

XUL SOLAR AND THE MUSIC: the Meeting of Arts

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At the opening of the retrospective show of Xul Solar's work at the Buenos Aires Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in 1968, Jorge Luis Borges closes his speech with a somewhat enigmatic invitation: "As Xul would say, let's *pan-live* in this world of his visions, of his lines, of joy, of purity and of the melody of his colors"¹. Why does he speak of *melody*? Is he suggesting his colors are organized in a set sequence? Or is he alluding to the musical side of Solar's work, and urging a systematic study thereof? Probably inspired by Xul's piano of colors, Borges's musical metaphor is not an isolated case among Xul Solar's critics. It makes one wonder about the importance of music in the life of the artist and its influence on his pictorial work².

There are many questions: what instruments did Xul play? Did he sing, go to concerts? Who were his favorite composers and what kind of music did he prefer? At what point did he take an interest in music and when did he begin to associate it with painting? It is necessary to investigate whether there are influences to his synesthetic tendency and determine the effect of music on his other fields of interests. Are there documents that give further information about Xul's research into the field of musical notation? What are the concepts behind his keyboards of colors and where do they lie in relation to similar inventions? How is the musical manifest in his paintings? Is this a conscious relation? To these ends, it is useful to reflect on the way music connects to Solar's aesthetic thinking and to his work's overriding symbology. Finally, what does his work teach us about music? Or is music the key to understanding certain Xul Solar paintings?

STUDIES, PRACTICE AND MUSICAL INTERESTS

The zither currently at the Museo Xul Solar might have been the first instrument that the artist learned how to play, perhaps under his father's instruction. From a family of music lovers, Emilio Schulz (Xul's father) carried on the musical tradition by sending his son to study the violin, the piano, music theory, and by taking him to concerts. Later, the young Alejandro would sit at the piano during the long melancholy days and the deep lonely nights that he spent pondering his vocation; there, he would figure out melodies, explore chords and try to make up harmonies. Music was an important part of the creative foundation of his early youth. Along with poetry, meditation, readings in the esoteric and philosophy, painting and drawing, music was the magma where the anguish and desires that tormented him blended.

In Europe, Xul's musical awareness—and indeed his general cultural awareness—broadened. He was able to listen to different sorts of excellent music in concert halls and through the scores that he could buy and then play on the piano. When he returned to Argentina, he made contact with local composers and musicians like those gathered at the Grupo Renovación³. In his library there are scores autographed by Juan Carlos Paz and Roberto García Morillo, and Xul is likely to have known

Alberto Ginastera, Carlos Guastavino, Carlos Vega and Atahualpa Yupanqui as well. He read about many aspects of the world of music—dance, the piano's mechanism, folk songs, harmony, counterpoint and different types of music—as well as music's relation with other art forms. He participated in studio sessions, sang in choruses, played the piano, and frequented the ballet, concerts, conferences on music and the opera—all of which confirm the importance of music in his life.

His taste for Richard Wagner and Johann Sebastian Bach, followed by Debussy and Stravinsky, is evident from his collection of scores, books and records. There is, however, a divide between the composers whose recordings he liked to listen to (Honegger, Richard Strauss, Ravel and Liszt) and those he played on the piano. This latter group includes Mendelssohn, Chopin, Schumann and Schoenberg, as well as some twenty composers for harpsichord or virginal (Frescobaldi, Scarlatti, Couperin, Rameau, Byrd, Gibbons and others). In terms of historical periods in his collection, there are few pieces from the Classical period, and, among Romantic composers, the absence of works by Schubert and Brahms is striking. His collection contains less popular music (specifically jazz, Latin music and tango), and almost all of it is in record form. The absence of chamber music and symphonies is surprising.

A study of the collection's genres would lead to other conclusions. First, the almost total absence of piano recordings confirms that Xul was an excellent piano player, which allowed him to play his favorite pieces. Second, two genres predominate: opera, especially Germanic opera, and ballet, especially by French composers. Russian composers hold an important place in both opera and ballet, and a certain predilection for symphonic choral music is also evident. These preferences confirm the artist's interest in combined artistic media: sounds and words, music and gesture, stage sets and harmonies.

WAGNER AND THE MEETING OF THE ARTS

After the Teatro Colon opened in 1908, Xul was able to listen to Wagnerian dramas in an ideal setting⁴. The influence of this composer on Xul is so deep that it can be felt in his autobiographical writings, even when there is no explicit reference to Wagner. Take, for example, the following text, where Xul uses an intense poetic style:

October 1910—Buenos Aires—night—

I am oppressed by a vague suffocation of desires, like rivaling and deadly enemy fogs; in the midst of my agitation, my spirit flutters about, looking for a way to escape, I don't know where to. I hear the splintering waves from between the hum of the sea and I feel cooling breezes; but the nighttime fleets of wandering ships vanish when called; mounted stern giants go silently through distant deserts of air, hiding the tight-colored moon, but their lesser souls do not understand me; ghosts, veiled things fill the air, I can not define them nor do they help me; keen hidden laughter and quick heard movements attract me fatally, while the fogs, like snakes, vanish.

Clear visions in the night, rhythmic musical sighs from the florid jungle, assorted rustling waters dance about and the breath-perfume of the young Spring plays and surrounds me like delicious flames, in delirious fever they strike me dumb, Oh! And a lively group of delicate maidens and magnificent mermaids!

But I do not understand their dances and nearby words, the most lovely one is at my side and the tiring delight numbs me painfully, the sad fogs hiding the picture, worthy of eternity in its young life

- Oh! What hands, what calls will lead me to pure air, to radiant sun and to midday satisfaction? I will become an old hat at this anguished struggle; with my hands, my eager eyes and ears, with my burning and wounding brain, I will find the way; if there is no way, if there is no land free of anguish for me, all of me, within my thoughts, I will make a world for myself, for my brothers⁵.

Splintering waves from between the hum of the sea seems to describe the beginning of *The Rhinegold*, whose erotic atmosphere resembles the feel of Xul's writing. The *lively group of delicate maidens and magnificent mermaids* is a reference to Rhine's daughters, while the *keen hidden laughter and quick heard movements* that attract him fatally bring to mind those daughters' flirtatious teasing of Alberich. The musical setting is evident in the *rhythmic musical sighs*, and the *dancing waters* refer to the Wagner's water-like aural effects. The *mounted stern giants* might allude to Fasolt and Fafner, whose image is combined with horse riding, probably taken from the *The Valkyrie*. Likewise, the delicious flames that surround him recall the end of the opera when Wotan abandons Brunhilde who is asleep in a circle of fire. Clearly, several Wagnerian images form part of the young artist's inner tumult. Neither does it seem a coincidence that during that year there were productions of both *The Rhinegold* and *The Valkyrie* at the Teatro Colon. Finally, the terminology he chooses to describe his first composition, that *dramatic and musical poem*⁶ that has unfortunately been lost, also places him within the Wagnerian tradition⁷.

The description of the revelry stops suddenly with a much more conscious resolution: Xul announces his need to travel and to find his own way in the world using his *hands* (painting and playing musical instruments), his *eyes* (looking at paintings, reading), his *ears* (listening to music and the sounds of nature) and his *burning and wounding brain* (thinking, meditating, studying art, religion and philosophy). Equating his senses and his intellectual faculties is very significant since it implies a valorization of the first. That is to say, knowledge is not sought with the brain alone –in truth, the brain comes last–, but also with the sense of touch, of sight and of hearing.

At least two testimonies evidence not only the importance of music for Xul, but also its function as a way into inner worlds. Francisco Luis Bernárdez states that in Xul's room in Paris, during World War I, there was a harmonium...

...a wreck of a piano that let Xul reach the sky through music. It was at those heights that our friend really lived. From there came forth his pure colors, his ineffable visions, his words full of priceless poetry, his goodness. And, of course, his stars which for him were living and familiar creatures, the unquenchable source of his oracles. Truth to tell, he lived there and sometimes came down to this world⁸.

Strangely, Luis Falcini, who was also in Paris with Xul at that time, uses similar terms to describe the key role of the ear –the organ of receptivity according to Paul Claudel⁹– in Xul's meditations:

[Xul's small work space in Paris in 1914 was] the space under a spiral staircase, a kind of landing where he could barely get around with his long legs. Leaning on the mast or staircase's center pole, his harmonium

was visually striking. Xul Solar curled up in this box to sound chords that took him to the Olympus of his reveries¹⁰.

Might these men have witnessed some of Xul's music-induced trances?

In the artist's earlier discourse, he mixes images of vision (*fogs, clear visions in the night*), smell (*breath-perfume*), touch (*I feel cooling breezes, delirious fevers*), movement (*my spirit flutters, dancing waters*), audition (*splintering waves from between the hum of the sea, the murmur of the waters, rhythmic musical sighs*) and taste (*delicious flames*). This characteristic is also true of poets like Baudelaire and Rimbaud, who write from the common depths of sensations¹¹. It makes us wonder if Xul was already reading these poets. The answer lies a little later in the artist's diary, when he writes:

I have been preparing to go to Europe with enough money for a month, and I have gone back and forth between feelings of hope, the desire to struggle, rest and utter desperation. Un matin nous partons, le cerveau plein de flamme, le cœur gros de rancune et de désirs amers¹².

Written in French, these verse were not written by Xul. They are taken from "Le voyage", a poem by Charles Baudelaire:

LE VOYAGE

Pour l'enfant, amoureux de cartes et d'estampes,
L'univers est égal à son vaste appétit.
Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!

Un matin nous partons, le cerveau plein de flamme,
Le cœur gros de rancune et de désirs amers¹³,
Et nous allons, suivant le rythme de la lame,
Berçant notre infini sur le fini des mers: [...]¹⁴.

This poem allows Xul to anticipate the sensations that would soon seize him when he began *his* trip. Furthermore, the similarity between *le cerveau plein de flamme* and the *burning and wounding brain* from the 1910 text shows that he was already under the influence of that great poet.

With Wagner and Baudelaire among his early fundamental aesthetic influences, it is not strange that the primordial merging of the arts, which was crucial to both of these artists¹⁵, would become crucial to Xul Solar's thinking.

His conviction about this matter was fully consolidated in Europe, where the artist came across movements like *Stile Liberty*¹⁶, which sought to unify so-called major and minor arts, or the movement around the *Der Blaue Reiter* [The Blue Rider] Almanac, that involved painters, musicians and poets. It is known that this publication surprised and reassured Xul, who saw his own queries reflected there. The primary figure in the *Almanac*, Wassily Kandinsky, was another great admirer of Wagner. He was also an enthusiastic advocate of merging the arts, a subject that he writes about in *Point and Line to Plane*¹⁷ and in *On the Spiritual in Art*⁸. He predicts that this fusion will bring magnificent results: "Thus, the unification of the forces of different art forms finally draws near. From this unification, an art that we can begin to make out, the true *monumental art*, will, with time, be born". Diaghilev's Russian ballets, which amaze Xul in Paris, are convincing signs of this art of the future.

RHYTHMS

Given the strong influence of Wagner, it is not surprising that the first musical characteristic to flourish in Xul's work is rhythm. For Wag-

ner, rhythm was the essence of all purely human art. In *The work of Art of the Future*, Wagner sustains that “universal art, the only art of the future” must be constituted on the basis of “the plastic movement of the body, represented in musical rhythm”¹⁹.

From 1912 to 1925, Xul Solar works on the visual representation of rhythms and dances. The origin of many pieces, including the *Entierro*²⁰ [Burial] series (1912-1915), lies in rhythm as movement and the visual rendering of that rhythm through the placement and gestures of the figures depicted. In *Entierro*, placing the monks on an elliptical road suggests a solemn rhythmical ostinato (in this case, a triplet of eighth notes followed by three quarter notes) which would describe why Xul describes this series as a “funeral march”²¹. Two small watercolors that might have been sketches for tapestries were posthumously named *Ritmos* [Rhythms] (1918 y 1919), due perhaps to their likeness to Kupka’s *Amorpha, Fuga en dos colores*²² [Amorpha, Fugue in Two Colors]. Like *Amorpha*, the chromatic dynamism of *Ritmos*, especially the one from 1919, gives the composition an elliptical rhythm that invites the eye to explore the pictorial space by following the bright orbit of a shooting star. Here, the paused movement of *Entierro* becomes an dizzying sweep. Likewise, the almost spatial atmosphere alludes to the *harmony of the spheres*²³, a Pythagorean myth (taken up by Plato) where key elements in Solar’s universe like colors, sounds and planets are combined²⁴.

In a corner of *Vuelo*²⁵ [Flight] (1919), mysterious hands pluck what appears to be the strings of a harp, setting to music the cosmic movement of the central figure and bringing to mind Falcini and Bernárdez’s testimonies. Likewise, *A los astros*²⁶ [To the Stars] (1920) confirms sound’s power to facilitate spiritual elevation. The graphic element composed by the parallel lines of the Amazon’s hair is repeated in the mane of the steed and in the strings of the lyre on which the hand rests. The harp and the lyre are highly symbolic instruments in Western art. They are often associated with the idea of inspiration²⁷. According to Gustave Moreau, for example, string instruments in general and the lyre in particular symbolize ascendance and spirituality²⁸. Xul Solar makes use of this type of instrument to represent both cosmic and poetic flight. The iconographic likeness of certain Moreau figures and Xul Solar’s work recalls the connection that Mario H. Gradowczyk establishes between early Xul Solar and Symbolism²⁹. The female figure might embody one of the muses from Apollo’s court. Apollo’s presence is implicit not only in the lyre but also in the figure of the sun—the star with which the Apollo is associated—, in the laurel crown and in the ravens, which are also Apollonian figures³⁰. Hence, in these pieces Xul Solar seems to indicate the close relationship between musical inspiration, poetic flight and spiritual elevation.

The remarkable *San Danza*³¹ [Holy Dance] series (1925), which consists of variations on the theme of collective ceremonial dances, closes Solar’s early music-visual period. In the three watercolors that bear the name *San Danza*, *Ronda* [Circle] and *Danza* [Dance], music is represented as brushstrokes, figures and splotches of color which, according to Kandinsky’s ideas, add various resonances³². For Jacques-Dalcroze’s Eurhythmic Theory, the bodies of the characters in these pieces seem to act as musical vectors. In the article, “Rhythm as a Factor in Education”, which was in Xul’s library, the Swiss educator affirms the existence of a close relationship between “movement in time and movement in space, between rhythms in sound and rhythm in the body, between Music and Plastic Expression”³³. The concept developed in Jaques-Dalcroze’s text is extremely useful in explaining what happens in these watercolors. Jaques-Dalcroze opposes “plastic music” to pure music. “Plastic music will picture human feelings expressed by gesture and will model its sound forms on those of rhythms derived directly from expressive movements of the human body”. Isn’t this very plastic music what we

can see in Xul Solar’s visual dances? In these works, figuration and abstraction are two valid language for depicting the world of sound, which is an important, if not fundamental, feature. Music determines the inner atmosphere of the five *San Danza* pieces. It acts as the battlefield for the primordial opposing forces that, in our reading, are suggested in these works. It is in music that these opposites meet in order to fulfill the promise of creation.

NOTATIONS AND SOLARIAN KEYBOARDS

Towards the end of the 1920s, there is a striking change in Xul’s musical focus. According to Juan Carlos Paz’s account in his *Memorias* [Memories]³⁴, this change is due to Xul’s conversations with Macedonio Fernández. From this moment on, Xul loses any interest in the length of notes, in the question of time in sound, though, in this new attitude, there is a much deeper intention: freeing oneself from time. In an interview from 1929, the journalist says: “Listening to [Xul] speak, I lost track of time”, and Xul replies: “Perhaps one day time will not exist for our spirits”³⁵.

The article that Xul publishes on Pettoruti offers a glimpse of his conception of music in general and rhythm in particular. There, Xul identifies three *necessities* in painting, a term that alludes to Kandinsky’s writings³⁶. These necessities are the poetic, the plastic and the musical. And about this last term, he writes: “The musical necessity demanded of [Pettoruti] free play in terms of line, movement and mass according to that necessity’s rhythmic tyranny”³⁷. With his usual syntactic complexity, Xul presents music as a field where two irreconcilable enemies meet: the freedom of melody, gesture and musical texture, and the tyranny of rhythm. Certainly, his decision to move away from “the [vulgar, material] primary part of music”³⁸, as Macedonio would have put it, is absolutely consistent with the spirituality that he tended to throughout his life.

This conceptual change would explain why the innovations Xul formulated in his musical writings from approximately 1927 to 1931 concern themselves with pitch exclusively. His intention is not to reject traditional musical notation, but rather to simplify it, reducing the number of signs to be learned and optimizing the space for musical representation. His music notebooks³⁹ show how he came to define two types of musical notation, whose basic principles can be deduced through the analysis of five handwritten transcriptions⁴⁰. In both *trigrammatic* and *enharmonic* notation⁴¹, the traditional musical staff is replaced by a new shape (a trigram and a hexagram respectively), where there is no graphic difference between two notes that are enharmonically equal. The same note represents, for example, G sharp and A flat. *Enharmonic* notation, probably based on the *trigram*, is characterized by the modification of the notes in order to indicate that they have been risen by a half note: a Saint Andrew cross shape replaces the traditional oval⁴².

Yet, enharmonic equivalence—one of the fundamental principles of this notation system—only holds true for instruments that have the same temperament, that is to say those in which the octave is divided into twelve identical semitones. For a violinist and a singer, however, there will always be a subtle difference in the intonation of two theoretically enharmonic sounds⁴³. This must have been a point of contention with Xul’s composer friends, since in an article in 1929 Xul advises the journalist to avoid this subject when talking to musicians⁴⁴. Furthermore, because they do not use different keys, Solar’s notations are imprecise as a way to register notes⁴⁵.

This theoretical work led to one of Xul’s most wonderful inventions: the keyboard of colors. Made using three instruments (a dulcitone, a harmonium and a piano), its origins lie in texts from as early as 1911, when he writes: “a dazzling light, in colors never before seen, in chords of ecstasy and hell, unprecedented timbres, in a beauty new and my own, in my countless children, I must forget all the nonsense that

drowns me”⁴⁶. Colors and chords, lights and timbre, the visual and the auditory —these combinations show his early synesthetic leanings. The Solarian keyboard stands out among similar organological investigations because it does not attempt to produce a *music of colors*. Its aim seems to be, rather, aiding music learning by facilitating a musical writing close to painting. At the same time, the incorporation of certain traits from experimental keyboards, like the admission of microtones, makes this into a unique instrument. And in the linking of ideas that is Solar’s *modus operandi*, the keyboard of colors becomes the point of departure for a new stage since it seems to have led the artist to consider another improvement for musical notation: the use of color. At the end of the 1940s, his experimental writings leave behind the white of sheet music and become colorful *melodic diagrams*.

MELODIC DIAGRAMS

If, like Kadinsky, Xul thought that music could make a contribution to painting, he was also convinced of the value of contributions in the opposite direction, which might result in a better visual rendering of sound. In 1953⁴⁷ he stated that the characteristics of the keyboard of colors allowed for “melodic diagrams that are actually drawings”. He emphasized this extremely innovative point, repeating that “with practice, musical movements could be drawn with legible lines like music”. What would these score-drawings look like?

One of the most serene and appealing watercolors from the *Multiondas* [Multiwaves] series, *Cinco Melodías*⁴⁸ [Five Melodies] captures the rolling movement of melodic lines and transforms them into mountains, into color planes whose transparencies reveal new matrices. Counterpoint seems to have been used on the five waves, thus evoking a polyphonic piece. In the voices of a chorale, for example, rhythm and *cantabile* generally go from the deep to the high-pitched; likewise, in this painting the sinuous lines become more and more mobile and uniform as they move from the bottom to the top. Similarly, the blue pilgrim figure at various stages of a journey alludes to both the human aspect of music and the importance of music as a medium for spiritual elevation. Do the ramps in the shape of musical staves which help to cross the valleys imply that reading music allows us to move forward despite the complexity of counterpoint? In this watercolor, Xul Solar seems to invite us to explore the hidden geography of a polyphonic work that, if listened to, would allow us to reach harmony (the circle of the sun) and enlightenment (the golden light).

Although the juxtaposed planes and the construction of the motif in *Impromptu de Chopin*⁴⁹ [Chopin Impromptu] suggest a certain affinity with *multiondas*, the principles behind its structure are different from those of the *Multiondas* series. The title of this piece leads to an analysis of the artist’s music collection and from there a relation can be established with Chopin’s *Opus 29 Impromptu Number 1 in A* for piano. It is evident that, reading from left to right, the two horizontal stratum from Solar’s *Impromptu de Chopin* are a graphic transcription of the first measures of *Opus 29*. The line in the lower section represents the eighth-note triplets of the accompanist, and the swirl up above, shaded in purple, reproduces the melody. At least two authors from the artist’s library are possible references for this melody-line parallel: Ernst Toch, whose essay *Melody* includes graphics similar to Solar’s *multiondas*, and Kadinsky, who states in *Point and Line to Plane* that “all phenomena from the outer and inner world can be expressed in lines—a sort of transposition”⁵⁰. In addition to the obvious artistic value of *Impromptu de Chopin*, this piece evidences Xul’s effort to make *melodic diagrams that are actually drawings*.

*Coral Bach*⁵¹ [Choral Bach] (1950) is somewhat similar to *Impromptu*; its title also alludes to a type of music and a composer. Yet, the difference between this piece and that earlier watercolor is quite marked,

since *Coral Bach* is largely a chromatic reduction. Uncommon in Xul Solar’s work, this reduction gives the image a nocturnal atmosphere, an atmosphere that is not just literal, but also symbolic and psychological. It might indicate the painting’s connection to the unconscious. It is not possible to verify here the existence of a previous musical model, but the title seems to clarify the difference: it lacks the possessive form, which might indicate that this piece is not an image inspired by a Bach composition (as is *Chopin Impromptu*), but rather a visual chorale in Bach’s honor. The word “music” in the title confirms the allegorical nature of the piece. The dense texture of the pointed stratum alludes to imitative polyphony and the piece’s shapes suggest triangles, the geometrical figure traditionally associated with the spiritual. It is also interesting to notice the surprising relation between the iconography of these spirits and the previously cited autobiographical text: with their hands, eyes and ears, with their heads in flames, these figures seek their own way through Bach’s music⁵². Finally, the dates of both pieces suggest that they are *in memoriam*; 1949 was the hundredth anniversary of Chopin’s death and 1950 the two hundredth of Bach’s death.

SOUNDS, PHONEME, SIGNS AND MAGIC

It was certainly in the polyglot context of his childhood that Xul began to play with sounds and words, with the phonemes of the five languages that surrounded him (his father’s German, his mothers’ (*las mamas*) Italian, the French and English he learned at school and the Spanish spoken on the street). His investigation into the relations between the sounds of spoken discourse and the musical gesture begin intuitively, then. Indeed, these two kinds of sound merge in the statement of the poet Jorge Calvetti:

Because he [Xul] loved music, sounds. And mostly the sounds of words, of literature [...] We spent hours reading poems in Finnish. He did not understand Finnish at all, but he did understand writing, signs. He read and read, and the sound...that’s where the music was. So he said a poem, a verse, [...] the vowels, the consonance, how they went, the meter. And he repeated and repeated: it was music. He found the music in poetry, in words⁵³.

The parallel between his study of linguistics and music is repeated throughout Xul’s life. For example, the neocriollo [Neo-Creole], a language with a highly oral nature⁵⁴, was born at a time when, according to Emilio Pettoruti, Xul “was bursting with concerns [...] he was equally interested in everything: [...] pictorial and musical techniques”⁵⁵. Soon thereafter, in 1917, Xul shared with his friend “some brand new concerns: the quarter tone in the piano and a universal language, Esperanto”⁵⁶. This relation between micro-tones and a universal language reminds us that, decades later, musicality would be one of the parameters that the artist would have in mind in developing his panlingua. In an attitude so typical of him, Xul tried to combine practical ends —facilitating the pronunciation and writing of this language— with artistic ones —enjoying its sounds. Panlingua and its dictionary, *panjuego* [Pangame], can be seen as empirical illustration of his list of universal parallels⁵⁷. The basic elements of word, music, visual arts, mathematics and astrology organized here are also reflected in the Pan-trees, *panaltares* [Panalters] and *cruces* [crosses]⁵⁸. Finally, the simultaneity of Xul’s development of a shorthand-like writing and the simplification of musical notation⁵⁹ reinforces the idea of a strong mutual influence between these two fields.

In terms of this parallel between shorthand and musical signs, there is a relevant series of portrait-graphics that seeks not only a physical similarity to the subject but also information about his or her personality and life. In *Rudolf Stainer*⁶⁰, for example, some of the ideograms that Xul creates are strikingly similar to certain musical signs. Indeed, there

are six lines on the subject's temple that might allude to the hexagrams used in enharmonic notation. Two red signs derived from eighth notes define the eyes, and a blue eighth note is the ear. The neck is delineated by a fourth eighth note and an ideogram that looks a lot like a tuning fork. These musical references are logical considering how important music was to Rudolf Steiner as a part of meditation, which explains the location of the hexagram. The eighth notes for the eyes and the ear recall Steiner's belief in a strong connection between vision and hearing. Finally, the last eighth note and tuning fork for the neck suggest that musical activity can adapt mental rhythm to physical rhythm. In this way, music would act as a nexus between body and mind, helping to keep them in harmony.

The founder of Anthroposophy allows us to address briefly a characteristic of music that relates to one of Xul's major interests: the magical nature of sounds. From his youthful revelries to certain later works, music is associated with the esoteric time and again. As we have seen, Xul's friends tell of the flights he took through playing or listening to music and there is documentation that attests to this same practice⁶¹. In Solar's work, the hypnotic power of singing is seen in the open mouths of some figures, like the dancers in *San Danza* (Malba, Costantini Collection). In *Ángel del carma*⁶² [Karma Angel], the exchange between heaven and earth is represented through arrows, one of which goes from the angel's mouth to the man's left eye. Is this an indication of the relation between an emitted sound—whether discourse or melody—and vision? A hexagram and what looks like a note on the angel's skirt add musical connotations. The image of the angelic singing that affects man's vision alludes to the centrality of music in occult rituals⁶³.

Through the figure of the trumpet, music plays a central role in *Anjo*, a tarot card from the XX Arcana that is generally called *Juicio, Resurrección o Trompeta* [Judgment, Resurrection or Trumpet]. This image represents the resurrection of bodies and spirits, the process of spiritual rebirth, inner rejuvenation and communion with the divine⁶⁴. Among the revealing difference between *tarot de Marsella*⁶⁵ and the Rider-Waite⁶⁶ deck is the importance that Xul gives the angel. The expression of its face is peaceful, almost smiling, and its eyes are closed. Might the angel be concentrating on playing music? Instead of representing the strident sounds of the trumpet as lines coming out of the it, as in the *Judgment* card from the Rider-Waite deck, Xul suggests these sounds with little

dots scattered around the cloud. Already used in his visual dances, this effect indicates that music is present throughout the scene. The dots are combined with beams of light emitted by the heavenly figure as in the *Le Jugement* card from the *tarot de Marsella* deck. The location of the trumpet, which is in keeping with traditional iconography, indicates its importance to the moment depicted since it is the trumpet that announces the advent of judgment day. Sensed not just by the ears but by the entire body, its sounds are visually evoked by Xul as rays and sparks, as gestures and colors.

CONCLUSION

These studies show the depth of Xul Solar's relation to music, a passion until his final days. By playing music, he was able to analyze and to reproduce the Wagnerian harmonies that riveted him and to penetrate the polyphonic textures that he later evoked in his work. His well-defined musical tastes reflect his interest in the combination of different art forms, an interest that might have grown out of his frequent and early contact with Wagner and Baudelaire. Convinced of music's importance for human beings and motivated by an ideal of universal brotherhood, he tried to simplify piano reading and technique so that they would be accessible to a greater number of people. His experimental notation systems and keyboards are on the list of his wonderful utopias.

In his pictorial work, music takes on many forms. Rhythms are manifest as combined forms; melodies as lines that weave counterpoint textures and suggest sensual harmonies through chromatic juxtapositions. Musical elements act like icons that transmit their symbolism to the canvas and blur the dividing line that separates visual art and experimental notation. Indeed, the intersection of these two fields gives rise to a musical sign that, freed from the context of the score, takes on new potential in Solar's universe. These visual resonances allude to the magical power of music and are connected to the word.

By bringing together music and other disciplines and fields of knowledge, Xul seems to embody the Wagnerian ideal of the artist-man, who "can not be entirely satisfied but through the union of all art genres in a total work of art: in all *isolation* of his artistic faculties, [the artist-man] is *dependent* and only partially what he can be; whereas in the total work of art, he is *free* and entirely what he can be"⁶⁷. Xul Solar's creation is evidence of this freedom.

1. Jorge Luis Borges, "Conferencia", in *Xul Solar. Catálogo de las Obras del Museo*, Buenos Aires, Fundación Pan Klub - Museo Xul Solar, 1990, p. 18. (Henceforth, *CatXul* will be used to refer to the catalogue, FPK to the Fundación and MXS to the Museo).

2. Aldo Pellegrini, Elena Oliveras, Jorge Glusberg and Jorge B. Rivera are among those who have perceived musical qualities in Xul Solar's work or his work methodology. Cf. Cintia Cristiá, *Xul Solar et la musique*, doctoral thesis in Music History and Musicology, under Michèle Barbe, University of Paris-Sorbonne, Paris IV, 2004. In Spanish, cf. Cintia Cristiá, "La música en la vida y en la obra de Xul Solar (Parte I)", in Ana María Locatelli de Pérgamo (ed.), *Revista del Instituto de Investigación Musicológica "Carlos Vega"*, Buenos Aires, Universidad Católica Argentina, no. 18, 2004, pp. 39-54.

3. Cf. Guillermo Scarabino, *El Grupo Renovación (1929-1944) y la nueva música en la Argentina del siglo XX*, Buenos Aires, EDUCA, Cuaderno de Estudio no. 3, 2000.

4. There are productions of *Siegfried* and *Tristan and*

Isolde in 1908; *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg* in 1909; *The Rhinegold* and *The Valkyrie* in 1910. Cf. Enzo Valenti Ferro, *Las Voces. Teatro Colón 1908-1982*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones de Arte Gaglianone, 1983.

5. Alejandro Xul Solar, [*October 1910*], unpublished, FPK.

6. Alejandro Xul Solar, [unpublished], [November, 1911], FPK.

7. The expression "drama musical" [musical drama], taken from the ideas Wagner puts forth in *Oper und Drama* is used to refer to his operas and other musical work whose verbal and scenic elements are organized for a single dramatic end, according to the conception of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Cf. Andrew Porter, "Music drama", in Stanley Sadie, *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London, Macmillan, vol. 12, p. 830.

8. Francisco Luis Bernárdez, "Xul Solar", in *Clarín* newspaper, Buenos Aires, January 30, 1969, n./p.

9. "La vue est l'organe de l'approbation active, de la conquête intellectuelle tandis que l'ouïe est celui de

la réceptivité", Paul Claudel, *L'œil écoute*, Paris, Gallimard, 1946, p. 34.

10. Luis Falcini, cited in Patricia M. Artundo, "El libro del cielo. Cronología biográfica y crítica", in AA.VV., *Xul Solar*, exhibition catalogue, Madrid, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, 2002, pp. 204-205.

11. Cf., for example, Arthur Rimbaud, "Voyelles", in *Le Bateau ivre et autres poèmes*, Paris, Flammarion, 1994, p. 62; and Charles Baudelaire, "Correspondances", "La vie antérieure" and "Harmonie du soir", in *Les Fleurs du mal*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1999, pp. 55, 62-63 and 95. Baudelaire was also one of Wagner's first supporters in France.

12. Alejandro Xul Solar, [unpublished text], [January, 1912], FPK.

13. My use of bold.

14. "For the child, in love with globe and stamps/ the universe equals his vast appetite./ Ah! How great the world is in the light of the lamps!/ In the eyes of memory, how small and slight!/ One morning we set out, minds filled with fire,/ travel, following the rhythm of the seas,/ hearts swollen with resentment,

and bitter desire, / soothing, in the finite waves, our infinities[...]. Charles, Baudelaire, *op.cit.*, p. 186.

15. Cf., for example, Richard Wagner, *L'œuvre d'art de l'avenir*, Paris, Éditions d'Aujourd'hui, 1982; and Baudelaire, *Écrits sur l'art*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1999.

16. The cradle of the Italian version of Art Nouveau was Turin, the first city where Xul resided for a more or less extended period. He would later live in other cities where these ideas were cultivated: Paris, Milan, Munich and London.

17. Wassily Kandinsky, *Point et ligne sur plan. Contribution à l'analyse des éléments de la peinture*, Paris, Gallimard, 1991.

18. Wassily Kandinsky, *Du Spirituel dans l'art, et dans la peinture en particulier*, Paris, Denoël, 1989.

19. "L'essence la plus originale de la musique devrait s'élançer [...] vers la rédemption au soleil de l'art universel, unique de l'avenir, et elle devait prendre cet essor de ce sol même qui est la base de tout art purement humain: du mouvement plastique du corps, représenté dans le *rythme musical*", in Richard Wagner, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

20. Xul Solar, *Entierro* [Burial], [1912-] 1915, watercolor on paper, 15 x 21 cm. FPK.

21. "Ecco una idea di un quadro a tempera che ho incominciato, una marcia funebre, verde charo, bruno azzurro, rosso apamato, nero, e viola – color chario". Xul Solar, [Letter to his father], Turin, 1912, unpublished, FPK, cited in Artundo, *op.cit.*, p. 204.

22. This likeness is mentioned by Mario H. Grad-owczyk in *Alejandro Xul Solar*, Buenos Aires, Alba / Fundación Bunge y Born, 1996, p. 38. Jason Wilson (translator).

23. Cf. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (ed.), *Plato Complete Works*, Indianapolis / Cambridge, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997, pp. 1219-1220; James Haar, "Music of the spheres" in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *op.cit.*, vol. 12, pp. 835-836; and Jocelyn Godwin, *Harmonies of Heaven and Earth. The Spiritual Dimension of Music, from Antiquity to the Avant-Garde*, Rochester, Inner Traditions International, 1987, pp. 124-193.

24. A volume from the artist's library makes reference to this myth: Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin, *Dernière Musiciana: Historiettes, Lettres, etc., sur la musique, les musiciens et les instruments de musique. Rythmique des anciens airs de danse*, Paris, Frères Garnier, 1899, pp. 18-24.

25. Xul Solar, *Vuelo* [Flight], 1919, watercolor, 11,5 x 11,5 cm, MXS.

26. Xul Solar, *A los astros* [To the Stars], 1920, tempera, 15 x 21 cm.

27. Véronique Wardega, "Gustave Moreau: les mille et une lyres", in Michèle Barbe (ed.), *Musique et arts plastiques: interactions. Actes du Séminaire doctoral et post-doctoral, novembre 2000 – mai 2001, série "musique et arts plastiques"*, no. 4, Paris, Publications de l'Université de Paris – Sorbonne, 2002, p. 15.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

29. Cf. Gradowczyk, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

30. Cf. Anne-Sophie Noël, "Les Instruments apolli-

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niens et dionysiaques dans la peinture française du

XVII^e siècle", in Michèle Barbe (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 9.

31. Xul Solar, *San Danza*, 1925, watercolor, 23 x 31 cm, MXS; Xul Solar, *San Danza*, watercolor on paper, 23 x 31 cm, Buenos Aires, CP; Xul Solar, *San Danza*, 1925, watercolor and graphite, 23,5 x 30,5 cm, MALBA; Xul Solar, *Danza*, watercolor on paper, 24,8 x 31 cm, CP; Xul Solar, *Ronda* [Circle], 1925, watercolor on paper mounted on cardboard, 25 x 31 cm, MALBA.
32. Kandinsky, *Point et ligne sur plan*, *op.cit.*, pp. 34, 90 and 118.
33. "Between movements in time and movements in space, between rhythms in sound and rhythm in the body, between Music and Plastic Expression". My translation of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, "Rhythm as a Factor in Education", in John W. Harvey (ed.), *The Eurhythmics of Jaques-Dalcroze*, London, Constable & Company, 1912, p. 23.
34. Juan Carlos Paz, *Alturas, tensiones, ataques, intensidades. (Memorias II)*, Buenos Aires, Ediciones de la Flor, 1987, pp. 102-103.
35. M.B., "El paraíso de Xul Solar", in *Almanaque de la Mujer - 1929*, Buenos Aires, 1929, pp. 295-297.
36. In particular, the "nécessité intérieure" from *Du spirituel dans l'art*.
37. Xul Solar, "Pettoruti", in *Martín Fierro*, I, no. 10-11, Buenos Aires, September-October, 1924, p. 7.
38. According to Macedonio's definition, transcribed by Juan Carlos Paz on his memoirs, *op.cit.*, p. 102.
39. Interestingly, the way most of the pages of the notebooks are filled recalls watercolor technique. The different colors and musical fragments are applied in layers, filling up all the space available gradually.
40. These unpublished documents are in the FPK Archives.
41. This terminology has been applied by me.
42. The empty oval is replaced by a square in the case of the half notes and the semibreve sharps
43. The theory indicates that there is a comma between these two sounds. Cf. "Enharmonic", Stanley Sadie, *op.cit.*, vol. 6, p. 203.
44. "There is something that I can not accept: why must there be a difference between a B (ti) sharp and a C (do) natural" – "I agree with you" – answered – "And I have even argued about it with a musician..."
– "Never talk to musicians about these things!", in Ernesto Mario Barreda, "Por los reinos de la Cábala", *La Nación* newspaper, Buenos Aires, October 20, 1929, p. 32.
45. Due to space limitations, I do not get into technical questions of notations and the keyboard. Cf. my doctoral thesis, mentioned above.
46. Xul Solar, [*Notebook*], unpublished, [1910-1912], FPK.
47. Carlos A. Foglia, "Xul Solar, pintor de símbolos efectivos", in *El Hogar*, Buenos Aires, XLIX, no. 2288, September 18, 1953, p. 50.
48. Xul Solar, *Cinco melodías* [Five Melodies], 1949, watercolor on paper, 35 x 50 cm, MXS.
49. Xul Solar, *Impromptu de Chopin* [Chopin Impromptu], 1949, watercolor on paper mounted on cardboard, 35 x 50 cm, CP.

50. "Tout phénomène du monde extérieur ou du monde intérieur peut trouver son expression linéaire –une sorte de transposition", *Point et ligne sur plan*, *op.cit.*, p. 81.
51. Xul Solar, *Coral Bach* [Choral Bach], 1950, tempera, 35 x 50 cm, MXS.
52. Xul stated his intention to find his way *with hands, eager eyes and ears, with a burning and wounding brain*. Xul Solar, Alejandro, [October 1910], *op.cit.*
53. Jorge Calvetti, [unpublished interview with the author], Buenos Aires, August, 2001. In Calvetti's first version, the language referred to was Norwegian. Is it possible that they read the poems in more than one language?
54. Cf. Beatriz Sarlo, *Una modernidad periférica: Buenos Aires 1920 y 1930*, Buenos Aires, Nueva Visión, 1988, pp. 117-118.
55. This anecdote happened in Florence in 1916. Emilio Pettoruti, *Un pintor frente al espejo*, Buenos Aires, Solar/Hachette, 1968, p. 101.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
57. Xul Solar, *Hiercoeco zieli segun natura*, n./d., unpublished, FPK.
58. Cf. for example, Xul Solar, *Pan Tree*, c. 1952, watercolor, 66 x 31 cm, FPK-MXS; Xul Solar, *Pan Altar Mundi*, 1954, watercolor on wood, 65 x 46 cm, MXS; Xul Solar, *Cruz* [Cross], watercolor on wood, 62 x 32,5 cm, MXS.
59. Cf. Ernesto Mario Barreda, *loc. cit.*
60. Xul Solar, *Rudolf Stainer* (sic). *Sabio, norma, lume, guru, san norma*, 1961, tempera on paper mounted on cardboard, 30,5 x 21 cm, Private Collection, New York.
61. In *Book Four* by Aleister Crowley, for example, the mantras are written down on staves. Cf. Frater Perdurabo (pseud.) [Edward Alexander Crowley], in Mary d'Este Sturges, *Book Four*, London, Wieland & Co, [1913], pp. 34-35.
62. Xul Solar, *Angel del carma* [Karma Angel], 1923, watercolor on paper mounted on cardboard, 28,3 x 33 cm, Private Collection, New York.
63. In the FPK-MXS Archives there is a manuscript of a score entitled "Introducción al ritual Rosa-cruz" [Introduction to the Rose-Cross Ritual]. This is an adaptation of Beethoven's *Opus 48* for a chorus of folksingers. Attached to the staff is a description of the ritual.
64. Cf. Michel Cazenave (ed.), *Encyclopédie des symboles*, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1996, p. 665.
65. *Ibid.*
66. P. D. Ouspensky, *The Symbolism of the Tarot. Philosophy of Occultism in Pictures and Numbers*, New York, Dover, 1976.
67. "L'homme artiste ne peut se suffire entièrement que par l'union de tous les genres d'art dans l'œuvre d'art commune: dans tout isolement de ses facultés artistiques, il est dépendant et imparfaitement ce qu'il peut être; tandis que, dans l'œuvre d'art commune, il est libre, et entièrement ce qu'il peut être". My translation of Wagner, *op.cit.*, p. 216.

