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Author: Alejandro E. Mundaca

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Todo Paisaje es Interno: From Nature to Music Alejandro E. Mundaca¹

ABSTRACT

This article explores current issues in the relationship between music, soundscape, and language, precisely when transnational musical strategies such as variations, transformations, and adaptations are used. This text discusses some interdisciplinary perspectives from a historical approach that scholars have put forward in contemporary musicology. This discussion aims to reflect on how these ideas echo the trend of Chilean music and provide practical methods for subjects other than traditional musicology. To do so, Mario Concha's album *Todo Paisaje es Interno* offers excellent elements, contributing to world nature and environmental awareness through music from Chile.

KEYWORDS: soundscape, music and translation, Chilean folk music

RESUMEN

Este artículo explora temas de actualidad en la relación entre música, espacio sonoro y lenguaje, precisamente cuando se utilizan estrategias musicales transnacionales como variaciones, transformaciones y adaptaciones. Este texto discute algunas perspectivas interdisciplinarias desde un enfoque histórico que los estudiosos han propuesto en la música contemporánea. Esta discusión tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre cómo estas ideas pueden hacerse eco de las corrientes musicales chilenas y proporcionar metodologías prácticas de otras disciplinas fuera de la musicología tradicional. Para ello, el disco *Todo Paisaje es Interno* de Mario Concha ofrece elementos interesantes que contribuyen a la conciencia mundial sobre la naturaleza y el medio ambiente a través de la música en Chile.

PALABRAS CLAVE: espacio sonoro, música y traducción, música folclórica chilena

¹ PhD in Music from the University of Sussex, and a master's degree in Music as an Interdisciplinary Art from the University of Barcelona. He is currently an ANID postdoctoral fellow at the Faculty of Letters at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, with the following grant: FONDECYT research 3210091.

INTRODUCTION: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Western musicology has a prestigious and consistent analytical tradition that dates back to 1777 when one of the first works sought to systematize European tonal music within academia. It was classified as ‘physical sound’ [acoustics], ‘mathematical sound’ [instrument construction], ‘musical grammar’ [notation and theory], ‘musical rhetoric’ [form and style], and ‘musical criticism’ [aesthetics and interpretation] (Forkel). Later on, at the end of the nineteenth century, Austrian musicologist Guido Adler (1855-1941) made pioneering contributions such as the foundation of the first journal of musicology. *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft* [Musicology Quarterly] in 1884, which provided a systematic classification for teaching and researching in Europe and America aimed as an academic discipline (Mugglestone). One significant point raised by Adler was his interest in the knowledge of the music outside the tonal canon by taking folk and popular musics into consideration with ethnographic purposes. Since then, art music studies, namely the Austro-German tradition with composers such as J. S. Bach and L. Beethoven, have a partner discipline that has researched the various ‘non-Western’ musical expressions transmitted by indigenous people orally: ethnomusicology. Although it began in Europe, the discipline of ethnomusicology developed institutionally in the United States, after World War II, during the decade of the 1950s where scholars provided the most significant body of study (see Nettl, for example). In this context, twentieth-century musicology developed, on the one hand, based on the grounds of the tonal theory of art [written] music (see Cook) and, on the other, based on extensive fieldwork aimed at oral-transmitted music under the methodology of cultural anthropology.

In musical teaching, as well as in theory, it is customary to speak about the ‘musical language’ of a composer, denoting the style or use of some aspects within a musical piece such as rhythms, beats, tonality, harmony, modality, among other musical features (see Rupprecht). On the other hand, many musicologists and composers reject the idea that music can be considered language because it is a non-verbal form of communication (see Adorno and Gillespie). Nevertheless, tonal music theory has been influenced by language because their apparent affinity gives the impression to imitate each other in terms of communicative structures based on positivist

structuralism. Traditional music “theory shows how pulse, meter (number and type of beats in the measure), accent and duration can be analyzed to identify groupings of notes that are similar to poetic feet known as iambic, anapaest, and dactyl, for instance” (Harper-Scott and Samson 32). In this formalist and structuralist context, the semiotic theory has been used to treat the linguistic qualities of tonal music focusing on “how music can generally be regarded as signs, and how they are distributed in pieces of music” and where “the formal elements of something can be discussed without their specific context” (33). Even the famous US linguist Noam Chomsky asked the question:

To determine whether music, or mathematics, or the communication system of bees, or the system of ape calls, is a language, we must first be told what counts as a language. If by language is meant human language, the answer will be trivially negative in all of these cases. If by language we mean symbolic system, or system of communication, then all of these examples will be languages, as will numerous other systems. (32)

This is why semiotics of European written art music tradition—anchored in the Austro-German canon composers such as J. S. Bach—has not succeeded according to the linguistic and music scholar Lucile Desblache, who explains that it has foregrounded an absolutist and closed view of the structures and syntax of music, taken with somehow ‘universal truths’ (Desblache 328). According to Desblache, “Music, in spite of being translational in essence, at least in the wider sense since it is based on transforming existing sounds, has long suffered from being perceived as an autonomous art” (2). This assumption, partly because of the Hegelian idealism that values “music for giving direct expression to inner subjectivity”, so that the “German philosophy of music, in particular, has been largely discarded since popular music impacted the cultural scene in the 1960s. Music is presently no longer thought outside of historical and social contexts, and mostly considered as a platform for social change and exchange” (Desblache 370). Thus, new perspectives and approaches became the focus for post-structuralist scholars, mainly from the USA and the UK, for whom music, specifically non-Western art music, analysis had less to do with what can be represented in the musical score and more to do with perception, listening, reception, issues of power, genre and race, among others,

providing the critical analysis that is now known as the New Musicology (Harper-Scott and Samson 89). Accordingly, the definition of music itself varies across different non-Western cultures, being its nature questioned as an exclusively human activity because “a definition of music is not only dependent on the content of music [...] but on activities and processes” (Desblache 62).

SOUNDSCAPE

The late Canadian composer and researcher Raymond Murray Schafer is one of the most significant authors exploring our relationship with the acoustic environment in modern industrial societies from an interdisciplinary approach. Drawing from disciplines such as architecture, acoustics, aesthetics, psychology, and musical composition, Schafer reflected on what was conceived as music and sound, posing ideas developed by other authors who considered music within a system of different sounds such as the ones generated by non-biological phenomenon such as wind, by non-human beings such as animals or machines, and the generated by human beings such as whistling (Krause, *The Great Animal Orchestra* 80). According to the Canadian composer, we can categorize the soundscape between “keynote sounds, signals and *soundmarks*. To these we might add archetypal sounds, those mysterious ancient sounds, often possessing felicitous symbolism, which we have inherited from remote antiquity or prehistory” (Schafer 7). The keynote sounds are analogue to the key in tonal music but might not be consciously audible such “those create²by its geography and climate: water, wind, forests, plains, birds, insects and animals”, ‘sound signals’ are those we listen to consciously such as bells or horns, and the ‘soundmark sound’² which derive from landmark refers “to a community sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make it specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community” (7–8). There have been a few discussions and musical products in Chile, as shall we see next. In 2013, Chilean ethnomusicologist Christian Spencer wrote an introductory article about the ‘paisaje sonoro’ [soundscape] in Spanish and a talk with musicians and scholars to discuss some approaches and reflections about this concept in Chile that nonetheless had produced few academic works at that moment (15).

² The Chilean Ministry of Environment has used the concept “Paisaje sonoro” (Ministerio del Medio Ambiente de Chile).

However, the conversation accounts for many creative works developed by composers and sound artists, mainly with urban soundscapes, where Luis Barrie's production highlights discography and performances (Spencer 15). In Chile, there are two remarkable projects in line with the theoretical foundations of the soundscapes. The first one is *Audiomapa* led by the Chilean sound artist Fernando Godoy and developed between 2012 and 2017. This collaborative sound mapping focuses on Latin America but contains recordings from around the world, and natural and urban soundscapes available free online (see Godoy, for example). The second one is the *Soundlapse* project which uses soundscapes recordings in three urban wetlands of Valdivia, southern Chile: urban park Huachocopihue, Cau-cau and Las Mulatas. This project aims to create sound-time lapse material, sound and videos, for scientific research and creative purposes, which are also freely available on its website (see Otondo) and whose scientific research in progress date began in 2019 (see Otondo and Rabello-Mestre).

TRANSLATING INTO MUSIC

In her book *Music and Translation*, Lucile Desblache discusses the manifold relations when music is considered under transcultural studies, specifically when lyrics or sounds need to be understood in another place with different culture and language. Drawing from Roger Wallis and Krister Malm's notion of transculturation in popular music, where local musicians incorporate global features of music, transforming and contributing to an international development of music (see Wallis and Malm), Desblache posits this perspective:

Since the Second World War, music has increasingly been perceived as a universal phenomenon, but not one that uses a universal language. Its manifestations are now seen as reflections of the cultures it associates with. Yet the processes of mediation that lead to new musics are rarely explored. In translation, adaptation, or transcultural studies, the focus is on vocal music, and the socio-political aspect of music is emphasised, rather than music itself. (114–15)

Desblache uses Maurice Ravel's *Bolero* as an example of the way musical elements such as rhythms and timbre are creatively translated to mediate between what is the Spanish dance bolero and what people of the cosmopolitan world finally listen to (38). Desblache identifies three broad categories of transcultural issues of music beyond the linguistic and cultural ones when translating a song's lyrics. The first one is encompassed by those sociological studies investigating "the impact of contemporary musical movements across the globe on the construction of geographies and identities or the political meaning of music across cultures" (115). The second category has been developed mainly by "musicologists, historians and [literary] comparatists" looking at "cultural intersections, exchanges and misunderstandings across ethnic and national borders" but limiting their examples to classical art music or popular music (116). And the third category corresponds to those studies that explore the transcultural aspects of music, focusing on "music as soundscapes, in the wake of Murray Schafer's interdisciplinary approach [and] questioning the capacity of sounds for meaning in changing environments" (Desblache 117).

Music in our contemporary societies has an almost incommensurable presence in everyday life (Tagg 279–80), this is not limited to urbanized areas so its existence has become ubiquitous and affects us, whether we pay attention to it or not (Kassabian). But it has not always been so. Technology has taken a leading role in this regard, from the 1930s onwards, because the presence of music would reduce in our everyday life if technological devices and sound systems did not exist, for example, considering the technological mediums of music as the extension of our hearing system (see McLuhan). A radical example of this situation would dramatically change our listening and awareness of music and sound:

[technologies] have meant that most contemporary exchanges imply transnational, interlinguistic, interdisciplinary and transcultural interactions. This is the case in music as in other spheres. In a globally connected community, cultural isolation is becoming rare and translation in all its forms plays a large role in breaking down walls. (Desblache 64)

As we know, many sounds from non-human animals have been the source for what is considered now musical sounds (see Wallin et al.) and which take on meaning in a particular cultural context. However, as the nature-human relationship has negatively changed during the last century, it is possible to identify different ways in which humans interrelate music and natural sounds with creative purposes. According to Desblache, the first way has been “Recording voices from the natural world and producing them as music” (348), as Bernie Krause exemplifies it with his album *Distant Thunder*. It is described as follows:

Rolling thunder and bolting lightning signal the arrival of a summer’s storm over the city. The rumble of distant thunder challenges the steady, gentle patter of rain in the garden outside as the storm moves over the city to the countryside beyond. A masterful pure environmental sound portrait of one of nature’s most dynamic yet comforting sound experiences. (Krause, *Distant Thunder* booklet p.1)

One of the first examples in Chile comes from Luis Barrie’s CD albums which mixtures soundscapes with speeches and other human and non-natural sounds. *Patrimonio sonoro de la Provincia de Valdivia* [sound heritage of the province of Valdivia] contains eight tracks which depict through soundscapes some crucial places of Valdivia, of which just two tracks, ‘La Pihua’ [track 5] and ‘Museo’ [track 6], are exclusively natural sounds (see Barrie).

A second way is present in those creative works that combine music composed by humans with recorded sounds from the natural world, with Einojuhani Rautavaara’s *Cantus Articus* (1972) as the most famous example (Desblache 348). The Finnish composer created a pioneering concerto for birds and orchestra, fusing magnetic tape recordings of marsh birds from northern Finland with flute melodies and other woodwinds in the first movement, while the second movement develops variations of the song of the shore larks, and the third uses the whooper swans’ sounds. An example from Chile is the performance work *Jaula Uno, Ave Dos* [cage one, bird two] by dancer Vicky Larrain premiered in 1996, being re-released in 2016 with the musical design by Luis Barrie and about forty minutes long³. This work is based on a true story that occurred in the city of Colina, where a 32-year-

³ Available at: <https://youtu.be/xkyGdjBJkTs>

old woman, Mirta Carrasco, lived for two decades locked up by her family in a chicken coop until it was discovered in 1992. The performance used original sounds from the news to recreate the soundscape where Mirta Carrasco was found, including her own sounds and howls. The 2016 performance included sounds of birds, chickens, and other non-human animal sounds (Larrain 05:50; 35:00).

A third way is “[b]orrowing creative elements from the natural world that resonate in human beings, such as cycles and activities, to structure compositions and inspire them beyond the spheres of human lives” (349). This broad idea dates back to the ancient tradition of imitation of the beauty in nature addressed by Plato or Aristotle, among others (see Gaut and Lopes). One of the most famous examples comes from Antonio Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*, where music translates the particular weather patterns of summer, autumn, winter, and spring through sounds. French composer Francois Mâche, who coined the concept of zoomusicology (Mâche 95), aimed to study the animals sounds understood as a communication means. Mâche sees music as a biological function whose models come from the natural world, questioning the common understanding of music understood as organized sounds:

It is particularly remarkable that only the sound quality of recombined signals is recognised by the bird, to the exclusion of their original function as stimuli: the bird abstracts the music from its acoustic experience, as many human musicians do. If henceforth one ceased to describe music by the single subjective emotion of the listener, and if one recognised this musical quality even in the most primitive systems or those most foreign to our tastes, by agreeing to consider them only as particular temporal objects, i.e. outside their social functions, then one can begin to speak of animal musics other than with the quotation marks that signal metaphors, before having even considered the ethological aspects of the question. (Mâche 114)

Mâche’s string quartet titled *Eridan* applies his theory by “borrowing and expanding the syntaxes of different bird songs” (Desblache 349).

A fourth way is the practice of “transcribing and interpreting natural sounds as human musical language” (348), with the French composer Olivier Messiaen’s *Catalogue of birds* as a good example. This work for a piano solo consists of thirteen pieces, where each one is associated with a bird from a region of France so that this musical creation aims to translate those diverse birds sounds through the musical ones (Freeman 11). In Chile, there are some good examples from art music composers such as Carlos Isamitt’s *Friso Araucano* [Araucanian frieze], from 1931, which translates the composer’s poetic impression of the Mapuche culture (Salas Viu), and also Carlos Lavin’s *Cantos de la selva* [chants of the jungle] (Blondel 67), from 1928. Music and nature have a long history that some scholars have problematised beyond the organised sound itself as a ritualised event (Attali 4). Still, the broad practice of twentieth-century music has led some scholars to develop a discipline known as biomusicology (see Wallin), who raised the question of whether whale songs can be considered music, or even more broadly, can animals produce sounds we think of as music? (Wallin et al. 483) The answer to this question goes beyond the purpose of this article, but music history shows that many musicians have used natural and non-human animal sounds like raw material to represent as music, and biomusicologists and soundscapes artists have demonstrated that possible answers can depend on the role and meaning each culture assigns to specific musical practices.

ALL LANDSCAPE IS INTERNAL

In 2013, Chilean musician Mario Concha, based in Villarrica, southern Chile, was awarded first in the prestigious Luis Advis Musical Composition Competition (Ministerio de las Culturas, las Artes y el Patrimonio) in the folk genre for “Tribulación” (Culturas Coquimbo). This 4:30-minute piece for guitar, electric bass, cello, viola, bass drum, sikus, tarka, and quena (Andean woodwinds instruments) shows the vitality of folk music: a living tradition. Chilean folk music illustrates how certain sounds associated geographically work, as the *Cuncumen’s Geografía Musical de Chile* [Chile’s musical geography] (Perrera) from 1964 shows. But it was Violeta Parra, one of the most significant musicians from Chile, who successfully fused traditional instruments and styles between South America and Chile beyond the folk boundaries of her time (Mundaca 123).

There are interesting issues in Mario Concha's album *Todo Paisaje es Interno* ['all landscape is internal'], digitally released in 2019 that somehow touches on the ideas presented in this text and provides exciting elements to the twentieth-first Chilean musicology, especially to popular and folk music. From a broader perspective, Concha's music reflects the human and nature relationship through creative means if we think of a landscape as the album's title suggests. The fourth track, which gives the title to the album, provides an exciting field of analysis as it is not Concha's composition and the only collective work. This musical landscape does not refer to Concha as an isolated individual but as the resulting soundscape from musicians and their instruments—namely guitar, electric bass, piano, and alto saxophone—whose distinctive particularities make them ontologically different.

Furthermore, the track's titles provide another insight into what is possible to find in this musical landscape: insects ('Insecto instante'), a tree (mujer árbol florido), a serpent (culebrón cerdúo), and a river (Rio Ternura). 'Culebrón cerdúo', track nine, is a narrated text accompanied by music, which tells the Mapuche legend of the 'piuchen', a mythological serpent with many aspects from different animal to human faces. This music translates, through a sound-based process, a local theme which goes from the Araucanian culture, in southern Chile, toward the rest of the Chilean geography, especially the capital and the north where geographic and cultural differences are stressed compared to the south. 'Mujer árbol florido', for example, is a solo guitar piece whose title comes from the Nicanor Parra's 'Defense of Violeta Parra' (223). Therefore, it can be considered a homage to the composer of the *anticuecas*; short pieces where the cueca is used as a reference and from which Violeta Parra developed one of the most original works for that instrument in Chilean music. Concha also recurs to the cueca rhythm in many parts of the piece and, like Violeta Parra, breaks, expands, and condenses this rhythmic cell.

'El sikus no sonaría bajo el agua' [The sikus would not sound underwater], is a piece for solo guitar whose title posits the impossibility of the sikus [an Andean panpipe] to be heard. Let's think of the transcultural issue in this piece. We can interpret this contradiction as the difficulty of musically translating the sounds of the sikus into a string plugged instrument, but even more, when the rainy south tries to hear [or make sounds to] the dry winds from the north.

‘A cantar una niña’ [to sing to a girl] is a cover from the traditional waltz-song titled ‘Las estrellas’ [the stars] (see Cuncumen) collected by the Chilean singer Blanca Hauser as the album states it. Concha’s version dispenses the rhythmic of the popular waltz version, singing the text accompanied by the guitar using arpeggio and legato notes, breaking the rhythm of the musical meter because only one string is plucked to make two or three notes sound like they are played in a row. Concha keeps the song’s melody; otherwise, linking it with the popularised one would be challenging. The general impression it gives me is that the singing is accompanied by a soundscape full of echoes produced by reverb because the melody is not traditionally harmonised as in popular songs.

As we have seen, Chilean music shows a solid creative activity relating to nature awareness from at least the last thirty years. Most notably, Chilean folk music reveals the human-nature relationship, generating consciousness through sound and music. Thus, *Todo Paisaje es interno* ‘speaks’ of geographies and nature but also invites us to explore how southern Chile’s soundscapes are changing away from the folk music perspective, as fusion of traditional genres and instruments show since the first recordings. It shows that traditional Andean woodwinds are no longer exclusive to northern Chile and that piano and electric bass are also part of current folk music. These changes and variations are at the core of Concha’s soundscape, deeply rooted in folk music. On the academic discussion, this text also aimed to intertwine literary, linguistics, and music studies focusing on how new perspectives can inform and provide interdisciplinary ideas to listen to contemporary Chilean music.

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