

PARÉNTESIS



PARENTHESIS



LUIS NAÓN

"Gelmanianas"

- I -

Luis Naon

♩=40

tasto en trainant, rubato.

ord

tasto

p *7* *3* *mp* *p_{sub.}* *7* *p*

5 *mp* *3* *mf* *7* *p* *ord* *m.vib* *p*

p *7* *3* *mp* *5* *3* *pp* *mp* *mp* *m.vib* *pont* *mp*

7 *mf* *ord* *s.v.* *m.vib* *p*

pont *3* *mp* *pp* *mf* *molto pont* *3* *mp* *7* *rall...*

ord *p* *m.vib* *p* *5* *mf* *rall...* *3*

tasto *p* *mp* *ord* *7* *mf*

s.v. *m.vib* *3* *mf* *pont* *mf* *f* *5*

ord *ric.* *tasto* *ric.* *3* *pp* *mp*

tenir le ricochet artificiellement.

Introduction

LUIS NAÓN

I've been hearing Juan Gelman's poetry since the 1970s. At first, in secret: Juan was prohibited during the dictatorship. Secretly, I was weaving a music that shared key features of the author's poetry: its urgency, the everydayness of his artistic practice, his watchfully waiting for the arrival, from some profound spot, of a true song that would be unnecessary in the short term, but indispensable for being able to keep living.

It was to my great fortune that my secret writing in sound would cohabit with Juan's reading aloud of his poetry at a presentation in January 2012 in Paris. For that opportunity I wrote 9 short fragments (like short poems, I would say) for solo cello, which interwove with his reading. I dubbed this music "*Gelmanianas*," as a sort of homage and musical re-reading of Gelman's poetry, in which the subtle alterations of words and the prosody of his reading are present. Whenever I read Juan's poetry, I heard his voice, as if it were just for me, as if it were he who was reading his poems.

In *Parenthesis* I partially take this idea back up, no longer with the physical presences of the musician and the poet (although both will be present after a fashion in the electroacoustic space), but rather as a distance necessary for achieving focus or for the visitor to discover the element of sound. This distance is accentuated by the inclusion of a third type of sounds, composed in the manner of brief interweaving poems, mixing with or commenting on the pure voice and cello.

The form of these successions, which is the composition itself, responds to the double criterion of contrast and relation, and results in an apparently interminable cyclical

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1— Juan Gelman, "Dibaxu XXIX," in *Poesía reunida*, Buenos Aires, Seix Barral, 2012, p. 840. [T.N. This line toys with the phonetic elasticity of Andean Spanish, specifically the conflation of the phonemes /o/ and /u/ among native speakers of Quechua and Aymara. A rough English translation, deprived of this nuance, would be: "the birds ain't dead."]

2— Juan Gelman, "Cita XI," in *ibid*, p. 498. [T.N. "what's noise in the head? / you?"]

reading, in which each small start of a sequence is the start of the whole cycle. Any point of entry into the work is a good one.

In the general space of this work there are thus three main, interwoven elements that mutually interpret each other: 1) Juan Gelman's voice, reading his own poems; 2) Eric Picard's cello, performing the *Gelmanianas*; and 3) the commentaries and parentheses—some times pure sounds, fabricated either with external, hardly recognizable materials or through treatments and declensions of the voice and instrument themselves.

The choice of poems for a project like this is quite a difficult task; an impossible one, I would say. Juan gave me total freedom for this, which also involved a responsibility on the same scale. My selection seemed adequate to him.

In some sense, what the visitor will hear is directly related to my internal hearing, maybe much more so than in any other musical work, in which the semantic is diluted and becomes, by definition, ambiguous. (Pure music is just that and therefore, fortunately, it lacks a translatable meaning.)

In reinterpreted music, there always remains a doubt, which corresponds to the interpreter's happy share of license, which creates the hiatus between creator and auditor. This is not the case in *Parenthesis*, in which Gelman's voice is Gelman's voice and what is heard as music is also what rings between my ears.

prendre du temps dans les traits et figures lentes
et accélérer librement dles trists rapides,
comme un flot de paroles

♩ = 80

pont → ord

tr

sffz → *pp* < *mp* > *pp*

6

5 3 3

f *p*

mp *m.vib* *ord* → *tasto s.v.* *pont* *ord*

mf < *mf* < *f* < *mp* *mp* < *p*

5 *m.vib* 3 5 5 6

mf < *mf* < *f* < *mp*

pont → ord

f *sffz* → *pp* *pp*

6 5 6 3 5

mf *pp*

6 3 5

mf *pp*

ord → *tasto* *poco pont*

7

mp < *pp* *p* < *pp*

- III -

lento - melancolico

Three staves of bass clef music. The first staff starts with a *pp* dynamic and includes fingerings of 5 and 3. The second staff starts with *mp* and includes fingerings of 3, 5, 6, and 5. The third staff starts with *mp* and includes fingerings of 3 and 5. Dynamic markings include *pp*, *mp*, and *p*.

- IV -

libero - contenu et violent

Two staves of treble clef music. The first staff includes instructions like *rall...*, *ord*, *pont*, *press.ord*, *écrasé*, and *press ord*. Dynamic markings include *sffz*, *p*, *f*, *p*, *sffz*, *pp*, *sffz*, and *pp*. The second staff includes instructions like *ord*, *l.v.*, *ric.*, *l.v.*, *écrasé*, and *press ord*. Dynamic markings include *f*, *mp*, *mp*, and *pp*. A note is marked *possible mais écrasé*.

- V -

libero - senza tempo (comme un faisant sortir une voix)

Two staves of bass clef music. The first staff includes the instruction *m.vib* and dynamic markings *p*, *mp*, *pp*, and *mp*. The second staff includes dynamic markings *mp*, *mp*, *p*, and *mp*, along with the instruction *rall...*.

Parenthesis



MANUEL ROCHA

The artist

Luis Naón (La Plata, Argentina, 1961) is an Argentina-born composer who decided, at the dawn of his youth, to spend most of his life in France. He belongs to that exodus of South American sonic creators who decided to leave in search of knowledge and otherness, and ultimately decided not to return, while still preserving, far in the background, an original identity that has always kept them on a threshold between the New and Old Worlds. But Naón also belongs to a generation of Argentines who are conscientious about and concerned with democracy, which probably saved their hides in the 1976 coup d'état since they were too young to have participated in the struggle against the dictatorship. In this sense, Naón belongs to the generation of the children of those who fought against the barbarism that occurred in that country, which brought about the death and disappearance of more than thirty thousand people.

Luis Naón's training as a composer is double, since he studied traditional musical composition as well as electroacoustics, a discipline that takes place in a completely different setting from the first. This young genre – which has scarcely been around for sixty years of production in the long history of the art of organizing sounds – hosts the Schaefferian sound objects of *musique concrète*, which are quite different from the notes of more familiar forms of educated music produced with acoustic instruments. Nevertheless, in learning this discipline – an art that underwent a great evolution in the 1980s (when Luis was being trained) thanks to the evolution of synthesizers, and even more so of computers and their use in the synthesis and digital transformation of sounds—the composer was led to conceive of instrumental writing as an electroacoustic writing, by overlapping the sound signs of complex noises with the setting of organic instrumental sounds linked to extended techniques, which are distanced from the world of fixed frequencies to which Western music has been subject for many centuries now.

Luis Naón's sound work has not been limited to that of a creator who always works in isolation, in solitude, and limited solely to his own ideas. Naón has always been interested in collaboration with artists from other backgrounds,

and this is where he has found new forms, ideas and languages that have led him to imagine different sonic worlds. His collaborations with the plastic artist Abel Robino (since 1997) have allowed him to complete different mixed media installations, while his work with the theater director François Wastiaux and the Valsez Cassis Compagnie introduced him to developing various musical works for the stage, including *Hamlet*, *Le Baigne* (by Jean Genet), *Requiem pour un bookmaker chinois* (a free adaptation from the film by John Cassavetes) and *Les Parapazzi* (by Yves Pagès).

The sound installation

Luis Naón's proposed installation for the Espacio de Experimentación Sonora emerges from his meeting the exiled Argentine poet Juan Gelman (1930) in Paris in 2012. This new collaboration arose from their geographic-temporal intersection.

During his adolescence in the 1970s, Naón discovered the poetry of Gelman, an inveterate and idealistic fighter for social causes who was involved from the late 1960s onward in the fight against the first dictatorship in Argentina, as a member of the peronista/guevarista Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias (FAR, Revolutionary Armed Forces). Beginning in 1973, Gelman participated in the organization of the Montoneros, and he would leave Argentina in 1975 in order to take charge of the group's diplomatic relations in different European countries. In 1976, the military coup forced him into exile, whence he has fought for years to pursue justice and find those who were guilty of the kidnapping and disappearance of his son and daughter-in-law during the military regime of the era, as well as to find his granddaughter.

Juan Gelman has never returned to live in Argentina; neither has Naón since leaving his birthplace in 1981 (at the age of 21). Given this, as well as the fact that Naón, the young composer, had secretly read Gelman in the 1970s (since the author's works were prohibited by the dictatorship), I am led to draw a connection between the two artists. Naón himself tells us that, since then, he "Secretly I was weaving a music that shared key features of the author's poetry: its urgency, the everydayness of his artistic practice, his

watchfully waiting for the arrival, from some profound spot, of a true song that would be unnecessary in the short term, but indispensable for being able to keep living.¹

The encounter between the composer and the poet took place thanks to a reading given by Gelman in Paris, and for which Luis Naón decided to write nine short fragments for solo cello, thinking of them as if they were nine poems that could be interwoven with the reading. Naón has called these “Gelmanianas,” “as a sort of homage and musical re-reading, in which the subtle alterations of words and the prosody of his reading are present.”²

Poetry readings are confined mostly to literary circles, and only rarely is the poet its best performer. There are exceptions. After having heard several of Juan Gelman’s poems read aloud by the author, I discovered a much broader dimension than that which is exclusively restricted to his reading. His unhurried voice—pensive, sweet, precise—prompts us to submerge ourselves in the literary images embodied by the poet. Juan Gelman’s eloquence is crisply musical. I don’t know if Luis had heard a recording of any of his readings before meeting him and hearing him in person, but I imagine that he did, because the composer affirms that every time he has read Juan’s poetry, he has heard his voice as if it were just for him, as if he himself were reading his poems.

For *Parenthesis*, Naón has used recordings of Gelman’s voice. Here the poet is no longer physically present, and the composer makes use of this absence to bring his work closer to the fundamental essence of *acousmatic* music.³ Acousmatic art is that in which the loudspeakers are the instruments, like the curtains that Pythagoras’s students used in ancient Greece to listen to his lessons without seeing him, in order to concentrate on his voice rather than his image. The speakers likewise allow us to concentrate solely on the sound objects, and not on their enigmatic origins.

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1— Luis Naón’s words taken from his project for the current installation.

2— Idem.

3— An aesthetic inaugurated by Pierre Schaeffer in Paris in 1948 under the name *musique concrète*, which would be redefined the following year by his successor at the Institut National de l’Audiovisuel-Groupe de Recherches Musicales (INA-GRM), composer François Bayle.

The Espacio de Experimentación Sonora (EES) could be described as an *acusmonium*, a concept invented by Schaeffer's successors to describe multi-speaker concert halls in which electroacoustic sounds are diffused through space. The EES is made up of four walls with a total of twenty speakers arranged on three levels. Here, Luis Naón has "choreographed" a sound work that utilizes three different sonic elements: the voice of the aforementioned poet, fragments of the "Gelmanianas" for solo cello (performed by Eric Picard) and, newly, "the inclusion of a third group of sounds composed in the manner of brief interweaving poems, mixing with or commenting on the voice and the pure cello."⁴ For Naón, this third group of elements consisting of pure sounds—whether made with rarely recognizable external materials or through treatments and declensions of the voice and instrument themselves—magnifies the distance that the visitor will already have been able to establish in listening to the dialogue between the poet's voice and the cello.

This three-part dialogue revolves around an "apparently interminable cyclical reading, in which each small start of a sequence is the start of the whole cycle. Any point of entry in the work is a good one."⁵

Choosing from among Gelman's poems could not have been at all easy: how to reconcile texts from different books and eras? This is where the composer's appropriation becomes important and creates a new, more musical poetic discourse, one that is nevertheless always based on the roots of the Gelmanian imaginary. Music, both instrumental and acousmatic, is abstract and subjective; it lacks a rational translation.⁶ Poetry and literature, by contrast, are constructed with images, but images that are very different from sonic ones. In this work, Luis Naón's big challenge has been to establish a dialogue between spoken poetry

4— Luis Naón's words taken from his project for the current installation.

5— *Idem*.

6— Except for the electroacoustic works in which the composer uses sounds from everyday life, which already constitute signs and images with a great metaphoric potential, and which he transforms to create new, meta-musical metaphors. Pure acousmatic music, by contrast, has always attempted to abstract itself from the origin of sound objects and to evade all semiotic discourse external to the abstract timbre of the sounds used.

and music, something that many composers have tried to do since the beginning of the twentieth century. On many occasions, these attempts have continued to resist finding an equitable fusion, owing perhaps to the noisy character of the speaking voice, which has been unable to find a comfortable niche in the world of frequencies and melody.

On the other hand, it has also been difficult in *Parenthesis* to overcome the enchantment of Juan Gelman's voice, a timbre that encloses an energetic, agentive karma with a lot of personality. But is it even necessary to compete? I don't believe so. It would seem that, ultimately, what Luis Naón has attempted to do is to create a space designed for himself, a place where he might be able to listen almost perfectly to the poet from his youth, but capturing the sonic answers that his ears have recreated over the course of years of being touched by Gelman's voice.

Selected Poems



JUAN GELMAN

Note IV²

does fear of aging age?
does fear of death deathen?
what am i doing with the thousands i
of my dead friends?

am i deathening myself?
perhaps it's that i fear you/loveds?
is it that perhaps i fear you face/face
like a human happiness?

or that i envy you perhaps?/
or that i i envy you perhaps?/
together as if we walked about today
without suffering our own and other?

but why do i weep against you-
other pieces of my life?
perhaps i can weep at last?
can i weep in the end at last?

2— Juan Gelman, "Notas," in *Poesía reunida*, vol. I: *Violín y otras cuestiones*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011.

Another Tango³

the monster of reason spawns dreams/ he said/
he sank his hands into the night and left them stretched there/
his adolescent voice
had dark rings where dream began/

he fell in battle one day then/
the day that women grew enraged with God/
with furious breasts they beat against the holes
that julio was leaving through/

and not to leave here/abandon/
but because it happens that one has to go/
many times to do it/
sisters/hands/we have to go/ta-da

some look after bitter mothers on the patio/
others lose their voices/
others sleep with shirts of fire/
that day the women beat with furious breasts/

why did you have to die?/
didn't sweetness walk behind you like an ox?
you had a window in your chest/
your soul exuded heat like fire but it died/

jorge also died without a warmth surrounding him/
where were you/you/world/or deer/or star that
shines?/julio fell with a sun inside his body/
women spin about/they shove/they rage/ta-da/

we'll make a morning lofty as a window/
our friends will come to look/
they'll see the unborn skies
where stars were hung for lives more beautiful than this/

3— Juan Gelman, "Los poemas de José Galván," in *Poesía reunida*, vol. I: *Violín y otras cuestiones*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011.

On Poetry⁴

there are a couple things that could be said/
that no one reads it much/
that all those no ones are just a few/
that everyone's worked up about the issue of the global crisis/and

the issue of their daily bread/it's an
important issue/i remember when
my uncle juan starved to death/
he said he'd stopped thinking of eating and that everything was fine/

but afterwards it wasn't/
there was no money for a coffin/
and when the city truck eventually came by to carry him away/
uncle juan looked like a little bird/

the men looked down at him with distaste or contempt/
they murmured
that everyone was always bothering them/
that they were men who buried men/and not
these little birds like uncle juan/especially

because my uncle went on cheep-cheep-cheeping all the way until
the city crematorium/
they took it as a sign of disrespect and were offended/
and when they slapped him so he'd shut his mouth/the cheep-cheep-
cheep flew all around
the cabin of the truck and so they felt
that he was cheep-cheep-cheeping in their heads/that

was just like uncle juan/ he liked to sing
and didn't see why dying was a reason not to do it/
he cheep-cheep-cheeped his way into the oven/his ashes cheeped a
little when they
emerged/
and then the city men stared at their shoes gone gray
with shame/but

4— Juan Gelman, "Los poemas de Julio Grecco," in *Poesía reunida*, vol. I: *Violín y otras cuestiones*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011.

going back to poetry/
poets these days don't have too good a time of it/
no one reads them much/ those no ones are just a few/
the craft has lost prestige/ for a poet it gets harder every day

to get a girl to love him/
to run for president/to win the trust of shopkeepers/
to make a warrior perform great feats so he can sing them/
to have the king reward him three gold coins per verse/

and no one knows if this is true because the world is out of girls/
and shopkeepers/and warriors/ and kings/
or just of poets/
or both and so there isn't any sense
in pulling out our hair and dwelling on the matter

what's nice is knowing one can sing cheep-cheep
amid the strangest circumstances
my uncle juan in death/now me
to earn your love

Sides⁵

The idea escapes; it doesn't want
the grease of words, a vain
mirror. It's like
your body between the trees
along Atlixco Street
from one side of the wind to the other.
It comes, suspends
the loss, cuts through
the destitutions, kindles
day in my corner, repeats no faces,
silently names
the animals of chance.

5— Juan Gelman, “País que fue será,” in *Poesía reunida*, vol. II: *El emperrado corazón amora*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011.

The Other Who Speaks⁶

The dusk that wants to be
unconditional touches
the ancient strings of a blind piano.
What loose threads of fate have knit
this sleepless sorrow? What
past September in
the hunger for time between
time and its hunger for
the compass coining shadows on
my face? The tram
has died that led me to humiliations
in the barracks. But no.
The rails of their
endless processions
screech in what still floats
from me to me.

6— Juan Gelman, “De atrásalante en su porfia,” in *Poesía reunida*, vol. II: *El emperrado corazón amora*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2011.

BIOGRAPHY

LUIS NAÓN

(La Plata, Argentina, 1961) began studying music at the Universidad Nacional de La Plata and continued his studies at the Universidad Católica Argentina. In 1981 he moved to Paris, where he finished degrees in Composition and Electroacoustics at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris and the Université de Paris VIII. Committed to composition and performing, Luis Naón has been professor of Composition and New Technologies at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris since 1991, and at the Haute école de musique de Genève since 2006. From 2003 to 2008, he was professor of Composition at the Escola Superior de Música de Catalunya.

He received prizes from the UNESCO Tribune Internationale de Compositeurs in 1990 and 1996, and has also received the Trinac Prize from the International Music Council and the Olympia Composition Prize, among others. Naón collaborates with different ensembles and institutions, including the French Ministry of Culture, the Teatro Colón (Buenos Aires), the Orchestre de la Seine-Saint-Denis, the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, and the Orchestre de Paris, among others. He has recently debuted *Around the Bell* for the Moscow New Studio and *Ex Lex* for the Ensemble Contrechamps de Genève. Two of his monograph discs have recently been published by Césaré and La muse en Circuit: *Lascaux Experience*, with the Ensemble Laborintus, and *Sainte Nitouche et ses satellites*, which brings together four works from the “Urbana” cycle, as performed by the Ensemble Diagonal. [luis-naon.com]

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