AN APPROACH TO A LATINAMERICAN COMPUTER MUSIC

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Abstract

This paper describes some significant general tendencies in Latinamerican electroacoustic and computer music developed by both individuals and groups of composers, emphasizing on those trends considered the most important: on the one hand, a high-end, strongly technological/computer-dependent electroacoustic and computer music represented by some young composers, and, on the other hand, a group of composers, who have composed instrumental music as well, identified in what I call a "pure Latinamerican contemporary music". It is proposed in what way a new and Latinamerican aesthetic approach can emerge from those two tendencies taking advantage of both of them. The importance of distinguishing between "emerging" and "pure Third Worldcountries" in the LatinAmerican region is also outlined. The relationship between the (lack of) infrastructure and the possible aesthetic results is likewise considered.

Introduction

Ricardo Dal Farra [Dal Farra, 1994] says: "Some people are now looking to Latin America with the idea that it holds the future (at least in some respects); others seem to think that Latin America does not exist at all. How difficult it is to find the right balance, to establish good criteria". In the LatinAmerican electroacoustic and computer music scene, as in any other one in the world, numerous tendencies exist and co-exist. Nowadays, a wide range of compositional styles and techniques that represent very different kinds of musical thought takes place. A "tendency" can be expressed by a group of works by several composers, by a series of works by the same composer, by only one work or even by a section of a work. It is far beyond the scope of this paper to analyze that phenomenon. I will only focus on the most important trends in electroacoustic and computer music in Latinamerica, which at the same time have gained international recognition and consideration and are a very original contribution to the field. Besides, they have established a clear and notable difference both in aesthetic and technological approach with respect to the music produced in the so called "first world" countries. Indeed those pieces act as a non-cultural model and do have revolutionary characteristics. There is much that can be said about music creation and production in Latinamerica", Dal Farra also says [Dal Farra, 1994] but I am going to refer to representative composers and/or compositions that can be grouped in "tendencies". I am aware of a very important methodological problem: how to establish generalizations? What about the music of individual composers who cannot be grouped in any tendency, except of that belonging to themselves? Unfortunately, and only by methodological reasons, I will skip those individual composers who cannot be grouped in any "tendency", although some of them share some elements with those ones included in the two tendencies. Some examples of those composers are: Dante Grela, Jose Ramon Marzanano, Gabriel Valverde and Alejandrolesias-Rossi (Argentina), Ariel Martinez (Uruguay-Argentina), Leon Bolito (Uruguay), Juan Amenabar and Jose Vicente Aznar (Chile), Jacky Schreiber and Adina Irrana (Venezuela), Eduardo Kunitz (Argentina-Venezuela), Pablo Freire (Ecuador), Flo Mezaes and Jose Augusto Massis (Brazil). I omitted all those LatinAmerican composers not presently living in LatinAmerican countries, also because of methodological reasons.

"Pure Latinamerican contemporary music"

First of all, I call with that name to the music, both instrumental andelectroacoustic, composed by certain composers and that is of a tremendous historical importance. I name it "pure" since it has an unmistakable and
unique Latinamerican essence. It is represented by Corin Abarotan and Graciela Paraukevaidis (Uruguay), Eduardo Bertola, Mariano Ekin and Oscar Buzan (Argentina), Conrado Silva, Gilberto Mendez and Jose Maria Neves (Brazil), Joaquin Orellana (Guatemala), Cergio Fradicino (Colombia), among many others. The majority of these composers started their electroacoustic music training in the Centro Latinamericano de Alia Estudios Musicales Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires, Argentina. A transnational role was played by the "Cursos Latinoamericanos de Musica Contemporanea", a series of courses with an international scope, which allowed young musicians from several Latinamerican countries to improve his formation and have contacts with composers, musicologists, theorists and performers coming from the industrial countries, who had a very clear political position applied to musical creation (Luigi Nono, Nicolessa Huber, Dietrich Zimmer, Giancarlo Pupo, etc.). A meaningful event was the "Simposio Internacional de Compositores en Brasil", held in Sao Bernado do Campo, Brazil, in 1977, in which the excellent lecture by Corin Abarotan: "Situation de l'actionnement musical en America Latina" described and analysed the most salient features of Latinamerican contemporary music (Abarotan, 1991a).

The musical production of all these composers but a close relationship with the social, economical and political problematic of the region (Paraukevaidis, 1983). Some of them adhered to the marxist ideology or were affiliated with the Communist Party. At this point, it is very important to say that in Latinamerica had some crucial differences with that from Europe. There was no attractiveness towards Stalinist methodologies. Most of the quoted composers took a combative attitude against the authoritarian and non-democratic governments that existed in the region. This was clearly manifested in several electroacoustic works.Only by quoting the titles of some electroacoustic compositions by Corin Abarotan it is very evident to deduce the political implications and the resulting aesthetics: "Homenaje a la fecha clavada en el pecho de Juan Ditos de Sol" , "Musica para reenazar senoraz gorda", "Salvador las ninos", etc.

In the work "Homenaje a la fecha clavada en el pecho de Juan Dias de Sol" there was a direct reference to the time of the Spanish colonization of America and the genocide practised in the continent then.

An important part of Oscar Buzan compositional thought was what he called "austere music" and "poor music", which reflected, on the one hand, the relationship between the lack of infrastructure to produce a state-of-the-art electroacoustic piece and the consequent humble technological result, and on the other, the specific aesthetics that emanates from a composer who himself identifies as a part of a society that lives in the poverty. Above all, two electroacoustic works by Buzan further reflects this way of thinking: "Parco" and "Austraol".

In the same sense, Abarotan developed a musical theory called -in Spanish: "minimalismo espectorante", which is minimalism but with highly important differences respect to traditional minimalism: there are microprocesses with repetition of sonorous cells, but subtly repeated and enriched by ostinat elements arising from aboriginal, Indian and agulisim cultures.

All this ideological and political position was also further expressed in numerous articles, papers and musicological works published in several proceedings, magazines and journals.

"The Computer Music group"

The name for this group of composers is also given by myself. This trend is much more recent than that I mentioned above. It is mainly represented by Roberto Morales-Munanares (Mexico), Juan Beyens (Columbia), Ricardo Dal Farra and Martin Alejandro Fumarola (Argentina), Eduardo Reck Miranda, Aluzito Arcela and Geber Ramalho (Brazil) and Rodrigo Segnini-Sequera (Venezuela), among others. Most of them have a strong background in computing science and informatics. For instance, Roberto Morales is very skilled with C, C++ and Prolog languages and has started working with Silicon Graphics computers.

Ricardo Dal Farra worked with almost all computer platforms but mainly with Macintosh. He is the only Argentinean (at least among all those ones living in the country) that produced a composition with MAX, "Voltil". At the same time, he is the best promoter of latinamerican electroacoustic and computer music.

Eduardo Reck Miranda has done extensive work involving cellular automata in both music composition and sound synthesis. He has produced electroacoustic music works using cellular automata, most notably a piece for orchestra composed with Conway's Life. He has also written a number of papers on software of his own design which are ready for presentation. Aluzito Arcela has also developed its own software and created the first Phd degree in Computer Music in the Latinamerican universities environment, in the University of Brazil.

Rodrigo Segnini-Sequera produced computer music based on virtual reality but from a very particular Latinamerican approach. He produced his piece "MPSCSYE[lep-lor]
ay using algorithms written under MAX and was defined as 'portable' music by the author (Segnini-Sequera, 1993).
María Alejandro Fumarola worked with YAMAHA synthesizers and tone generators, applying FM synthesis to most of his pieces and nowadays is using Csound and Csound for MS-DOS and besides, a Mac-NT Cube with Common Music.

Juan Ignacio Reyes, current Director of the Centro de Música por Computadora at the Universidad de los Andes in Colombia, has further studied algorithmic composition, which applied to some of his pieces. He also used Patchwork and is now utilizing a CRAY computer available at Universidad de los Andes.

"Emerging Countries" and "pure Third World Countries"

There is an enormous difference in the quantity of electroacoustic and computer music produced in the "emerging countries" and in the "pure Third World countries" in Latin America. Typical examples of "emerging countries" are Argentina and Brazil whereas Panama, Guatemala or Ecuador can be considered as "pure Third World countries". Anyway, this classification is a bit arbitrary but it is useful as an elemental taxonomy of electroacoustic and computer music producer countries. However, we cannot forget that people in certain zones in "emerging countries" such as Brazil, Argentina or Mexico, still die because there is not enough food, medicine and work. Some of this difference can be deduced of what Juan Reyes said:

"A Latin American E- & A-Computer Music Association should be a primary task in order to promote and project our project, and our compositions. It is important because our music heritage (except for Argentina) is not very strong as in developed countries and particularly Europe. By the same token we are not as many composer / per capita as in Canada or France where they have an association of this kind on almost every neighborhood."

A brief description of the situation related to the differences between the different countries but concerning to communication problems was also drafted in a recent article of the author of this paper [Fumarola, 1995].

Conclusion

Although several centers and studios for electroacoustic and computer music, mainly in the "emerging countries", have updated their equipments and technological centers, there are still many studios and centers that possess old technology and in some cases they do not have any computer yet. It is in these cases that the proposed aesthetics by Oscar Buzan and CorinaAharonian could be even genuine significance in order to produce meritorious pieces; taking advantage of the Latinamerican milieu and picturesque with "pure" technology and techniques. What especially applies to all those centers and studios that have state-of-the-art equipment, such as the LJH in Mexico, the Centro de Música por Computadora at the Universidad de los Andes in Colombia, the Laboratorio de Música Electroacústica at the Universidad Nacional de Cordoba and the LPJM in Argentina, the PANaroma Studio in Brazil, only to name a few ones; it is that they can produce a unique and "pure Latinamerican computer music" using, on the one hand, the latest technological resources available in those places, and on the other hand, those elements already employed by the practitioners of what I before called "pure Latinamerican contemporary music" [Aharonian, 1993a] [Aharonian, 1994b]:

PRESENCE OF THE PRIMITIVISM: not as mere decorativism or ornamentalism but as serious and high-end innovation of concepts, ways of action and reactions (agit e reagit in Portuguese), non-european rapprochements, etc.

RUPTURE OF BORDERS: between elements coming from popular music and "serious" Western music (Uruguayan composer Leo Miallah has done this and it is a very unique and funny manner). Feedback between technological possibilities and aborigen, Indian and aguami elements.

CULTURAL IDENTITITY: the silence, a cultural symbol is Latinamericana; the magical, the magic/wizardry inherent to the musical fact [Ellin, 1972]; the austerity, as despilotiment or exploitation.

IDEOLOGICAL COMPROMISE: that was common in the twenties but it should be continued and in a new and aggrandized form. Concrete matters concerning social, economical and political problems of the region should be taken into account.

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VIOLENCE AND TASTE FOR "SMALL THINGS": violence without scream or with suffocated scream. The "small things": the very small, softness, weariness, ultrasensitiveness, delicacy, refinement, mere expressive pleasure of thesonorous detail.

Dal Fara has done something related to some of these things in the piece he recently composed for the ICMA Comission Awards, in which he used sampled sounds of Latinamerican folklorical instruments; and before that, Roberto Morales had composed his work "Nahuatl II" for Charumba harp and electronics. They represent a compositional, aesthetical and technological strategy for a pure Latinamerican electroacoustic and computer music.

Acknowledgements
I wish to thank Lydia Ayers, who suggested me the idea of classifying Latinamerican countries into "emerging" and "pure Third World" and also to Corin Aharonian for providing me key material and having had very productive discussions. Special gratitude to Juan Reyes and Ricardo Dal Fara for their support.

References