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***Cantos Robados* (2005) — Fátima Miranda. Or how to “Steal” the Past and how to “Put” it in the Present Time**

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Abstract. In order to illustrate the theme of the conference *Old is new: the presence of the past in the music of the present*, I focused on a work of Fátima Miranda, a Spanish artist. This work is the concert-performance *Cantos Robados* created in 2005 by this singer, who is also a woman performer, composer and improviser. Of all the creations of the artist, *Cantos Robados* (2005) is certainly the one that questions the conditions of “new” and “progress” in art, from contemporary reuse of old and/or traditional musical traditions. My approach will be to go from singular to general, and will lead to a more general reflection on the direction of History and the question of new.

Keywords: Fátima Miranda; *Cantos Robados* (2005); concert-performance; creative process; tradition/modernity.

1 Introduction: *Cantos Robados* or the direction of history.

In order to illustrate the theme of the conference *Old is new: the presence of the past in the music of the present*, I chose to be interested in a work of Fátima Miranda, a Spanish artist. This work is the concert-performance *Cantos Robados* created in 2005 by this singer, who is also a woman performer, composer and improviser. My approach will be to go from singular to general, and will lead to a more general reflection on the direction of History and the question of new.

Since the 1980s, Fátima Miranda defends a *trans-aesthetic* and *trans-historical* artistic gesture. Indeed, Miranda juxtaposes in her works creative process from traditional, old, experimental and contemporary musical practices. As well, she offers incessant bridges between oral tradition and written tradition to the listener, and also incessant back and forth between past and present time. Of all the creations of the artist, *Cantos Robados* (2005) is certainly the one that firmly defends a posture that the artist took care to write in a statement of intent, which is a true aesthetic manifest. The artist questions the conditions of “new” and “progress” in art, from contemporary reuse of old and/or traditional musical traditions. Thus, she writes:

Imitating and copying is undignified. On the contrary, stealing and appropriating the sources to integrate, digest and forget them, transcending them and converting them into *something else* can give rise to an *original* art form [...] (Miranda, 2005a).

This conversion, the title *Cantos Robados* (robbed/stolen Songs) playfully expresses it. Indeed, the verb “robar” in spanish means “to rob” but also “to steal”, “to burgle”, “to swindle”,

or even “to pick” in a more popular expression. Then, the act of creation is a subversive act for the artist, suggesting an aesthetic movement, but also a real ethical posture. Would be the question of presence of the past in the music of the present an eminently political question?

It is from this initial overview that our thinking will be developed, at a point where we'll try to understand at once (1) the creative process developed by the artist in *Cantos Robados*, and also to wonder (2) about “new” in music. Finally, we will consider the broader question of innovation in Arts. We will assume that innovation often means on converting (from Latin *convertere*: to turn), implying transformation, inscription, but also misappropriation, kidnapping, and stealing of old processes in contemporary uses. That may seem far away from precepts of avant-garde in the second modernity of the twentieth century, where break - and not continuity - should prevail in discourses and actions of artists.

The course of History becomes a sort of pendulum, constituted by reinjection loops more than breaks and transitions. Is it the sign of a critical look, at last released from ideologies of the last century? Is it also a sign of re-cognition of multiple otherness which “inhabit” our land, even though globalization should be – as it is said – further galloping? In 2012, the Picasso Museum in Antibes¹, held an exhibition entitled: *A modern Antiquity*. We will mention a few presentation phrases that resonate with our purpose:

One of the strangest episodes in the history of European modernity is the unlikely affinity between ‘new and ancient’ forged by the most radical modernists before World War II. *A modern Antiquity: Picasso, De Chirico, Léger and Picabia in the presence of the Ancient* explores this alliance as it was proposed by these four iconic figures. Works of the twentieth century and sculptures or Greco-Roman ceramics are confronted in this exhibition, showing the re-invention by these ancient artists rather than the only influence of Antiquity on their own production. Thus, it shows how they were able to appropriate this past by making it ‘modern’ and how it was possible in the specific historical context of Europe before 1939 (Moreeuw , 2012; author’s translation).

2 *Cantos Robados*: Convert to invent

For Miranda, to rob means “to ramble”, as well as “get lost” on long roads where rocks are “rolling stones”, similar to “found objects” as she explains in the statement of intent of *Cantos Robados*². This concert-performance is the result of a collaboration between Miranda and Mirella Weingarten³, director (including opera), choreographer, German designer, also famous in creation of stage costumes. Both artists share a taste for the archaic, the kitsch and the grotesque and have the same will to consider the scene as a place of displacement to *other* universes.

The dramaturgy of this concert-performance is divided into two large blocks, each one having a number of short pieces. The titles of the pieces are difficult to translate because they are not based on simple anecdotal wordplay, but on a sense of multiple meanings claimed by

¹*A modern Antiquity: Picasso, De Chirico, Léger and Picabia in the presence of ancient*, from 18 February to 20 May 2012 at the Musée Picasso, Antibes. Exhibition organized by the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, in collaboration with the Musée Picasso, Antibes.

²For the statement of intent, see the official website of the artist, *op. cit.* We also add a source: a personal interview, Madrid-Marseille, September-24-2016, recording via WhatsApp.

³<http://www.mirellaweingarten.com/>.

the artist. Miranda holds this taste to her experience of sound poetry she has practised in the 1980s, particularly in the *Flatus Vocis Trio*. For example, *Lo Cura* can mean both (if based on the read aloud meaning rather than the written): Madness (*locura*) and Healing (*Lo Cura*). This piece is made of cries (*alborbolas*, *yuyu Arab*), at the same time fighting cries, ecstasy cries, celebration and feast cries, that express the existing closeness between madness and healing, both proceeding in a same cathartic state. Miranda plays much more with Spanish language than she plays with Musical language. The latter is not really tonal nor modal, neither atonal nor noisy or melodic.

Cantos Robados

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| 1—Almohedina | } | Part 1
Sacred |
| 2—In Principio II | | |
| 3—Arroró | | |
| 4—Arrobada | | |
| 5—Lo cura | | |
| | | |
| 6—Aire desoriental | } | Part 2
Profane |
| 7—Y con el mazo dando | | |
| 8—El azar y yo (de Tormes) | | |
| 9—Onomatropeyas | | |
| 9—Respiros de España Blues | | |
| 11—In Memoriam 11-M | | |
| 10—Entre Salamanca y Samarkanda | | |

The atmosphere of the first part is ritual, highlighted by the presence of a monumental suit in which Miranda appears to float (the suit is 4 meters high and 2 meters and a half in diameter). With the light creation of Weingarten, the suit changes its appearance, suggesting architectures and varied landscapes (tent, house, apse or volcano, even a mosque, on the top of which Miranda becomes a Muezzin [*Almohedina*]). The second part is profane. Miranda performs on the floor, backing down to her fashion heights. The suit, empty of her presence, remains on the scene: it becomes in turn a house, a Berber tent, an Indian tepee. This apparent opposition between 'sacred and profane' is in fact not an opposition. Miranda thinks about their complementarity. For instance, the artist has an ironic look on the sacred meaning, using small plastic toys or whistles in the first part. Meanwhile, in the second part, everyday thing is sacralized, the suit becomes refuge, sanctuary, place of intimacy.

It's in this passage between two areas of action, that stands, for Anne Cauquelin (2013), the conversion which mainly engages the artistic activity. Meanwhile Miranda talks of "metabolism". This passage implies no break between one surface and another. It negotiates a continuity involving the invention of a language - meaning a particular expression, a stylistic singularity. In fact, the conversion involves a spatial effect (a staging area), which is a *problematization* performed and imagined by the artist. For *Cantos Robados*, stage, costume, top and bottom are not mere pieces of decor, they are put at the service of a particular poetic, which is that of simultaneity. This simultaneity of "high" and "low", "holy" and "everyday" things, art music and popular music, oral tradition and written tradition, occurs in each piece.

The performance dimension of the artistic act makes present these “found objects that roll endlessly”, which Miranda steals to better convert into her own action surface. As she told us: multiple vocal techniques she learned were retrospectively used to find her own voice and way. Her path. Her singularity. By practising, she discovered other vocal possibilities that she had never imagined possessing, and which are not dependent on these ancient and traditional techniques.

We take as an example the piece *Onomatropeyas* (Miranda, 2005b), in order to try to understand more precisely how this conversion operation stands. The title already announces some clues to the meaning. *Onomatropeyas* does not exist in Spanish. *Onomatropeyas* means onomatopoeia; meanwhile *tropeyas* means “shock”, “accident” and could be translated as “strike”. *Onomatropeyas* thus refers to inherited onomatopoeia of the sound and phonetic poetry, but also to rhythm hit, sometimes grotesque and ironic, in which this short piece is based⁴. Accompanied by an African bow, a berimbau mouth (sort of jaw harp made especially for her), Miranda offers in just over 3 minutes a glimpse of her vocal possibilities, of her higher register to her chest voice (remember that Miranda has a vocal range of over four octaves). Music sources are all of those phonetic poetry including jazz (scat), throaty voices closed to guttural techniques of overtone singing. There is also noisy onomatopoeia, inherited from futuristic poetry and experimental music. Cells or phrases are repeated in a fluctuating tempo.

The whole piece is entirely based on the principle of rhythmic repetition. For Miranda, rhythmic repetition is precisely what makes possible the conversion principle. While it is particularly highlighted in this work, this is for Miranda the foundation of her creative process, repeating melodic and rhythmic cells as practices, techniques, styles and music genres. Indeed, repetition is not simply conceived as a common platform to all musical cultures in the world, it is also the essence of musical rhythm through which the most atypical conversions or further in time and space may occur. Repeating allows to insert moving in motionless position, and so to move from one place to another melody’s flanges, various vocal techniques, opposite registers.

However, the conversion cannot be identical to what is converted. Some rests remain. Remember that, for Miranda, copy and imitate are unworthy acts. No repetition is therefore identical. It’s in this rest, or the surplus (to which Anne Cauquelin also refers), which is exactly the location of *new*: *Onomatropeyas* is not fairly jazz, not quite overtone singing or rather experimental music. According to Martin Zenck (2012), extending the works of Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault, repetition is a process, based on a time delay between repetition and which is repeated. It also has a retroactive impact. These features, in which there is an integral part of the creative process of Miranda, bind the repeat to the difference, to the new.

3 Create “new”: between poetic, ethic and politics.

Fátima Miranda remains deeply committed to the avant-garde of the second half of the twentieth century as well as to contemporary aesthetic mutations (inspired by Duchamp and Cage). Her intention is not archaic or outdated. The artist seeks to create “new” without denying other music (old or traditional). As for Gilles Deleuze (*Différence et répétition*, 1968), repetition

⁴If this part is not exactly in the middle of the concert-performance, yet it represents the transition between sacred and profane, whose complementarity is effective at the end of the concert-performance: *Between Salamanca and Samarkand*.

produces difference for Miranda. Repeated elements become autonomous. From conversion to conversion, they generate new. As recalls Martin Zenck, reactivating the reading of Deleuze by Foucault in *Theatrum philosophicum* (1970), “difference is not the result of something new or an opposition to the above, it is precisely born through and with repetition” (2012). The transforming power of repetition is clearly involved in the poetic of Miranda, who also likes to quote Gilles Deleuze as a source of inspiration in her creative work.

In his book *Pour sortir du postmoderne*, Henri Meschonnic (2009) engages in a strong revision of “modern”, “modernity”, and “new” concepts. “New” is not only modern, nor should modernity be confused with contemporary. For Meschonnic, modernity meaning new work is recognizable by the activity of the work subject, its historicity basing its changing value, and its “indefinite faculty of presence into present, of all present's transformation.” (2009: 18). So, new is not the area of influence, chronology, or even genealogy, but an historical (or trans-historical) order that is played in practices.

Then “new” is a poetic, ethic and politic affair. That is to say an intersection of several action schemas. The concept “making a work” leads us to look at the world, not as a project that would be guided by a progressive ideology, but as crossing it, doing act by repeating. And, so, choosing not considering art only as a product of an era. This choice, highly political, allows to take the *remains* produced by this conversion and asserts the importance of an individualized culture. The presence of the past in the current music (or art) is the concerted action which agrees returning to works, to practices, without necessarily classifying them. This concerted action allows to keep fundamentally open practices and works, leaving a place for the in-between, for border's cross, for porosity between different living times of cultures and arts history⁵.

The final piece of *Cantos Robados* engages as a sign of this “new” that speaks, watches and hears itself. Between *Salamanca y Samarkanda* is the index of this conversion of past into present, in which the concert-performance is based on. Between Salamanca, the hometown of Miranda, and Samarkand, this dreamed Asia, is metaphorically located the intermediate place of conversion where tension between repetition and repeated elements is played.

The place of language... That of subject... That of new...

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⁵Martin Zenck, *op. cit.* Referring to the heterogenesis concept of Danielle Cohen-Levinas: “(...) it is possible to borrow the concept of “Heterogenesis” to Danielle Cohen-Levinas, in order to designate a difference that is not overwhelming given, but open. The tension born of repeating itself and repetition of the object, gives way to an in-between”.

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