style, thematicity (in the case of narrative forms of music, e.g. program music), text strategy, texture, and thematic transformation, among others. In other words, *isotopie* basically refers to the principles that articulate the coherence of a musical work. Even further, one can talk of multiple *isotopies*, if referring to bitonality or polyrhythmic passages. As well, it is possible to encounter opposing *isotopies* simultaneously, which given the context may be indicative of irony, or of deliberate contradiction. In other words, an *isotopie* can be any type of

¹ Described by Tarasti as a "second theme". See Eero Tarasti. *A Theory of Musical Semiotics* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994), 47.

abstract structure that allows the work to "make sense." As Tarasti explains, "Of interest is not the mere fact that this type of structure looms in the background, but the way it manifest temporally in the course of a musical work" (Tarasti 1994: 7). One could interpret the concept of *isotopies* as the elements that provide the context for a work to be understood comprehensively.

In the case of Brouwer's *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia*, one can identify several *isotopies*. Firstly, there is a clear sense of form delineated by sections that are distinct from each other, and that are fundamentally connected to the narrativity of the piece. Given that the title of the piece is highly suggestive of what seems to be different stages in which a human being can experience rain in Cuba, each section is reminiscent of a special type of fluvial atmosphere. For example, the opening section may be suggestive of the first droplets of water entering before a storm, falling at disparate times (although if viewed within Brouwer's aesthetic, it could also signal to a generative pointillism that alludes to the complexity of Cuban polyrhythmic textures), and displaying textural homogeneity, perhaps aurally mimicking little raindrops of similar density and intensity—the calm before the storm (see figure 1). Following, the atmosphere gets denser and denser, featuring different textures by means of compositional techniques such as close imitation (see figure 2; rehearsal letter E), or aggregative pentatonicism (see figure 3; rehearsal letter F). The piece reaches a climax during the penultimate section (see figure 4; rehearsal letter G), where the texture shifts (in terms of timbre) from natural sound (plucking relatively close to the sound hole, where the distance between the fretted note and the spot where the player attacks the string is approximate to the length of twelve frets, in other words, an interval of an octave) to a very aggressive Bartok pizzicato— a conspicuous and explosive depiction of hail falling from the sky, and hitting the surface ground disparately and aggressively. Gradually, the texture becomes more docile and sweet, as the composer calls for a leisurely shift to "natural sound" as well as the pacing of the surface rhythmic activity (see figure 4; rehearsal letter H). Finally, the opening bars from the A section are brought back as a coda, perhaps symbolizing the last moments of what appears to be the end of this Cuban storm. Consequently, one could state that the form reflects two *isotopies* that are present simultaneously: one that refers to the structural design of the piece, and the other that deals with the implicit narrative of the work.

A musical score for four staves, labeled I, II, III, and IV. Each staff contains a series of notes, with some notes marked with a circled '4' and a '1' above them. The score is divided into five measures by vertical bar lines. Above the first four measures, there are 'x4' annotations. Dynamic markings include 'p' (piano) and 'l.v.' (lento vivace). The notation is in a single system with four staves.

Figure 1.

A musical score for four staves, starting at measure 49. The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes performance instructions: 'Più mosso' and 'E Legato (sul tasto ad lib.)'. Dynamic markings include 'pp' (pianissimo), 'ppp' (pianississimo), and 'p' (piano). The notation is in a single system with four staves.

Figure 2.



Figure 3.

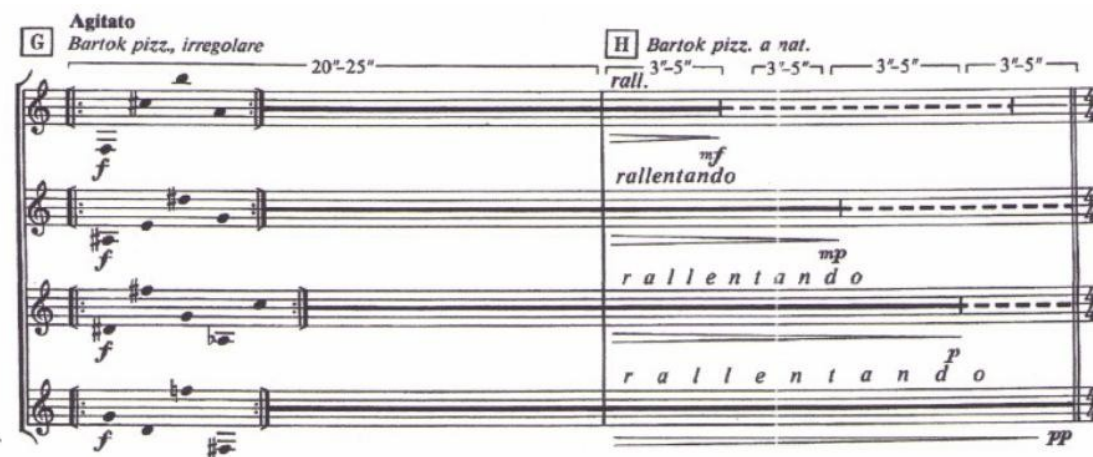


Figure 4.

There are additional *isotopies* present in the work. For example, one could label the style from which Brouwer is deriving its main elements as an *isotopie*. Ergo, minimalism appears here as a deep structure that holds the piece together. One could even argue that this compositional style enables the program of the music to unfold: the use of minimal elements provides the composer with a tool that allows him to offer a truthful portrayal of the program behind the piece. The sound of rain, could be argued, is more rhythmical than melodic: hence, minimalism emerging as *isotopie* than enables rhythmic interplay to occur, given that its center is certainly not melodic or harmonic complexity (at least not in a Wagnerian sense).

Finally, one encounters the idea of "Cubanness" as an *isotopie* that provides a deeper insight of the meaning of the piece. At a first glance, it is easy to determine that the piece deals with the idea of water: flowing, cascading figures, timberal homogeneity, and textural changes that may be interpreted as catalysts for the idea of a storm (refer to the section on icon, index,

and symbol). However, there is not a direct element that indicates that the piece is conspicuously Cuban. In very general terms, one relates the aesthetics of Cuban music with nationalistic traits that are always present in traditional music and that derive from the Afro-Cuban tradition. Elements such as the rhythmic figure of the *cinquillo*, or melodic figurations deriving from the *montuno* come to mind.² But as stated before, these traits are not clearly found in the piece. Surely, one could argue that there is a fair amount of syncopation, which often relates to the Afro-Cuban tradition, but there is not a clear figuration that hints at the idea of "Cubanness." However, the texture of the piece, being a guitar quartet that although divided into four distinct parts, it does not show a major separation in terms of range nor timbre, pointing in the direction of a very distinct element of "traditional" Cuban aesthetics. This is also supported by the fact there does not seem to be a specific function adhered to each part. For example, in romantic music one can comprehensibly distinguish the function of each line: the upper voice usually carries the melody, there is often a middle part that serves as accompaniment, and a bass line that functions as the harmonic basis for the development of the piece. But as mentioned above, there is ambiguity in terms of a specific function assigned to each line. In fact, the parts often seem to overlap creating an intricate textural web that gives the allusion of multiple drops of water falling at aleatoric rates. This textural formation leads one to conclude that what Brouwer is presenting here is an *isotopie* that points in the direction of "Cubanness."

But how does this texture reflect the aesthetic of Cuban music? We know by the title of the piece that perhaps the music should contain Cuban traits. However, it may just be a simple allusion as to how the composer imagines or sonifies the sound of rain while living in Cuba. Nonetheless, the polyrhythmic texture generated between the four parts, along with somewhat assigned pitches that are placed in a similar range, and that are repeated over and over, created the illusion of a *batá* ensemble—a prominent form of percussion present in music rituals in Cuba, specifically related to the Yoruba. These traits derive from Western African traditions, which Brouwer is commonly known for using in his pieces (Hudson 2003: 86). As evidenced when comparing figure 5 (Hudson 2003: 92), and figure 6, there seems to be a similarity between the transcription of *batá* music and the opening section of *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia*. Furthermore, this piece belongs to a series of "landscape" pieces that Brouwer wrote, including *Paisaje Cubano con Rumba* (Cuban Landscape with Rumba) and *Paisaje Cubano con Campanas* (Cuban Landscape

² For a detailed discussion of these traits, refer to Alejo Carpentier's *La Música en Cuba*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1972 [1946], 42.

with Bells). For example, in *Paisaje Cubano con Rumba*, Brouwer clearly delineates this polyrhythmic texture to make a more literal allusion of Cuban percussion which even calls for “prepared” guitar (as in Cage's prepared piano pieces) to give the guitar a more percussive sound.³ However, in *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia*, Brouwer gives us a less direct and more abstract form that emulates the “call and response” dynamic, characteristic of the *batá* percussion ensemble. This answer, although apparently a far-fetched idea, seems to satisfy my initial inquiry in regards to the *isotopie* of “Cubanness” found in the piece. This is also an indexical characteristic that will later be discussed, as it concerns Peircian theory.



Figure 5.



Figure 6.

Tarasti follows the identification of *isotopies* with three categories that he classifies as constitutive core elements of a sound semiotic analysis. These categories are: *spatiality*, which refers to the articulation of tonal space; *temporality*, which deals with the notion of temporal organization, and *actoriality*, which deals with thematics and “anthropomorphic” elements of the text. I will exclude the *actoriality* category, as the piece does not deal directly with any direct literary sources or distinct themes that develop as in a romantic work, given its more “atomic” constitution, which opposes the Western preference for an organicist development.

When applying these categories to the analysis of the piece, one finds that both the spatial and temporal categories serve as a straightforward outline of the general characteristics of the piece. *Spaciality* in this piece deals in the “inner” sense with the diatonic “non-functional”

³ For a more detailed discussion and analysis of *Paisaje Cubano con Rumba* see Hudson 2003: 23-44.

harmony and the pentatonicism (which reflects Brouwer's stance of universal traits in music), and on the "outer" sense deals with the way that the sound-space is altered by an ensemble of instruments of the same kind that project their sound coming from different directions (a sort of panning effect). *Temporality*, on the other hand, is conveyed through a dichotomy of rhythmic activity. Even though, in the score there is a great deal of control, even in the "looser" sections that have no metric indication (see figure 3, and 4; rehearsal letters F and G), aurally the listener may perceive a tighter rhythmic unit during the opening section, but as the piece unfolds, it becomes more elastic. This is taken to the extent that the pizzicato section may be perceived as a pastiche of untamed chaos. The dichotomy then is presented between the very metric first measures, in which there is no room for a rubato-type of interpretation, and the highly organized but aurally looser form of the section mentioned above.

Modalities

In a similar manner, Tarasti taps into Greimas' theory of modality, which refers to the modalizations of speech as an element that provides meaning. In other words, the natural inflexions of speech give additional meaning to the interpretation of the text, often adding an extra layer of meaning. As Tarasti states, "Modalities denotes all the intentions by which the person who voices an utterance may color his or her speech i.e. modalities convey evaluative attitudes (such as will, belief, wishes) toward the content of an utterance" (Tarasti 1994: 38). The modalities that Tarasti adapts are the following: *being* (state of rest, consonance, stability), *doing* (musical action, dynamism, dissonance), *becoming* (natural process of music), *will* (musical direction), *know* (cognitive moment of music), *must* (aspects of genre and style), *can* (technical resources in performance), and *believe* (epistemic values of music i.e. truthful/untruthful to the narrativity of the work). As well, Tarasti outlines a system of classification of these modalities that allows the listener to compare and understand them as separate units that work under a hierarchical framework that varies accordingly. This system uses the symbols -, -, 0, +, ++ to denote deficient, insufficient, neutral, sufficient, and excessive amount of modality, accordingly. My personal interpretation of how these modalities are contained in the piece can be found in figure 7.

| | |
|----------|----|
| Being | + |
| Doing | 0 |
| Becoming | ++ |
| Will | ++ |
| Know | - |
| Can | + |
| Must | ++ |
| Believe | + |

Figure 7.

Given the brief nature of this document, I will not go into extensive detail when discussing these modalities. However, I will provide a brief description of how these elements are found in Brouwer's *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia* according to my subjective reading of the piece: there is a great amount of *being* that *doing* in this piece, which is reflected by both the predominance of consonance over the piece and constant repetition of the cells that give a sense of stability and rest. However, one cannot simply exclude the fact that the piece gradually evolves into a more dissonant and unstable entity. There is a greater deal of kinetic energy being generated as the piece reaches its climax. Thus, the justification of the modality of *becoming* as excessive. In a similar manner, there is a vast amount of *will* and *must*, which is explained by the intention of the composer to follow a specific program and convey it in a truthful sense (therefore my rating of believing as sufficient). On the other hand, there is a deficiency in the modality of *know*, as the isomorphisms present in the piece allows the listener to understand the general meaning of the piece without an *a priori* understanding of musical knowledge. Finally, when referring to the modality of *can*, there is a fair amount of technical procedures required by the performer to accurately create the soundscape proposed by Brouwer: the performer is in need of technical proficiency of certain techniques like the tremolo, or the Bartok pizzicato in order to convey a truthful interpretation of the work.

As demonstrated above, modalities can function within musicological discourse to describe the piece in its musical terms, and even tap into the discourse of embodiment—one that is conspicuously absent in theoretical analysis. Nonetheless, the reading presented merely constitutes a definite description of the piece, and it should be interpreted in that sense. My

purpose, as it has been mentioned before, is solely to provide the reader with a possible application of semiotic theory to musical analysis.

I will now shift direction and provide a brief analysis of the piece by using the Peircian concepts of index, icon and symbol. It is important to denote that given the nature of these concepts (striving to find a universal system that describes language in a truthful and accurate manner), there might be some overlapping of the content described by using Greimas' theory. This sort of redundancy is not pointed out by Tarasti, and falls into a personal commentary modeled by my experience dealing with the aforementioned concepts.

Icon, Index, and Symbol

The tripartite foundation of semiotics—icon, index, and symbol—articulated by Charles Sanders Peirce, is best understood if one recalls Vladimir Karbusicky's brilliant explanation of these categories of signs (quoted in Monelle 2000: 17), in which he employs the cuckoo's call as a multivalent example that shows—in musical terms that is—both the interrelatedness of these categories and its corresponding differences. In a strictly Peircian sense, however, an icon is simply a sign that resembles an object. Visually, for example, a photograph resembles that which the camera attempts to capture (this, in its broadest and simplest sense—no need to venture into Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*). Musically, as Raymond Monelle shows, an icon can be read as the composer's intention to aurally portray phenomena. The cuckoo's call, therefore, can be understood as an icon that is placed in a piece to aurally imitate the "real" cuckoo's call (e.g. Mahler's *First Symphony*). However, this sign can also be interpreted indexically—that which signifies by virtue of causality—, as the cuckoo's call can also come to represent the heralding of spring, given its association with said season and, if for example, it is also orchestrated. Even further, once this aural depiction is governed by convention, it becomes a symbol, which can either show iconic or indexical features.

In order to proceed, nonetheless, one needs to understand how these three sign categories fit into Tarasti's semiotic schema, and how they are represented in Brouwer's piece. Firstly, as mentioned before, an icon deals with isomorphisms that give a literal aural depiction of an object. For example, in *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia*, one finds a great amount of iconic elements. As explained above, when referring to *isotopies* (the overlap I was previously referring to), there

are moments in the piece (e.g. rehearsal letter G) that convey the idea of solid precipitation—hail falling from the sky and hitting the ground. Other instances can be considered iconic as well. For example, the harmonics played in measures 46-48 (see figure 8) in the third guitar resemble the sound of a single drop of water hitting a surface and resonating in a room.



Figure 8.

Secondly, since an index can be described as a category that has a relation of contiguity with an object—presenting a major form of abstraction if compared to an icon—musically speaking, the index can be inferred as an element that displays emotion or a specific mood that shows a relation to an object. In other words, its meaning is derived from context by causality. In this piece, one can find a vast amount of indexical moments to the point that I would argue that this piece is more indexical than iconic. As explained in the previous section, flowing figures of measures 51-72 are reminiscent of water cascading, and flowing in all sorts of directions. In addition, the imitative texture found in this segment can be suggestive of the idea of a fugue, which by etymological definition relates to the idea of escape or to "flee" from something (from the latin *fugere*), which if placed under the appropriate context may come to signify a leak. Perhaps, this is a far-fetched idea, but I am willing to enunciate it as it interesting to speculate as to why Brouwer decided to use close imitation as means to convey the idea of rain. Another indexical moment can be found in the opening section. In this particular passage, Brouwer's choice of calid diatonicism, with the addition of the performer's ability to play these single notes with a warm and round tone, can be indexical of the warm weather experienced in a place like Cuba. Similarly, the very idea of "Cubanness" arises from an indexical stance. In this sense, the call-and-response-type of interaction between voices, as well as the intricate layering of rhythmic activity, serve as indexical

signifiers of Cuban identity. As in the case above, I am aware that the ideas being presenting can fall into the category of speculative, but I am willing to present them, as they seem logical given the context presented here.

Lastly, the symbol is explained by Tarasti, as a sign that through conventions of musical tradition convey meaning (Leonard Ratner labeled these as *topoi* or musical topics), or in better terms, subjects of musical discourse. Following this train of thought, my description of the idea of "Cubanness" as both an *isotopie* and as an index, can also act as a symbol. If reinterpreted in Peircian terms, the polyrhythmic texture symbolizes Brouwer's relation to the idea of Cubanness, which he chooses to depict through the allusion of conventional signifiers of Cuban culture such as *batá* drumming. It is imperative to emphasize the fact that a symbol is an expression that is interpreted *only* through convention, whether it constitutes a trait that is understood by its whole cultural context, or an element that can be attributed "uniquely" to a composer, belonging exclusively to his/her vernacular. In this case, one could refer to Alejo Carpentier's collection of Cuban traits delineated in *La Música en Cuba*, and how these have been employed and modified by composers of the likes of Amadeo Roldán or Alejandro García Caturla, as examples of musical symbols used to denote Cuban identity. These symbols, or topics, which now belong to the collective imaginary of a particular culture, need a full cultural study: they must be understood contextually, and its emergence and development, traced. This is, therefore, a matter left for future examination.

Denouement

If music is to be understood as a cultural artifact that allows for communication to occur, then it follows that its discourse should be treated within the same framework as culture: semiotically. As the American musicologist Gary Tomlinson recalls in his article *The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology*—following the work of the prominent anthropologist Clifford Geertz—culture should be understood as a field that deals in signs; in Geertz' own words: an "interworked systems of construable signs" (quoted in Tomlinson 1984: 351). It is then logical to assume, as Tomlinson affirms, that music necessarily makes part of this "web of culture" and that it should be studied as such. What follows then, is an interpretative exercise that arises from the necessity to validate cultural explications, which appear as signs, and which require a sense of *fullness* when studied.

Semiotic analysis, therefore, can prove to be a very effective method to analyze and understand a musical piece, not only in its technical processes, but in exposing its underlying ideology as well. Personally, I believe that Tarasti's outline for music analysis —with its "soft" method—when combined with theoretical analysis and a historical framework, permits a more comprehensive understanding of a musical work. It could even come to be regarded as a constitutive element of what the prominent anthropologist Clifford Geertz labeled as "thick description" (Geertz 1973). In a similar fashion, I am willing to posit that semiotics can provide a complacent method that compensates for the communication gap generated by the use of verbal activity as means of conveying musical information and meaning. Furthermore, it can come to be extremely efficient when dealing with pieces that relate to nationalistic trends, particularly in the study of music symbols or *topoi*. These symbols, which are lying vibrant on the surface—while patiently waiting to be deconstructed by the musicologist—can constitute an effective path that achieves a "thicker" understanding of culture, embedded necessarily in a hermeneutical context that opposes its ideological nemesis: a hermetically-sealed stance where the meaning of the work is solely circumscribed around the private play of musical gestures. In simple terms, semantics over syntax.

BIBLIOGRAFÍA

- Agawu, V. Kofi. 1991. *Playing with Signs: A Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Brouwer, Leo. 1987. *Cuban Landscape with Rain: 4 guitars*. Québec, Canada: Doberman-Ypann.
- Carpentier, Alejo. 1972 [1946]. *La Música en Cuba*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
- Century, Paul. 1987. "Leo Brouwer: a Portrait of the Artist in Socialist Cuba." *Latin American Music Review* 8 (2): 151-171. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/780096> [accessed October 27, 2013].
- Chagas, Paulo. 2013. *Unsayable Music, Six Reflections on Musical Semiotics, Electroacoustic and Digital Music*. Riverside, California: Manuscript.
- Eli Rodríguez, Victoria. "Brouwer, Leo." Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online. Oxford University Press, accessed October 25, 2013 <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/04092>.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretative Theory of Culture." in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 3-30. New York: Basic Books.

Hudson, John. 2006. "The Afro-Cuban and the Avant-Garde: Unification of Style and Gesture in the Guitar Music of Leo Brouwer." DMA diss., The University of Georgia.

Kronenberg, Clive. 2008. "Guitar Composer Leo Brouwer: The Concept of a Universal Language." *Tempo* 62 (245): 30-46.

Monelle, Raymond. 2000. *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Peirce, Charles S. 1998. *The Essential Peirce selected philosophical writings. Volume 2, 1893-1913*, ed. Charles S. Peirce Edition Project, 4-10. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

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

Tomlinson, Gary. 1984. "The Web of Culture: A Context for Musicology." *19th-Century Music* 17(3): 350-362.

Daniel Castro Pantoja (Bogotá, Colombia, 1989) obtuvo su *Bachelor's in Music* en la Universidad de Loyola en Nueva Orleans, donde se graduó *Summa Cum Laude* en interpretación de Guitarra Clásica en el año 2011. Posteriormente, se le fue otorgada otra beca completa para completar sus estudios de Maestría en interpretación de Guitarra Clásica con el maestro Stephen Aron en la Universidad de Akron en el estado de Ohio, donde se graduó en Mayo del 2013. Actualmente se encuentra cursando su primer año de doctorado en musicología en la Universidad de California, Riverside bajo la asesoría del Dr. Walter Clark.

[

Cita recomendada

Castro Pantoja, Daniel. 2014. "Aguacero: A Semiotic Analysis of *Paisaje Cubano con Lluvia* by Leo Brouwer". *TRANS-Revista Transcultural de Música/Transcultural Music Review* 18 [Fecha de consulta: dd/mm/aa]



Esta obra está sujeta a la licencia de Reconocimiento-NoComercial-SinObraDerivada 4.0 España de Creative Commons. Puede copiarla, distribuirla y comunicarla públicamente siempre que cite su autor y la revista que lo publica (TRANS-Revista Transcultural de Música), agregando la dirección URL y/o un enlace a este sitio: www.sibetrans.com/trans. No la utilice para fines comerciales y no haga con ella obra derivada. La licencia completa se puede consultar en http://creativecommons.org/choose/?lang=es_ES