Klangfarbenmelodie in Polychromatic Poems: A. von Webern and A. de Campos
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Concrete poetry shares with other artistic movements of the 20th century a high degree of self-consciousness: from its beginnings, its practitioners accompanied their creations with a steady flow of manifestoes and position papers explaining and justifying their work and formulating their goals. The statements of the Brazilian "Noigandres" group, collected in their Teoria da Poesia Concreta: Textos Críticos e Manifestos 1950-1960, are characterized by a sense of continuity which is both historical and interdisciplinary. These young poets from São Paulo placed themselves firmly within the tradition of what they considered as the major achievements of the preceding generations — not only in literature, but also in music and the visual arts. Thus, besides Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Pound, Cummings, and Joyce, they constantly refer to Malevich and Mondrian, to Eisenstein, and to Schoenberg and Anton von Webern.

However, continuing the tradition did not mean for these poets simply imitating their models. Rather, it meant exploring further the possibilities inherent in their art and, following the direction indicated by the works they admired, finding new structures and new uses of their verbal material so that their texts would come to represent the artistic concerns and the insights of their own age. Gestalt psychology, phenomenology, information theory, and — very importantly — the concept of the Einsteinian space-time continuum occupied their thinking just as much as the ideas of the Russian Formalists, the precepts of Ezra Pound, and the example of Mallarmé's "Un Coup de dés." And they found that in developing their art they could learn just as much from painters and composers as they had from their literary models. Thus, the experience of listening to René Leibowitz' recording of selected works by Anton Webern, published in 1950 on two Dial LP's, was to have a profound impact on the composition of the six texts which mark the beginning of Brazilian concrete poetry.

Created in 1953 by Augusto de Campos, these texts are as pleasant to look at as they are difficult to read. Most immediately striking is...
that they are in color, or rather colors. The first and simplest, "poeta-
menos," which gave the six poems their collective name, is in purple,
with an intrusion of four yellow elements; the second, "paraiso pu-
dendo," contains four colors — red and blue, green and yellow; the
third, "lygia fingers," adds to these four the purple of the first poem;
the fourth, "nossos dias com cimento," has two pairs of complemen-
tary colors; the fifth, "eis os amantes," arranged symmetrically over
its vertical axis, consists of blue and orange, the two complementary
colors absent from the fourth; the sixth finally, "dias dias dias," em-

e
e
employs all six primary and secondary colors and adds as a further
means of differentiation the use of capital letters in some of its ele-
ments. All the other poems employ uniformly lower-case letters, and
the typeface is throughout a bold Futura of the same point size.

At least as striking as the use of color is the spatial arrangement of
the verbal material. It adds to our inclination to view these texts
first as visual images. In fact, the new edition of these poems of 1973,
in a loose-leaf portfolio format, presents each text on a white card-
board square, ready for mounting and display as a poster-poem. Each
text thus appears as a constellation of verbi-visual signs care-
fully inscribed on the surface so that its horizontal and vertical axes
coincide with those of the square. One of them, "eis os amantes," is
a Mittelachsengedicht reminiscent of Arno Holz; the others have verti-
cal alignments not only at the left edge but frequently throughout
the space, so that the reader is induced to connect the verbal elements
with those above and below. The material has been drawn from, or
refers to, the semantic codes of as many as five languages and appears
as phrase, word, syllable, or single letter, isolated by irregular spatial
intervals but arranged in equidistant horizontal lines whose number
varies from twelve to seventeen. While some words are fragmented,
others are run together, often forming Joycean portmanteau words.
In some texts, different colors are given to complete words or indi-
vidual phrases, but in others, words are also internally analysed by
color to suggest additional meanings. In many instances, color and
spatial arrangement take the place of conventional grammar and syn-
tax, texts appear within texts, and the reading becomes multidirec-
tional.

At first glance it might appear as if the structural strategy here had
been derived primarily from pictorial models (aside from the obvious
literary ones). But closer inspection reveals that, with the exception
of the full-fledged ideogram "eis os amantes," criteria of graphic de-
sign were not decisive for the textual organization. Instead, it was a
musical model that provided a major impulse, as revealed in a pro-
grammatic statement introducing the texts:
or aspiring to the hope of a

**Klangfarbenmelodie**

(tonecolormelody)

melody of timbres

with words

as in Webern:

a melody continuously switching from one instrument to another, constantly changing its color:

instruments: phrase/word/syllable/letter(s),

whose timbres are defined by a graphic-phonetic or "ideogrammic" theme.4

The term is Schoenberg's, and a brief theory of "Klangfarbenmelodie" appears at the end of his *Harmonielehre* (1911), while he provided the clearest practical demonstration of this concept in the third of his Five Pieces for Orchestra op. 16, of 1909, originally entitled "Akkordfarbungen" (Chord Colorations), then simply "Farben" (Colors):5 throughout most of the piece, the pitches of the same chord are played in ever-varying combinations of woodwinds, brass, and strings. This is consistent with his distinction, in the theoretical speculations referred to, between two kinds of "sequences whose interrelation produces an effect similar to thought," both of which he calls "melodies": one is the sequence of different pitches, conventionally produced by one instrument or group of instruments, the other the sequence of different tone colors, supposedly on one pitch or vertical group of pitches, an unconventional mode of composing which at that time excited Schoenberg's imagination and made him postulate the possibility of producing "such sequences of what we generally call tone color that their interrelation will work with a kind of logic wholly equivalent to the logic we deem sufficient with the melody of pitches."6

Schoenberg's development was to lead in a different direction, and Webern, whose studies with Schoenberg ended in 1908 but who remained close to his teacher, never composed anything quite like Schoenberg's op. 16/III. However, he was at that time developing a style in which the use of tone color assumed an even greater structural importance. Because of Webern's reduction of all the musical materials and the increased transparency thus achieved, each indi-
vidual event is given a heightened function and significance. One of the ways to bring this about is a constant change in timbre, both horizontally and vertically. Webern’s compositions gain in intensity what they lose in extension. The first of his Five Pieces for Orchestra op. 10 (1911/1913) lasts only 54 seconds in performance. It employs ten solo instruments, some of which contribute no more than three notes. Not one event is repeated; each is of equal importance and is related in several ways to every other event. The piece opens with a sequence of three single neighboring pitches, each played by a different combination of instruments from different families (B: trumpet and harp; C: celesta, harp, viola; back to B: flute and harp), followed by a group of three pitches played by one instrument (glockenspiel); it closes with a group of six pitches played by the harp, followed by four statements of the same pitch, first by the flute, then by flute and trumpet, then by the trumpet, and finally by the celesta. The central eight of the total of twelve measures have a wider range of pitches and contain vertical relationships of up to five different tone colors.7

It is quite obvious that this composition, referred to by one student of Webern’s work as “an incarnation of the concept of ‘Klangfarbenmelodie’,” 8 nevertheless does not embody Schoenberg’s idea in its strictest sense, except possibly at the very end where for other reasons it would be difficult to speak of a “melody,” not even one of tone colors. A better term, now in common use, is “Klangfarbenwechsel.” Such a change of tone color can, of course, also occur in a sequence of different pitches perceived as a melody in the conventional sense. While that is only one of the ways in which Webern employed it, it is what Augusto de Campos had in mind when he hoped to achieve a “KLANGFARBENMELODIE . . . as in WEBERN.”

A composition which particularly fascinated the Brazilian poet was Webern’s Quartet op. 22, of 1930. Written for violin, clarinet, tenor sax, and piano, and employing a serial technique, it opens with five measures of successive three-pitch sequences each given to a different instrument, with the right hand of the pianist functioning as separate instruments. Every other sequence mirrors the preceding one, retaining the intervals but reversing their direction, with the first note of the second sequence sounding simultaneously with the last note of the first in the initial four groups, and with the second note of the first in the following four. Tenor sax and violin execute the first two sequences; the two hands on the piano, the second two; violin and tenor sax (in reversed order) attack the next group, except that the third pitch for both is supplied by the clarinet; the fourth group is again given to the piano, with the entrance of the two hands reversed. The movement continues with what may be loosely called a variation of that pattern, with the tenor
sax accompanying as a free voice what is essentially a canon whose second voice is an inversion of the first.

Anton von Webern, Quartet for Violin, Clarinet, Tenor Saxophone, and Piano op. 22, first movement, measures 1-5.

For our purposes there is no need at this point to analyse further the details of this intriguing structure. What interests us, rather, is the way Webern has handled the change of tone color in the opening measures, for it provides the clearest example of what Augusto de Campos had in mind when he set out to create an equivalent to Webern’s “Klangfarbenmelodie” in his polychromatic texts. In fact, in an essay-poem published in 1974, the poet asserts that “lygia fingers’ . . . follows almost literally the initial part of the Quartet.” It hardly needs to be emphasized that de Campos equates the color of the verbal elements of his text with the tone color of Webern’s instruments. Reading the poem line by line, we first encounter a female name in three syllables, “lygia,” printed in red. This would correspond to the three-pitch sequence stated by the tenor sax. It is followed by three elements in green (the violin): the Portuguese “finge” (pretends) becomes by addition of “rs” English “fingers,” which may be read as verb or plural noun, and the reversal of the “rs”-sequence turns into Portuguese “ser” (to be). The next line presents the trisyllabic adjective corresponding to “fingers” which may be read as either English or Portuguese; the four letters of “digital” contained in “lygia” are printed in red, while the “d” and “t” represent the green “finger”-motif. The simultaneous presence of both colors in one word corresponds to the simultaneous sounding of saxophone and violin at the point of transition from one pitch sequence to the
lygia finge
rs ser
digital
dedat illa(grypho)
lynx lynx

assim
mãe felyna com ly
figlia me felix sim na nx
seja: quando so lange so
ly

gia la sera sorella

so only lonely tt-
next; but in the structure of the two works there is a discrepancy, for the line would have to precede rather than follow the “fingerser” complex if the text were meant to reflect the structure of the composition as precisely as possible.

The next line, a portmanteau-word based on “datilografo” (I type, derived from Greek daktulos, finger, and graphein, write) but including Latin illa (she) and a mythical gryphon as well as a play on Portuguese dedo (finger), contains in its two times three syllables all of “lygia” in red, surrounded by green “finger” sounds (d, t, r, ph/f). Here, again, the text departs from Webern’s structure, but by employing means which closely resemble the composer’s devices. Two verbal motifs, each expressed in a different color, have been stated and then developed by an appeal to several semantic codes and by a process of decomposing and recombining their graphic signs, resulting in a field of manifold relationships with a spatial syntax that allows for horizontal, vertical, and diagonal connections.

Next, “lygia” appears transformed into a feline, “lynx” — a transformation signaled not only by the vertical alignment and the presence of the “1y,” but more emphatically by the red color of the “lygia” motif. The two syllables achieved by the repetition are echoed in the same line, but across a wide space, by the dissyllabic “assim” which appears in a new color and thus represents a new motif — a parallel to the entrance of the piano in the Quartet. The purple “assim” remains suspended: while it may be read as a simple affirmation, it finds its fuller significance when the eye travels diagonally across the following two lines to the next purple element which completes the statement — “assim seja”: so be it. Those two intervening lines are composed of intertwining fragments of the red “lygia lynx” motif and of the green “finger” motif which has been similarly transformed as “lygia,” and of four separate syllables in yet another color, yellow — just as the clarinet enters with two short notes to complete the violin-saxophone sequence in Webern’s composition. And where the piano reappears in the Quartet, we reencounter the purple in the text. It is to remain the predominant color until the end, interrupted only by four short “so” elements in blue, and flanked on the left by a red “lygia” that has been divided and arranged vertically in the same manner as “lynx” has appeared on the right of the three-colored twoliner.

One could consider the blue in connection with the purple (in which it is contained) as a parallel to the interaction of the two piano voices, but that might be stretching the correspondences. Just as the reappearance of the “ly” in the penultimate line, in alternation with purple elements, and its final statement, reduced to “l” (all of which somewhat resembles the saxophone-piano-saxophone sequence of measures 6-7), so do the placement and coloration of the “so” par-
articles derive their ultimate justification entirely from their function in the text. "lygia fingers" is, like all the others in the series, a self-sufficient poem.

While it is clear that Augusto de Campos has made no attempt at an exact isomorphic transposition of Webern's music into a multicolored ideogram, it is equally clear that the sequence of colors in the poem does indeed follow closely the sequence of timbres in the initial measures of the Quartet. Has the poet thus achieved the creation of the literary equivalent to Webern's "Klangfarbenmelodie"? We should not try to answer this question before considering an aspect of the text which has thus far escaped our attention, although it might normally be the first to present itself in a discussion of the relationship of music and poetry: How do these texts sound? How are they to be recited?

In the programmatic statement the poet speaks of "a graphic-phonetic or 'ideogrammic' theme" determining the timbres (my emphasis), and he closes with: "reverberation: oral reading – real voices acting (approximately) as timbres to the poem like the instruments in WEBERN's klangfarbenmelodie." It is, then, a multivocal performance that the poet has in mind, and the colors also serve to indicate phonic timbre, although there is no indication of voice quality and pitch level. It is true that he has on occasion given solo readings of "lygia fingers," but he prefers to read "cis os amantes" with his wife, Lygia, each of them reading one of the two colors; and his favorite recorded interpretation is that of his friend Caetano Veloso, a Brazilian pop singer who taped the six "voices" indicated by the colors in "dias dias dias" separately and then mixed the recordings, embedding the whole in a "Webernized" version of a popular song on a theme similar to the poem's.  

It would be far more difficult (and less effective) to produce a multivocal reading of "lygia fingers"; but we are certainly meant to hear in our minds the different colors as so many different voices. It is by inviting us to explore the interaction of the semantic qualities of the verbal elements designated by the colors that the text engages our interest. By itself, a statement such as "lygia finge (fingers) ser digital [/] datilografo[:] lynx" may appear somewhat cryptic to a reader unfamiliar with the private meaning which it undoubtedly contains. Even the reformulation of "datilografo" as "dedat illa(grypho)" will not provide him with a clear enough clue to the crucial event occurring in the text: the establishment and interaction of different verbal motifs which are developed, decomposed, transformed, and combined with other motifs throughout the poem. It is the sound/color that designates the motifs and makes us aware of their existence. And it is the verbal material itself, in its semantic, phonic, and visual properties, that constitutes them — so that the emphasis
shifts to the signifier, in contrast to more traditional poetry where usually the signified, such as images, will provide the motifs to be developed.

The choice of the verbal material, however, is still determined by a conventional primacy of the signified. There is obviously nothing random about this choice or about the arrangement of the material. This youthful poem is still very much Erlebnislyrik, as much given to the expression of personal experience as to building a new poetic language after the models inherited from the pioneers of the past. Consequently, there is obviously a privileged reading: the poet's own. But it is privileged only inasmuch as it is privy to the reasons behind the choice, which include highly personal ones (how is the uninitiated reader to know that there lurks in the text another woman in the poet's life, Solange Sohl?). Other readings are therefore no less valid, as long as they can account for every one of the poem's elements — for that is what the controlled structure demands. On the other hand, the multiplicity of meanings generated by the multilingual text makes it an "open work" in which the interest in the fate of the individual "verbivocovisual" motif may outbalance the concern with the central theme.

The fact that the multidirectional and polysemous, constellational character of the text tends to interfere with our awareness of the underlying, essentially still discursive and unidirectional statement offers an illuminating parallel to the listener's perception of the opening of Webern's Quartet. If one considers only the pitch arrangement, one readily realizes the existence of two voices forming an inverted canon. However, the fragmentation of these voices into three-pitch sequences and the tone-color change within each group or "field" of two sequences, as Friedhelm Dohl calls it, concentrate our attention on the individual fields and their immediate interaction and thus partly obscure the perception of the more extensive voices. Although very tightly bound into the overall structure, these fields, each of which is a two-voiced inverted "micro-canon," achieve, as Dohl observes, a "relative independence." Dohl stresses the important function of the variable rests between the fields in this respect. It should be noted that, just as Webern made the rest into a carefully calculated and expressive element in his music, so does the poet activate the space surrounding his verbal signs, which is thus experienced as an integral part of the poem's structure.

In the first five measures of Webern's opus 22/I, each of the two voices is successively carried by all five instruments. Since the structure of "lygia fingers" precludes a polyphonic recitation, the text of the poem is likewise carried successively by all five of its timbres. Webern's tone colors do not assume the function of denoting individual motifs, as do de Campos' sounds/colors. However, since the
voices of the canon do not coincide in the two middle fields, as Döhlf has shown, with the basic pitch-row and its inversion, but incorporate them in a cross-over fashion ("Reihenkreuzung"), the tone colors serve to denote these two statements of the row: the original row is sounded by the tenor sax and the left hand of the piano, and the inversion of the row by the violin and the right hand, with the clarinet providing the same (structurally crucial) pitch for both rows. The extent of the poet’s awareness of these structural relationships at the time when he wrote his text is difficult to determine; but short of creating literary imitations of canon and pitch-row, it is hard to imagine how his employment of sound/color could be brought into closer correspondence with Webern’s use of instrumental color in the Quartet.

We have suggested that the indebtedness of the poet’s compositional strategy to Webern’s thinking extends far beyond the concept of “Klangfarbenmelodie,” and that a knowledge of Webern may aid considerably in unlocking these difficult texts. But we should also recognize that the indebtedness of the poetamenos poems to the Austrian composer detracts in no way from their status as independent and original works of art.

These six texts for various voices were the first Brazilian poems written in the concrete vein. As the “Noigandres” poets developed and refined their idiom, clarifying and simplifying their structures, they moved even closer to the spirit of Webern but abandoned some of the techniques adapted by Augusto de Campos for poetamenos. Verbal “Klangfarbenmelodie” was one of them. It is expensive to print polychromatic spatial poems. A more decisive reason was their discovery of simpler and more efficient ways to create ideogrammic text-scores for multivocal and even polyphonic readings, texts which were at the same time less private and seemingly more accessible. One example is Augusto’s “uma vez” of 1957.
commercial recording of the text with two female and two male voices, conducted by Julio Medaglia. It explores some of the possible vocalizations of this poem, which is recited, not sung. The diagonal descent is produced by giving each subsequent article-noun phrase to a lower vocal register, from soprano to bass, with voices sounding simultaneously when there is a vertical alignment in the visual “score.”

The reading follows first the individual diagonals, then scans the whole text horizontally in a simultaneous reading, and finally, with a change of method, presents the two diagonals originating from “uma bala” on the left by assigning the four articles of the ascending diagonal to the bass and the accompanying nouns to the soprano, having both voices run parallel, while tenor and alto sound the descending articles and nouns, respectively, so that the recital ends in a true polyphony. But the text of the poem is by no means simply a score for sound poetry. The “Noigandres” poets continued to demand a reader capable of perceiving their texts at the same time as verbal, graphic, and phonic sign structures. Like that of Anton von Webern, their work was a logical continuation of a tradition, but it nevertheless challenged conventional aesthetic norms and expectations.

NOTES

2. In a letter dated 8 June 1980 Augusto de Campos writes that he and Haroldo bought these records in 1952. He adds that, according to a catalogue of the time, they contained the Concerto op. 24, songs, the Quartet op. 22, the Symphony op. 21, the Bagatelles op. 9, “etc.”

3. Augusto de Campos, poetamenos (São Paulo: Edições Invenção, 1973). Composed between January and July, 1953, the six texts were first published in noigândres, No. 2 (Feb. 1955), in an edition of 95 copies; the typeface actually used, Kabel, also sans serif, came closest to Futura among those available at the printer’s (information by A. de Campos). All later versions use Futura. Three of the texts, “ilgía fingers,” “nossos dias com cimento,” and “eis os amantes,” were reprinted in noigândres, No. 5, which is a book-length anthology: Augusto de Campos, Déci Pignatari, Haroldo de Campos, José Lino Grinewald, and Ronaldo Azeredo, antologia do verso à poesia concreta 1949-1962 (São Paulo: Massao Ohno, 1962), pp. 101-105. The poem “eis os amantes,” printed in red and black and announced as a “text intended for 2 voices-colors, male and female,” was also published in the Teoria, p. 16, and — white and yellow on a light-blue ground — on the cover of Artes Hispanicas / Hispanic Arts, 1, Nos. 3-4 (1968), with a translation — blue and white on dark yellow ground — by A. de Campos, Marco Guimaraës, and Mary Ellen Solt preceding the title page (when the volume was reissued as Concrete Poetry: A World View, ed. by M.E. Solt, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970, both versions moved to the recto and verso of the first leaf).

4. poetamenos, 1973, n. pag.; transl. by Jon M. Tolman. The text was also printed in Teoria, p. 15; the English translation, with other material from Teoria, in Studies in the Twentieth Century (Troy, N.Y.), No. 7 (Spring 1971), p. 58.


6. Translated by C.C. from Harmonielehre as quoted by Döhl, pp. 97-8. (Unless noted otherwise, all translations from the German and Portuguese are mine.)

7. Analysed by Gruhn, with two diagrams, pp. 21-23.


10. A. de Campos, “João GilBerto/Anton WeBERn,” a collage of quotations of verbal texts, musical notations, comic strip images, and original statements, printed in an unnamed, undated, unpaginated magazine without a place of publication (to avoid censorship), which may, however, be cited as código, No. 1, published in 1974 in Salvador, Bahia.

11. The grammophone record, which shows on its sleeve the text of the poem, is contained in A. de Campos and Julio Plaza, Caixa Preta (Black Box: São Paulo: Edições Invenção, 1975). The first public performance of the poetamenos texts took place during the V Curso Internacional de Férias “Pro Arte” in Teresópolis, Est. do Rio, Brazil, in January 1954, arranged by Déci Pignatari with the assistance of Damiano Cozella and other musicians (Teoria, p. 195).

12. According to Haroldo de Campos, the concept of an “open work of art” had been explained by Pierre Boulez in conversation with D. Pignatari; Haroldo applied it to the work of e.e. cummings and referred in that context also to the early compositions of Webern (“A Obra de Arte Aberta,” Diário de São Paulo, 3 July 1955, repr. in Teoria, pp. 30-39). The term was to receive world-wide currency through Umberto Eco’s Opera Aperta (Milan: Bompiani, 1958); in the preface to the first Brazilian edition, Eco mentions Haroldo’s independent earlier use of the term (Eco, Obra Aperta, tr. Giovanni Cutolo, Coll. Debates, 4, 2nd ed., São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1971, p. 17).
13. This term was borrowed by the Noigandres poets from Joyce (Finnegans Wake §41.68); occurring in many essays in the Teoria, it holds a central place in their manifesto of 1958, the “plano-piloto para poesia concreta” (Teoria, pp. 156-58).

14. The discussion in this and the following paragraph is based on Döhl's careful analysis on pp. 240-42 (he says nothing about the relationship of tone-colors and pitch-rows). It is interesting to note that the terminology used in describing Webern’s early work could with only slight adjustments also be used in describing poetamenos texts: “The ductus of the voices dissolves into a discontinuity of single points, groups, or fields of pitches. Expressed positively: the concept of voices progressing side by side in a temporal-discursive fashion is replaced by a concept of points, groups, and fields of pitches interrelated in a spatial-structural fashion. ‘Linear counterpoint’ is substituted by ‘constellational counterpoint,’ monosemous analogy replaced by polysemous analogy” (Döhl, p. 160). The discussion of op. 5 and op. 7/III is entitled “Form as Constellation.”

15. The structural importance of the F-sharp sounded by the clarinet consists in the fact that it is the precise center of the vertical spread of all the pitches, as Döhl has shown (p. 240).

16. noigandres, No. 4 (1957), n. pag. (the issue is a large portfolio edition of texts printed as poster-poems, black on white). The version printed in the antologia (noigandres, No. 5, p. 111) contains an error in line 2 (“uma vala” instead of “uma fala”); this version was included by Emmett Williams in his Anthology of Concrete Poetry (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), n. pag.