

# Perspectives on Contemporary Musical Practices



# Perspectives on Contemporary Musical Practices:

*From Research to Creation*

Edited by

Madalena Soveral

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# INTRODUCTION

## FORMS OF CONTEMPORARY MUSICAL THOUGHT

GIACOMO FRONZI

“I went upstairs to my room, but I was not alone there. I could hear someone mellifluously playing Schumann. No doubt it happens at times that people, even those whom we love best, become permeated with the gloom or irritation that emanates from us. There is however an inanimate object which is capable of a power of exasperation to which no human being will ever attain: to wit, a piano”.<sup>1</sup>

We do not know what music Marcel Proust (a true music enthusiast and connoisseur) was thinking of when he wrote these words. He was probably dwelling on his favorite composers, such as Beethoven, Wagner, Schumann, Debussy, Fauré or Franck. We cannot know. We can, however, share his point of view and we can also share Proust’s stance regarding the piano. Its chameleonic ability to shake one up and calm one down, to excite and soothe, remains unmatched and unmatchable. It is like the painter’s palette, where all the colours available have their place and can be combined with one other in the most creative fashion.

According to Stuart Isacoff, the piano has been the “center of the universe” for more than three hundred years, “luring music lovers to Parisian salons to hear Chopin’s plaintive improvisations, and to Viennese concert halls for Beethoven’s ferocious, string-snapping outbursts”. It has been the heart of the “rent parties” in Harlem, as well as the solace of both Californian miners in their solitude during the Gold Rush, and Siberian farmers “who never had heard a note of classical piano music until Russian master Sviatoslav Richter brought it to their doorsteps”. Indeed, as Isacoff points out, the piano cannot be considered only as an instrument. It is “in the words of Oliver Wendell Holmes, [...] a “wondrous box” filled as much with hopes, yearnings, and disappointments as with strings and hammers and felt. It has been a symbol as mutable as the human condition, representing

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<sup>1</sup> M. Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, IV. *Sodom and Gomorrah*, trans. by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and T. Kilmartin, Vintage Books, London 2000, p. 218.

refined elegance in a Victorian home and casual squalor in a New Orleans brothel”. Thus the piano has always been irresistibly charming. Both its ability to attract and its own power have seduced dozens of generations of listeners. The level of sonic volume it can produce cannot be matched by any other classical instruments, and this has given it a role and a relevance that no other instrument can boast. “With wood and cast iron, hammers and pivots, weighing altogether nearly a thousand pounds – and capable of sustaining twenty-two tons of tension on its strings (the equivalent of about twenty medium-sized cars) – this majestic contraption will whisper, sing, stutter, or shout at the will of the player. Its tones range from the lowest notes of the orchestra to the highest. It has the remarkable ability to express music of any time period, and in any style – Baroque fugues, Romantic reveries, Impressionist sketches, church hymns, Latin montunos, jazz rhythms, and rock riffs. In the process, it makes everything its own”.<sup>2</sup>

As with all “classical” instruments, the modern piano has also undergone technical improvements, even though these have not affected it drastically, for the piano of 2021 is almost the same as that of the nineteenth century. Born at the beginning of the eighteenth century thanks to the ingenuity of the harpsichordist Bartolomeo Cristofori, this instrument has been gradually perfected yet never straying too far from the original model (aside from the use made of it by John Cage, with his “prepared piano”). The piano’s timbral qualities and extreme variety of sound have always been an inexhaustible source of inspiration for composers of all ages. Moreover, by prescribing a “pizzicato” (of the strings) or strokes inside or outside the soundboard, thus imposing no restrictions and requiring only a pressing of the keys, some contemporary developments have further expanded the possibilities of this instrument.

It is important to emphasise that the piano is a permanent feature within contemporary repertoire, and it fulfills the demands of composers with styles which can be even very different from one other. Indeed, the possibilities it offers constitute a sonic and timbral pool which is nearly inexhaustible. It is also for this reason that it has never been abandoned, as it can satisfy the ever-changing needs of composers, perhaps even more so than other instruments.

However, to frame the role of the piano in the music of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, it is necessary to say something about contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> See S. Isacoff, *A Natural History of the Piano. The Instrument, the Music, the Musicians – from Mozart to Modern Jazz and Everything in Between*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York 2011.

music and, above all, about contemporary musical thought. Perhaps more than in previous centuries, this thought displays a need to be placed within a dense network of extra-musical references. Particularly from the 1950s onwards, music has developed a progressively closer dialogue with other fields and other artistic practices. The result has been a growing combination of styles, languages, perspectives, goals, materials and different places. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and for the first time, music found itself intertwined with disciplines (computer science, electronics, physics, chemistry, architecture, botany, just to name a few) and fields (traditional, folkloric or popular music, Oriental philosophy, Zen meditation, noises and much more) which had remained until then distant from one other (or, in any case, never too close) and each of these encounters corresponds to “new beginnings”. It could be argued that musicians have had relationships with some of these fields in the past as well, and that much is true, yet what characterizes the composers of the twentieth century is the fact that they have searched for exchanges, dialogues and confrontation in a systematic way and as never before.

Furthermore, the Second World War did not represent a watershed only on a historical plane. In those same years, while in different corners of the world a conflict was being fought, the result of which was that freedom, rights and democracy were established, other revolutions were taking place in the history of Western music after the dodecaphonic: the electroacoustic and digital revolutions.

This general situation makes it impossible to formulate a unitary discourse around contemporary music, starting from its periodization. Particularly as far as the decades going from the Second World War onwards are concerned, realizing this periodization in a precise manner is very complicated for various reasons. Firstly, the most important composers of the second half of the twentieth century lived through a large part of that century and, in most cases, have also been active in the third millennium. This means that besides covering different decades, their production has undergone variations – sometimes even radical ones – over time, so much so that it cannot be located within a single “season” of contemporary music. The second reason is linked to the fact that the musical expressions of the period which is being considered display extremely wide variation. While in the first decades of the twentieth century the great novelty of dodecaphonic and serial music was a meter allowing one to draw a fairly distinct line between those on the side of tonality and those on the side of overcoming it, although there were also halfway solutions; from the post-war period onwards the compositional solutions have multiplied so much

that the landscape has become extremely diversified, since it is the result of experiences which are increasingly individual rather than collective.

All this, even if here only briefly explained, makes it clear that the conditions of existence of contemporary music (meaning as “conditions of existence” both the productive dimension and that receptive) are today particularly problematic. The music of the twentieth century is developing in surroundings which are totally different compared to those of previous centuries, not only because of the great variety of aims, genres, styles, paths and shapes, but also in the sense that it displays distinct innovations as regards technical means, places and contexts. At the cusp of the second and third millennia, the ways in which music is produced, disseminated and listened to have experienced an unprecedented revolution. The picture is therefore complex and structured, posing challenging difficulties of interpretation. The pieces of the contemporary music mosaic (and that of the contemporary situation of music) are so different that sometimes they lead us to assessments and analyses flying in opposite directions. This implies that identifying a single vision of contemporary music is impossible, as this book also demonstrates.

Added to this, for the audience there lies the difficulty in assimilating contemporary music. The distance that has been created between composers and audiences, from the dodecaphonic turning point onwards, still seems to be unbridgeable. Despite efforts, the difficulty in understanding seems to be an obstacle which is hard to overcome for an untrained and, perhaps, uninterested ear. This situation is even more complex if one accepts the fact that in recent decades musical critics have not always readily embraced the innovations which little by little have transpired in the music of the twentieth century. One of the merits of this book is precisely that it helps to bring contemporary music closer not only to a wider audience but also to those theorists who are not familiar with it, focusing on relevant authors, themes and problems, the importance of which goes beyond the confines of music and its history.

This volume is divided into three chapters which, in their variety, collect writings involving composers, works and issues of huge interest. The topics are treated with great philological attention and within a historical perspective. However, this does not prevent authors from expressing meta-musical and philosophical thoughts, demonstrating that contemporary music has a deep connection with the speculative dimension. Not only does the whole volume have international scope, but it is also a valid testing-ground in relation to what was said earlier.

The essays, in their specific detail, offer a contribution which is important for grasping the complexity of the contemporary music scene and its multiformity, which is also investigated and analysed above all (but not only) within the scope of piano repertoire. With this said, let us now go into more detail about the contents of the volume.

The first chapter (“Historical perspectives: concepts, theories, and practices”) opens with an essay by Letizia Michielon dedicated to *Douze Notations* (1945) by Pierre Boulez; here the author makes an accurate and meticulous analysis of this important piano work. Michielon brilliantly identifies the musical (Debussy, Ravel, Bartók, Stravinsky e Varèse) and extra-musical (Char, Michaux, Klee e Mallarmé) references which influenced Boulez in its composition, where serial technique, rhythmic attention and timbrical sensitivity merge marvellously. Her analysis pays specific attention to the influence exerted by Mallarmé, suggesting an analogy between Symbolist poetics and the mysterious atmosphere surrounding these twelve pieces. The essays are made even more meaningful with the analysis of *Douze Intuitions, Homage à P. Boulez et M. Zambrano*, composed by Michielon herself in 2012. This writing confirms the perspective from which the author sees music: a revealing experience, one where what is antipodal coexists in a higher unity, oriented towards light and hope.

A few years after *Douze Notations* by Boulez, Dmitrij Šostakovič wrote his *24 Preludi e Fughe*. Daniel Tarquinio dedicates his essay to this work through a rich and in-depth musical analysis, strictly connected to the performative and interpretative dimension. Again, in this case, the essay has a musicological nature (also linked to authors such as John Rink and Boris Asafiev), but lends itself to philosophical perspectives (Edgar Morin). Tarquinio places his own analysis of Šostakovič’s work within a diversified theoretical frame by highlighting its profound unity and compactness, ensured by a “dramatic thread” connecting all 48 pieces. At the same time, he suggests an alternative reading, grouping the 48 pieces in five smaller cycles, of which he analyses the first, revealing its consistency relating to the whole cycle.

After France and the Soviet Union, the reader is transported to the other side of the globe, to the United States. Indeed, Maria do Rosário Santana focuses on Elliott Carter’s piano production and in particular on certain of his works: the piano *Sonata* (1945), the *Sonata* for cello and piano (1948), the *Duo* for violin and piano (1973-4) and, above all, the *Night Fantasies* for piano (1980). Without a doubt, Carter has been one of the most creative contemporary composers, a lone voice in the crowd; he has chosen to

follow a personal path when the research of the avant-garde was conversely oriented towards the post-Weberian or the Cagean approach. The essay by Maria do Rosário Santana focuses commendably and with remarkable expertise on key aspects of Carter's poetics and compositional style: meter, time and, above all, rhythm.

For Carter, rhythm goes beyond the boundaries of music: it is essential to everyone's life. We live in a polyrhythmic dimension, starting from our body, where the rhythm of our breathing overlaps that of heartbeat, whilst proceeding with a different meter. Broadening the perspective, it is society and the world that appear to us as the result of a combination and overlapping of different rhythms, each of which is represented by each individual. This is the essence of a society which is truly free: to allow each individual to find their own rhythm and live according to it, without forcing anyone to assimilate a rhythm which is far from their own nature, principles and aspirations.

What is more, the following essay by Kuo-Ying Lee shows how the framework of contemporary music is complex and how it can be analysed from different perspectives. Dialogue configures itself as one of these perspectives and, in some cases, the combination of different perceptive experiences, such as the visual and aural, also performs the same. The study of the relationships between sound and colour often occurs in the arts of the twentieth century, such as with Kandinskij and Skrjabin, two artists having a strong synaesthetic attitude, to which also Messiaen and Ligeti are no strangers. Synaesthesia is a phenomenon which essentially implies the coexistence of perceptions resulting from the stimulation of different senses or the association of diverse sensations appearing simultaneously, such as "coloured hearing" or an "aural vision".<sup>3</sup> From Lee's writing it emerges that despite their diversity, works such as Skrjabin's *Prometeo*, Messiaen's *Préludes pour piano* or Ligeti's ninth Etude for piano "Vertige", are exceptional examples of how synaesthesia has been treated in contemporary music.

Ana Telles draws our attention to a figure who often occurs in this book, both as a composer and as the author of the writing with which the book ends. This is João Pedro Oliveira, one of the most prolific and well-known Portuguese composers, author of more than one hundred works, from instrumental to electro-acoustic and visual music. Telles focuses on an aspect where she emphasises the mystical dimension as being absolutely central to Oliveira's production. According to the author, about one third

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<sup>3</sup> See F. Rampichini (ed.), *Acusmetria. Il suono visibile*, Franco Angeli, Milano 2004, p. 19.

of the works Oliveira composed between 1982 and 2016 can be directly or indirectly connected to biblical sources, themes or motives. Through an in-depth analysis of the Portuguese composer's works linked, in fact, to the Bible, Telles demonstrates convincingly that between the Protestant Christianity of Oliveira and his creative itinerary there is a close and consistent connection.

The second chapter ("Analysis and Performance: Case Studies in Solo Piano works") opens with an essay by Madalena Soveral on the subject of *Litanies du feu et de la mer* by Emmanuel Nunes. Together with Oliveira, this Portuguese composer is one of the most important artists in the current European contemporary music scene. His catalogue includes instrumental, vocal, orchestral and electroacoustic works, which are regularly on the bill of the main international festivals and performed by some of the most famous ensembles (such as the Ensemble Modern or the Ensemble Intercontemporain). This substantial work by Soveral has the aim of reconstructing Nunes' creative path by means of dividing it into three series of works, from each of which an aspect peculiar to his musical thought emerges. Among the various works this essay deals with, Soveral mainly focuses on *Litanies du feu et de la mer* for piano (1969-71), which she chooses because it contains some of the traits which are specific to Nunes' poetics: the attention to the spatialization of sound, the search for particular timbrical solutions, the morphological inquiry on the structures of the piece, as well as the issue concerning the relationship between compositional processes and instrumental techniques.

Paulo Meirelles dedicates his writing to one of the most important Brazilian composers, Almeida Prado. More precisely, Meirelles focuses on the use of the *cluster* within Prado's piano production, emphasising that it is a performative and musical solution to which the Brazilian composer often turns. Clusters occur in different shapes and forms (as happens in *Momento no. 7*, *Cartas Celestes no. 5* and *Cartas Celestes no. 1*), which are attentively analysed by Meirelles and which, according to the author, are not to be meant only as expressive means but also as a structural element within the overall organization of his works.

In addition to leaving a large mark on the history of music, the greatest composers are often a source of inspiration for other composers. This is the case, among the many possible, of the Spanish composer Isaac Albéniz and his Suite *Iberia*, composed between 1906 and 1909. This Suite, as Carlos Taboada and Miguel Diaz-Emparanza Almoguera write, is a milestone in national piano literature, whose quality has spilled over the Spanish borders, to the extent that it has taken on a truly paradigmatic connotation. *Iberia* is

an extraordinary work also because tradition and modernity, folklore and renovation coexist in it. This explains why Albeniz' Suite has been a model for many composers, among whom the Spaniard José Luis Turina Santos, author of *Homenaje a Isaac Albéniz (I. Jaén)* (2001). This is not only a homage but also an attempt to write a hypothetical continuation to Albeniz' Suite. The two authors analyse this piece by Turina Santos, revealing both the formal and technical analogies with *Iberia*, and the direct allusions to the piece, thus demonstrating how Albeniz' language, adequately updated, could be still now a source of inspiration for musical creation.

The following essay, by Ana Cláudia Assis, focuses on another Portuguese composer, Jorge Peixinho, who passed away prematurely at the age of 55. In particular, Assis investigates with great acuity the relationship between musical gesture and instrumental technique within the piano production of Peixinho, starting from the premise that the Portuguese composer considers the act of composing and that of performing as inseparable from musical thought. Through the analysis of works such as *Symmetrical Successions* (1961), *Harmonics I* (1967), *Study II* (1971), *Music Box* (1981-5) and *Study V* (1992), Assis traces the essential features both of the creative process of Peixinho and of the technical-instrumental procedures he developed in his piano writing, all within an overall framework where gesture, idea and technique coexist productively.

Anna Kijanowska proposes another interesting topic, relating to the piano production of the young Chinese composer Lei Liang. Kijanowska's reading aims to stress how Liang, mainly in works such as *Garden Eight* (1996-2004) and *My Windows Suite* (1996-2007), is able to revolutionise the sounds of the piano by "painting images" of nature. In Liang's musical thought, the constant dialogue between spirituality and the natural dimension is clearly present. From this same dialogue arise musical solutions which, through frequent shifts from the lowest to the highest register of the piano, succeed in painting sonic landscapes immediately recalling the beauty of nature. Furthermore, this merging of spirituality and nature also emerges from the way Liang uses rhythm and time, made always flexible and unpredictable.

The third and last chapter ("Composing and Performing with Technological Means") opens with Helena Santana, who returns to the production of João Pedro Oliveira. If, on the one hand, Ana Telles has underlined the connection between the religious dimension and musical thought, Santana focuses on the techniques of repetition, variation and transformation that Oliveira uses mainly in his works for piano and electronics. Through the analysis of *Tessares* for orchestra (1991),

*Pirâmides de Cristal* for piano (1993) and *Pyramids* for two pianos (2008) – besides highlighting the relationship between each of these pieces (each of which is the expansion of the following) – Santana carefully examines the techniques of manipulation of the musical materials used by Oliveira. From Santana's work, one can clearly understand how the Portuguese composer has always tried to build a dialogue between traditional instruments and electronics, reaching an effective synthesis both from a technical point of view and an aesthetic.

We have already noted that the greatest composers are often a source of inspiration for other composers. Another case is that of the British Jonathan Harvey, author of *Tombeau de Messiaen* (1994). Mariachiara Grilli dedicates her essay to this work, more specifically to its interpretation from a spectromorphological perspective. Grilli's aim is to explain through which modalities the relationship between the piano and electronic sound configures itself, therefore demonstrating that the structure of Harvey's piece is in a sense prismatic. Through applying the concepts and the terminology of Denis Smalley's spectromorphology, the author highlights on the one hand the relationship between the piano part and the notation employed for the acousmatic material, and the piano specific writing on the other. Through both this analysis and the identification of the connections with Messiaen's writing, Grilli aims to show how the electroacoustic material could take on an essential role within the formal definition of the work by Harvey being examined.

Without focusing on a single composer or piece, Helen Gallo opens up the discussion to a more general question, that of the relationship between instrumental performance and electroacoustic music. It is a very important topic within the sphere of contemporary music, because it involves the relationship between performer and composition. Concentrating her attention primarily on performance and on the idea of virtuosity, Gallo highlights how performing electroacoustic works has led the performer to re-shape their own role, also in light of the complications due to the releasing of electroacoustic sounds both in real and in delayed time. Moreover, the author also wonders whether electroacoustic practice has had an influence on instrumental praxis, especially on the piano, and what repercussions it may have also had on the concept of virtuosity.

Simonetta Sargenti dedicates her writing to *Mantra* (1970), one of the most famous works by Karlheinz Stockhausen. With this piece, the unsolved dilemma of the last Stockhausen emerges, that of a music which, beyond those problems having a strictly musical nature, is increasingly oriented towards celebrating itself and its demiurge. According to Mark

Prendergast, “with *Mantra* the idea of ‘formula music’ came into play. This was a technique whereby a simple musical idea could be expanded over time. Miles Davis had done something similar in 1959’s *Kind Of Blue* but here Stockhausen was dealing with a piano motif treated by various electronics at a Munich studio. The result was considered to be beautiful and quasi-meditative”.<sup>4</sup> Sargenti analyses *Mantra* through connecting the performative dimension to the aesthetic by stressing the novelty of the compositional method Stockhausen uses, and convincingly demonstrates that this work can be analysed from different perspectives (technical, musical, aesthetic and philosophical).

João Pedro Oliveira closes the book with a work dedicated to the construction of organic relationships between image and sound within the context of visual experimental music. Oliveira begins with the assumption, clarified by Michel Chion, that the connection between image and sound in film making and in other connected media (such as opera, theater or video clip) can be interpreted beyond the simple cause-effect relationship. The image-sound connection, indeed, proves to be more complex and structured. This can also be demonstrated by looking both at the development of films over the last 130 years and to that of music technologies. By also referring to the ideas of Michel Chion, Denis Smalley e François Bayle, Oliveira aims to analyse, query and pursue certain connections between sound and image, through examples selected both from works of movie tradition (Hitchcock, Lawrence, Kubrick, Reggio, Reiné) and from his own compositions of visual music. The conclusion Oliveira comes to is that the relationship between image and music can be hardly understood in terms of “analogy” or “translation” but is something more powerful and structurally integrated.

This book, edited painstakingly by Madalena Soveral, represents a serious contribution to the study of contemporary music and piano within the repertoire of the last seventy years. It does not only suggest theoretical perspectives on contemporary musical practices, but also contains contemporary perspectives on musical practices, combining a historical approach and interpretative attitude. All the essays here presented shed light on the values, the qualities, the possibilities and the peculiarities of the production and the reception of contemporary music for piano, also giving a clear idea of the transition occurred between the second and third millennia. It is not easy to imagine what awaits us in the future, but staying with what

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<sup>4</sup> M. Prendergast, *The Ambient Century. From Mahler to Trance – The Evolution of Sound in the Electronic Age*, Bloomsbury Publishing, London 2000, p. 55.

recent history suggests, the challenge always seems to be the same: we have to imagine the future if we are to deal with it in the best way possible.

According to James Parakilas, “just as there has never been an ideal piano, there has also never been an ideal use of the piano, an ideal site for the piano, an ideal role for the piano to play in people’s lives”<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, it would be utopian (and, maybe, historically incorrect) to search for an ideal dimension in which to locate the piano, its history and the large repertoire to which the composers have given life in the last three and a half centuries. What seems more meaningful, rather, is having full awareness of the fact that the piano and the magic it is able to create can enhance our lives, beyond the forms that they have had until now and those which they will have in the future.

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<sup>5</sup> J. Parakilas, *Afterword: Making the Piano Historical*, in J. Parakilas and Others, *Piano Roles. A New History of the Piano*, Yale University Press, New Haven-London 2001, pp. 321-5: 325.



## CHAPTER ONE

# HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES: CONCEPTS AND PRACTICES



L'AZUR ET L'ABÎME.  
A COMPARISON BETWEEN DOUZE NOTATIONS OF P.  
BOULEZ AND DOUZE INTUITIONS OF L. MICHIELON

LETIZIA MICHIELON

The *Douze Notations*, crucial Boulezian apprenticeship work,<sup>1</sup> reveal an individual style, that of freely combining serial technique, the result of spending time with René Leibowitz, along with the complex use of the rhythmic component, in a matured manner thanks to the teaching of Olivier Messiaen,<sup>2</sup> and the timbral sensitivity characteristic of the French tradition. The composer was to always remain attached to these miniatures, considered by Peter O'Hagan as sort of *objets trouvés* for numerous subsequent works.<sup>3</sup>

Conceived as a cycle of variations on a series to which circular permutation is applied,<sup>4</sup> the *Notations* were in fact noted down in December 1945, orchestrated between the end of 1945 and January 1946 (as evidenced by a precious manuscript preserved at the Paul Sacher Foundation<sup>5</sup>) and finally summarized in the orchestral interludes of the *Improvisation I sur Mallarmé* in *Pli selon pli* (where *Notations* no. 5 and no. 9 are used<sup>6</sup>) and in the thematic nuclei of *Sonatine* and...*explosant-fixe*...<sup>7</sup>

The re-enactment transmutes into a new creation with the 1980 orchestration, a sort of rhizomatic proliferation<sup>8</sup> of the original material, which remained unfinished in *Notations* I, II, III, IV and VII.

<sup>1</sup> P. O'Hagan, *Pierre Boulez and the piano. A Study in style and technique*, Routledge, London and New York, 2018, p. 47.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>4</sup> R. Piencikowski, *L'opera per pianoforte di Boulez, in Da Beethoven Boulez. Il pianoforte in ventidue saggi*, Longanesi, Milano, 1994, p.183.

<sup>5</sup> O'Hagan, *Pierre Boulez and the piano*, cit., p. 38.

<sup>6</sup> J. Goldman, *The musical language of P. Boulez. Writings and compositions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2011, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> O'Hagan, *Pierre Boulez and the piano*, cit., p. 43.

<sup>8</sup> E. Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy*, Cambridge Press, Cambridge, 2010, p. 3.

The original piano version would only be published in 1985, perhaps due to the perplexities engendered by technical considerations (the presence of canons in the octave, the use of accompanied melodies, the excessive freedom in the use of serial language) and the references explicit in Jolivet's *Mana* and Schönberg's piano series.<sup>9</sup>

Essentially, as the author himself points out, in the twelve short fragments consisting of twelve measures each, annotated as “for the ear and for the eye”,<sup>10</sup> there can be discerned echoes of Debussy, Ravel, Bartók, Stravinsky<sup>11</sup> and Varèse.<sup>12</sup>

The complex network of musical reminiscences is intertwined with the influence of artists such as René Char, Henri Michaux, Paul Klee and, above all, Stéphane Mallarmé.<sup>13</sup>

Ivanka Stoianova emphasized the importance that music plays in Mallarmé's aesthetic<sup>14</sup> conception and the decisive role of his poetics on musical impressionism and avant-garde artists, in particular Boulez.

If Scherer's reconstruction of *Le Livre*<sup>15</sup> was to become a source of inspiration for the theory of controlled risk,<sup>16</sup> applied within the works composed at the turn of the nineteen fifties and sixties,<sup>17</sup> the young Boulez appeared to have been lured, in the *Notations*, by the metaphysical tension

<sup>9</sup> Piencikowski, *L'opera per pianoforte di Boulez*, cit., p. 184.

<sup>10</sup> Ivi, p. 183.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.explorescore.org/pierre-boulez-douze-notations-boulez-video-interview.html>

<sup>12</sup> O' Hagan, *Pierre Boulez and the piano*, cit., p. 40.

<sup>13</sup> Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy*, cit., p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> I. Stoianova, *Entre détermination et aventure. Essais sur la musique de la deuxième moitié du XXème siècle*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2004, pp. 11-22. See also *Mallarmé et la musique, la musique et Mallarmé. L'écriture, l'orchestre, la scène, la voix*, edited by A. Bonnet and P.-H. Frangne, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, Rennes, 2016; M. Breatnach, *Boulez and Mallarmé. A study in poetic influence*, Scholar Press, Ashgate, Aldershot (1996); S. Bernard, *Mallarmé et la musique*, Nizet, Paris, 1959; M. Landi, *Il mare e la cattedrale*, ETS, Pisa, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> J. Scherer, *Le Livre de Mallarmé*, Gallimard, Paris, 1957.

<sup>16</sup> To reconstruct the relationship between Boulez and Cage, see their correspondence in P. Boulez - J. Cage *Corrispondenza e documenti*, Archinto, Milano, 2006.

<sup>17</sup> On the connection between *Le Livre* and the *Third Sonata* by Stockhausen, see letter N. 123 to K. Stockhausen, written on October 1957, conserved in the Paul Sacher Stiftung, Sammlung Karlheinz Stockhausen.

On the compositional technique used in the *Third Sonata*, see P. Decroupet, *Serial organization and beyond*, in *Pierre Boulez Studies*, edited by E. Campbell and P. O' Hagan, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 111ff.

that animates the aesthetics of the symbolist poet, suspended between the aspiration towards *azur*, a representation of the absolute, and *abîme*, vertigo, the abyss into which the human being falls in pursuit of an unattainable ideal of truth and beauty.

The architecture of pairs that characterizes the early cycle, also used by Chopin in the *Preludes* op. 28, highlights this contrast and the intrinsically dialectical nature of Boulezian poetics,<sup>18</sup> influenced by Souvtchinsky and Schloezer,<sup>19</sup> as well as by the masters of German idealism.<sup>20</sup>

O'Hagan, however, opportunely underscores, beyond the heated contrasts, the secret connections between the individual *Notations*, highlighting how the underlying unity emerges with even greater vigor in the first orchestral version.<sup>21</sup>

An interpretative key is offered to us by the composer himself, who punctuates the extemporaneous and improvisational nature of his youthful series.<sup>22</sup>

Boulez resolutely seeks his own expressive freedom by shattering the constraints imposed by tradition, of which he also avails himself, and dramatizes this innovative impetus through a language that in its most visionary moments seems to refer to a pre-logical totality of meaning. In fact, among the folds of silence, in the stammering glare of certain obsessively repeated melodic cells and in the timbral magic that envelops the twelve fragments, the echo of the interstitial song and the intangible Mystery to which sound, similar to the poetic word, alludes.

It may be said that, as also occurring in Mallarmé, it suggests but does not exhaust this meaning, to which the artist has privileged access through the imagination, even if understood, and later specified by Boulez

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<sup>18</sup> Speaking of which, Goldman underlines the typical dialectic of Boulez between invariance and contrast and, in order to demonstrate this, utilizes a *paradigmatic-analysis* model inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss and systematized by Jacques Nattiez (Goldman, cit., pp. 4-5).

<sup>19</sup> Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy*, cit., p. 59.

<sup>20</sup> Ivi, p. 256.

<sup>21</sup> O'Hagan, *Pierre Boulez and the piano*, cit., p. 41. For a detailed analysis of *Notations*, see G. Krammer, *P. Boulez. Douze Notations pour piano (1945)*, Diplomarbeit zum Erlangung des Akademischen Grades eines Magister Atrium an der Abteilung für Musikpädagogik der Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Graz, im Fach Musiktheorie bei OHPf. Mag. Richard Dünser, Vorgelegt von G. Krammer im Wintersemester 1998/99.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.explorescore.org/pierre-boulez-douze-notations-boulez-video-interview.html>

in *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*, as a faculty capable of becoming self-aware. Intellectual reflection, indeed, is not detrimental to inspiration for the composer, even where it appears dazzling and oracular.<sup>23</sup>

Similar to that which happens in Adorno's negative dialectic, which uses the tools of reason to tear apart and go beyond identifying thought,<sup>24</sup> the *Notations* also seem to suggest, thanks to the flexible use of serialism, a receptiveness to non-linear logic.

The *Douze Intuitions, Homage à P. Boulez et M. Zambrano*, which I composed in 2012, take up and amplify the innovative potential contained in this fracturing gesture, invoking an affinity with the enigmatic and evocative thought that characterizes the *Claros del bosque* (1977) by Maria Zambrano.

"The light of the forest" - argues the Andalusian philosopher – "is a center in which it is not always possible to enter", something that "now reveals itself as a shuddering mirror, a palpitating clarity that once something comes together as a whole, it breaks apart".<sup>25</sup>

This mixture of patency and latency, where St. John of the Cross's "clear mysticism" is intertwined with Heidegger's *Lichtung* and the concept of *circumstance* theorized by Ortega y Gasset, translates in Zambrano into a philosophizing that is elliptical and flickering, capable of restoring the enlightening feeling of the heart.<sup>26</sup>

The *Intuitions*, conceived as twelve short preludes that draw inspiration, in their microform and cyclical conception, are linked to this interior disposition, as well as to the *Bagattelle* op. 126 by Beethoven, to the *Preludes* of Chopin and Debussy and to *op. 19* by Schönberg.

Brief echoes taken from the *Notations* are used here freely, in a more or less explicit way, to suggest the suspended atmospheres and conceptual knots that characterize the *Claros del bosque*.

The harkening theme and sound suspended in silence, crossed by flickering luminescence rendered through free permutations, characterizes the first piece of the cycle, inspired by the initial chapter of Zambrano's work.

<sup>23</sup> P. Boulez, *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*, Schott's Söhne, Mainz, trad. it. *Pensare la musica oggi*, a cura di L. Bonino Savarino, Einaudi, Torino, 1972, p. 175.

<sup>24</sup> L. Cortella, *Una dialettica della finitezza. Adorno e il programma di una dialettica negativa*, Meltemi, Roma, 2006; L. Michielon, *Il suono messo a nudo. Contrappunti al Beethoven di Adorno*, EUT, Trieste, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> M. Zambrano, *Claros del bosque*, Fundación Zambrano, 1977, trad. it. *I chiari del bosco*, Mondadori, Milano, 1977, pp. 11-13.

<sup>26</sup> C. Ferrucci, *Postfazione a I chiari del bosco*, cit., pp. 168-9.

Suddenly, being enkindled by the vision of beauty in the dark instead beckons the fleeting composition of the second *Intuition*, which clashes with the dark and lumpy sound of the third, inspired by the paragraph dedicated to the *delirium* and the texture of Emilio Vedova's paintings.

*Presence of Truth*, suggested by a delicate floating trait in the fourth *Intuition*, based on the echo effect, is also gently manifested in berceuse waving, where the next piece, *The word which guards*, takes shape.

The core of the collection is embedded in the sixth piece, *The metaphor of the heart*, which gives back the swirling and overwhelming burst of an opening capable of shaking and startling the conscience, and in the following, *The obscure post and the cross*, where time and eternity meet, against the background of vibrations generated by a mute *cluster* entrusted to the tonal pedal.

The plummet from this center generates angoscia (*Anguish*), obtained in the octave *Intuition* through rhythmic arpeggios, *clusters* spread with the palm and a more percussive pianism, in which the obsessions of the octave *Notation* echo.

Calm returns in the next piece, *The mirror of Athena*, which places reflective chordal surfaces on the various registers; onto them, in *Intuition* no. 10, flows the broken and coagulated song of the heart understood as a "vessel of pain".<sup>27</sup>

New dawns unfold in the penultimate piece, *The nascent time*, which evokes the unfolding of being and the manifestation of the self, expanded in its many possible lives.

They orient themselves towards the flight of the soul, entrusted to the final *Intuition*, reaching out towards a light-sound in which the metaphysical tension subsides at last.

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<sup>27</sup>Ivi, p. 81.



D. SHOSTAKOVICH'S 24 PRELUDES AND FUGUES:  
 DRAMATURGY, NOTION OF TOTALITY.  
 PRELUDES AND FUGUES I TO IV.

DANIEL JUNQUEIRA TARQUINIO

Dimitri Shostakovich's 24 Preludes and Fugues *opus 87* are a landmark in the piano repertoire of the 20th century. Along with other great cycles or sets of pieces, such as the *Ludus Tonalis* by P. Hindemith (1895-1963), the *Catalog of Birds* by O. Messiaen (1908-1992), the *Études* for piano by G. Ligeti (1923-2006), the *Ponteios and Studies* by M. Camargo Guarnieri (1907-1993), this work by Shostakovich stands out as an extraordinary manifestation of polyphonic art.

The composition of the 24 Preludes and Fugues is related to the tributes made to J. S. Bach, in Germany in 1950. D. Shostakovich actively took part in the event, both as a member of the delegation of guest musicians from the Soviet Union and as a member of the jury of the International Competition held in Leipzig for piano, violin, organ and harpsichord categories. The composer attended and participated in several concerts, among them, the final concert held in Berlin, in the Hall of the Frederick II' State Palace. On that occasion, together with Tatiana Nikolayeva and Pavel Serebriakov, he performed Bach's Concert for Three Pianos and Orchestra in D minor.

The pianist Tatiana Nikolayeva, who was then graduating from the Moscow Conservatory, received the first prize in the International Competition. During the auditions, Nikolayeva asked the jury to choose any of Bach's 48 Preludes and Fugues, so that she could perform it. Such an act strongly impacted the public, the jury and Shostakovich.

According to Tatiana Nikolayeva's statement in her interview with Khentova (1996c, 221), during the tributes, Bach's music was heard daily for three weeks in all concert halls and in the Church of Saint Thomas of Leipzig. A very attentive Shostakovich commented: "Great music is heard everywhere". Khentova (1996b, 221) commented that, in 1950, the Russian composer and pianist was quite taken by Bach's music, perceiving it as a much-needed reality for contemporary times.

D. Shostakovich had performed all the Preludes and Fugue of The Well-Tempered Klavier during his piano studies with Ignácio Gliasser (1850-1925), in 1917, at the age of 11. From 1919, the young Shostakovich continued his studies at the Petrograd / Leningrad Conservatory, in Maximilian Steinberg's composition class (1883-1946) and in Aleksandra Romanova's piano class (1876-1942) in 1920. He was also in Leonid Nikolaev's class (1878-1942) from 1921 to 1927. D. Shostakovich was always highly regarded as a pianist and a composer by teachers such as Alexander Glasunov (1865-1936) and L. Nikolaev, and by his colleagues, the great 20th century pianists, Maria Yudina (1899-1970) and Vladimir Sofronitsky (1901-1961).

In June of 1923, when almost 17 years of age, D. Shostakovich completed his piano undergraduate degree at the Conservatory. For his final exam, he performed a recital with the following pieces: J. S. Bach's Prelude and Fugue in F sharp minor from Book I of the Well-Tempered Klavier; Beethoven's Piano Sonata *opus 53*; W. A. Mozart's Variations in C major "Ah vous dirai-je maman"; F. Chopin's *Ballad no. 3*; R. Schumann's *Humoresque opus 20* and F. Liszt's *Venice and Naples*. In addition to the recital, he performed the R. Schumann's Concerto in *A minor*. Shortly before his final concerts, following Maria Yuhina's suggestion, he learned and performed Beethoven's Piano Sonata no. 29 in B flat major *opus 106* for a teacher commission, obtaining a good evaluation. Yudina followed the preparation of the work, being consulted by the young pianist before his classes with Leonid Nikolaev.

Another striking fact in the pianist Shostakovich's youth was his participation in the First Chopin International Competition in Warsaw in 1927, as one of the representatives of the Soviet Union, alongside L. Oborin (1907-1974) who received the first prize. According to Sofia Moshevich, "Shostakovich managed to last through to the final round, playing very well. Despite his performances, however, he won no prize and was only awarded a diploma" (Moshevich, 2004, 49).

After completing his studies in piano and composition, Shostakovich worked as a pianist and composer. However, since these were competing roles. Shostakovich had to prioritize one or over the other. For example, in the spring of 1930, in the city of Rostov, he performed Tchaikovsky's *1st Piano Concerto* and Prokofiev's *1st Piano Concerto* with the Rostov Symphonic Orchestra. The following night his 1st Symphony was performed, and the author performed some of his solo piano pieces. According to Khentova (1996a, 159), his success was enormous. After that event, he dedicated himself to composition for two years, mainly to the Opera *Lady Macbeth*