TRANSLATION FOR SOLO VOICE: JOHN CAGE'S MULTILINGUAL VISUAL MELODIES

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ABSTRACT: John Cage's interdisciplinary compositions have been studied more from a musical than a literary perspective. The latter, as this paper seeks to demonstrate, is of particular interest to address certain concepts related to the latest trends in Translation Studies (Campbell and Vidal, 2025, 2024, 2019; Bennett, 2024; Vidal Claramonte, 2024, 2017; Blumczynski, 2023; Minors, 2023; Meylaerts and Marais, 2023; Lee, 2022; Gambier and Van Doorslaer, 2021). In this sense, this paper aims to offer a panoramic overview of this relationship between vocal scores and translational practices through the analysis and translation into Spanish of three of Cage's works: *Aria* (1958), *Solo for Voice 35* (1970) and *Sonnekus2* (1985). Despite the formal specificities of each of these works for solo voice, all of them constitute, from different perspectives, a clear line of study to delve deeper into the current paradigm shift of Translation Studies as a discipline. In addition to sounds and visuals, the literary nature of these three works means that translation goes beyond linguistic barriers and experiments with other semiotic systems, tackling concepts such as originality, authorship, interpretation and representation.
KEYWORDS: Solo Voice; Intersemiotic Translation; Multimodal Adaptation; Interdisciplinarity; Intertextuality; Interdisciplinarity

1. Introduction

This paper approaches the translation of John Cage's experimental artistic works from a dual perspective: on the one hand, the original work is analysed descriptively as an intersemiotic translation from literature to music and vice versa; on the other hand, I shall make a first attempt, considering that the research continues theoretically and practically with other vocal works by the same composer, to interlingually translate some of these works into Spanish, highlighting their formal and textual complexities. The study focuses on compositions that combine mainly the sonorous, but also the visual aspects, with the literary; that is, works composed for solo voice in which text is subordinated to the melody, while simultaneously complementing each other. Among Cage's compositions, three works have been selected for this study: *Aria* (1958), *Solo for Voice 35* (1970) and *Sonnekus2* (1985). It should be noted, as will be made clear later on, that the reason for this selection from among all of Cage's works for voice lies mainly in two factors: on the one hand, the possibility of establishing a comparative line between three works from three different compositional periods; on the other hand, to delve in a practical way from the same theoretical prism into the idiosyncrasies of three works which, although all of them are composed for voice, possess very particular and diverse formal characteristics.

Almost like an abstract painting, Cage's *Aria* operates like a visual score in which shapes, colours and languages guide a performer through indeterminacy (Brown, 2007). This composition, in which the perception of music as language is more than a simple premise, revolutionises notation as a method of representation: verticality indicates

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height; horizontality, time; and colours, style. In his musical lecture, *Solo for Voice 35*, Cage journeys through philosopher Henry David Thoreau's social and political concepts. Influenced by Thoreau's writings, above all, *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (1849), Cage uses Thoreau's words to begin his musical lecture: 'that government is best which governs least', composing a series of musical variations that combines the more textual and vocal aspects of the song's lyrics with its musical accompaniment. Finally, the textual score *Sonnekus2* consists of nine short songs based on passages from *Genesis*, which are arranged in mesostics: the vertical structural line refers to the *Sonneries de la Rose + Croix* (1892) by Erik Satie, whose cabaret pieces *Je te veux* (1902), *La Diva de l'Empire* (1904) and *Tendrement* (1902) also act as a backdrop for Cage.

The composer's experimentation with musical and literary works through innovative compositional procedures has led to some texts being considered untranslatable (Battistón, 2023; Apter, 2007). In these cases, Cage vanishes, following the postmodern hypothesis of the death of the author (Barthes, 1968) to end up saying almost the same, but in a different way: through listening to sounds, noises, silences and voices in several languages, echoes of an infinity of cultural and artistic references resonate through transliteration and intertextuality. However, the tunes of the intersemiotic and the multimodal in the performance (Bermann, 2014) invite reflection on their conceptual, visual and sonorous idiosyncrasy from a new perspective of Translation Studies (Campbell and Vidal, 2025, 2024, 2019; Meylaerts and Marais, 2023; Vidal Claramonte, 2022, 2017; Lee, 2022; Bassnett, 2022; Gambier and Van Doorslaer, 2021). Hence, the translation will, therefore, have to draw on all those semiotic elements that constitute the work and endow it with meaning, both in the process of studying the original interdisciplinary work and in its interlingual transfer into Spanish. Cage's vocal compositions represent, in this sense, an interesting corpus for studying translation from an interdisciplinary prism that allows us to apprehend the narration and interpretation of a new performative representation beyond the linguistic.

2. From voice to song, from song to translation: the interlingual translation of an intersemiotic composition

The idea of tackling the interlingual translation into Spanish of Cage's intersemiotic works, conceived in an interdisciplinary setting, must go beyond the hackneyed question of what translation is, to ask "what does translation do?" (Blumczynski, 2023, p. 7) and how it does so, reflecting on "the manner as well as the matter" (Blumczynski, 2016, p. 27). Following this line of inquiry, this study takes these works as melodies sung by different voices or played by different instruments in an intersection between 'musical texts' (Desblache, 2019) and 'sound poetry' (Perloff, 2019) from a musicological and translational perspective. In this sense, musical texts include "musical elements, such as notes, chords annotations, music transcription, and performed music and non-musical elements (verbal and visual content as well as performative content linked to the way a piece is played, sung and/or produced)" (Desblache, 2019, p. 65), while sound poetry possesses a series of semantic,

syntactic and linguistic attributes that redefine the function of language. For this reason, the analysis of the poem as an act of sound

> [m]ust consider its realization in live performance and hence the very nature of its sounds — their intelligibility, their relation to other sounds in the poem, their use of the pronunciation of a particular spoken language, their role in articulating a structure. Since sound poetry, while not constituting music, is a poetic form that works between media, the perspective of musicology and of avant-garde and experimental music can help us interpret its aural dimension. (Perloff, 2009, p. 97)

Recent studies, which focus on translational practices within other non-linguistic artistic disciplines such as music, painting or dance (see, for example, Vidal Claramonte, 2022), ask questions about how musical performance is affected by the process of translation, whether the notation of the former is itself a form of translation or how the source text has to be apprehended in order to carry out the semiotic transfer during the creative and interpretative process in order to

> [c]ommunicate to the target-language audience that the original work is worth its attention by revealing at least something of the special excellence of the original. This does not necessarily mean preserving the sounds of the words at all times, though it could mean creating word–music sounds that re-create the overall beauty and pleasure of the original, while also, if possible, re-creating some of the original's word–music interactions. (Apter and Herman, 2016, p. 15)

The incessant debate in Translation Studies about the idiosyncrasies of the original text takes on another dimension here, since the musical works of Cage that we take as 'originals' are indeed palimpsests of other texts. These "unstable texts" (Bennett, 2019, p. 45) are polyhedral pieces that require a plural approach from the lines of the stave to the sentences of the stanza, from the notes to the words, from the rhythm of the melody to the cadence of the speech. In this sense, the idea of this research lies in demonstrating that the interlingual translation of these works is possible thanks to the intersemiotic nature of the original work, which has already been translated interdisciplinarily. Each translation procedure is specific to the work itself, but the procedure is nourished by the musical nature of the text. Accordingly, the search for idiomaticity in the translation of this discourse, which is superimposed on the melody in the target language, will also depend on the target linguistic system because

> [r]hythmic phrases provide frames for sound acts. These sound acts themselves are realized by a configuration of choices from all the sound resources available in the given context. Melody often plays a key role, but not always and never only. Thus, the sound 'caress' may be realized by a certain choice of melodic means (voice at high pitch level; narrow pitch range; slightly descending and undulating melody); but also and at the same time by certain rhythmic choices (for example a medium tempo); by a choice of 'social distance' (soft, hence close); and by certain choices of voice quality or instrumental timbre (slightly nasal, labialized) and so on. Change any of these, and the sound act will also change - change the

> voice quality of the aural 'caress' to nasal, tense and loud, and the melody might be better described as sounding like a whining complaint. (Van Leeuwen, 1999, pp. 97-98)

Therefore, it would be expected that "[t]he language dissolves into purely material sound, musically interchangeable with the instrumentation to which it is set, and any rhetorical value that the words possess collapses into the rhetoric of the performance" (Bailey, 2016, p. 162). However, the difference in this case is that Cage is not an ordinary musical composer. As Mumma explains,

> [h]e was a virtuoso storyteller, a happy raconteur. But Cage was also quick with complex ideas and structures, and a fast learner. As a performer he was disciplined, reliable, and imaginative with creative decisions. Cage loved performing. He was nourished by the performing experience, even under difficult circumstances. He usually found an appropriate match of his technical proficiency with a given situation. Indeed, quite often his unique performance virtuosity—with music, with words and verbal repartee, and with graphic materials—was astonishing, even to practitioners of those arts not easily astonished. (Mumma, 2001, p. 119)

Yet, as Pritchett (1993, p. 1) notes,

> [h]is credentials are clearly those of a composer, Cage has, as often as not, been treated as something else. It has been stated on various occasions by various authorities that Cage was more a philosopher than a composer, that his ideas were more interesting than his music.

Although his musical compositions have been more widely recognised and performed, it is true that his literary and visual works were key to his conception of art and his creative practice, interchanging techniques and compositional procedures between the two disciplines indistinctly, but through a highly structured conceptual and formal process:

> Initially through translating structural ideas from the musical to the textual, during the 1940s, then moving musical notation closer to the visual through the 1960s, Cage drew the different art forms gradually closer together, exploring their similarities as well as differences, so that by the 1970s he had moved to a point as a mature artist where his creative ideas were equally able to find expression in music, text or drawing or painting. […] This consistency of approach allowed Cage to identify and then use the similarities between the art forms to build deliberate relationships that enabled a fluidity of ideas across previously closed boundaries; despite bringing the art forms closer together, he also ensured to recognize the unique aspects of each of them. (Stones, 2013, p. 133)

In parallel to the interdisciplinary nature of the work, two aspects are of great importance for the translation: on the one hand, Cage's combination of different textual sources and, on the other hand, the visual nature of the work. Cage draws on pre-existing materials in all his works; however, his works for solo voice represent a very significant case. The fragmentation, combination and rewriting of texts by other authors and musicians, as will be shown in the presented case studies, led to the creation of solos to be performed. In some of them, moreover, beyond experimentation with musical notation, "Cage

reconceived the nature of his invented 'mesostic', changing it from a structure around which a poem could be written to a method for 'writing through' preexisting texts […]" (Brooks, 2002, p. 138). A mesostic is a poetic form created by Cage, in which, following the idea of the acrostic, there is a vertical line made up of the central letters of each horizontal line. Beyond the conceptual evolution of the mesostic throughout Cage's artistic career and the complexity of its formal application through aleatoric rules, Jorge considers that *"[l]as obras de poetas y pensadores funcionaban como pre-textos sobre los que intervenir con el mesóstico como regla arbitraria pero impersonal*" and, as a result, "*lo que se lee o percibe es una suerte de temperatura lexical de los textos reescritos, una reminiscencia, un perfume verbal que recuerda a un universo, pero que en otro sentido está totalmente perturbado y mutado, y de cuya sintaxis nada queda*" (2015, pp. 368-369).[8] In addition to this fading of syntax, there is also a preference for a notation that breaks with tradition, as Nyman argues,

> [m]any of these notations move further along the road to a completely non-representational situation – no longer is a particular sound heard and translated into a graphic symbol which represents the 'image' of the sound to be reproduced. Many in fact represent a certain kind of work to be done so as to arrive at a point of being able to make an action (or actions) to produce a sound (or sounds)! (1999, p. 96).

Taking this into account and attending to the interdisciplinary nature of the original work, between the textual and the musical, interlingual translation (in this case into Spanish) should not opt for the predominance of one language or the other, but rather negotiate the tensions between original and translation, offering

> a conceptual route out of irreconcilable dualities by opening up to the possibilities of creative and critical intertextualities across languages and cultures. It transcends a zero-sum (all-or-nothing) conception under which the translator is either submissive to or subversive of the original text and its author (Lee, 2022, p. 6).

Experimental notational procedures are particularly striking in Cage's first and second compositions studied below. In all of them, but especially in the third, the need to adapt the text to musical discourse in performance stands out. As with other lyrical forms, these texts are open to multiple readings and interpretations, always subject to the idea of duration and time, which is also characteristic of each language. This aspect is particularly relevant in the translation of these melodic lines since the internal reading differs greatly from the performance reading, especially in relation to pitch and breathing. Considering the formal complexity intrinsic to this translational procedure, and far from questioning its

[8] "the works of poets and thinkers served as pre-texts on which to intervene with the mesostic as an arbitrary but impersonal norm. […]. what one reads or perceives is a sort of lexical texture of the rewritten texts, a reminiscence, a verbal scent that recalls a uniline, but which in another sense is totally disturbed and mutated, and of whose syntax nothing is left." [All translations of quotations henceforth presented in footnotes are my own.]

possible interlingual untranslatability, it is worthwhile exploring Cage's works to study "the extent to which the process of intersemiotic translation from music is similar to or different from the process of translating between verbal languages" (Bennett, 2024, p. 162). The creative combination of music, image and text in the original compositions serves as the basis for an interlingual translation in which it is revealed that "[t]he centrality of language in all these works is a symptom of a transition from the sign as a representation of the world to an image of the world as a textual sign" (Vidal, 2022, p. 86). Hence, "translation is crucial to all forms of artistic creativity, collaboration and performance", especially in those multimodal works which propose an analysis of the "transference, exchange and dialogue between the arts and the artists, not only in performance, but during the collaborative process, during the archival process, and during the interpretation process" (Minors, 2023, p.3).

3. Multilingual melody of music, literature, politics and religion: *Aria* (1958), *Solo for Voice 35* (1970) and *Sonnekus2* (1985)

In his quest for interdisciplinary creativity, there are several works in which Cage walks between different artistic manifestations, with an important preponderance of the written text during the representation and interpretation. In cases where the composition stemmed from a previous work, "Cage used elaborate rules for 'writing through' these predecessor texts to give rise to poems that start from other poems but that are very different" (Vidal Claramonte, 2024, p. 26). On this occasion, however, the three works studied below are similar, but also present an added, manifested formal difference: the textual discourse itself has to be sung by a solo voice, so that the translated text has to comply with certain performative components.

3.1. The translation of a multilingual vocal line: Aria

Aria was composed in 1958 and premiered in Rome early the following year. This work, dedicated to the composer and mezzo-soprano Cathy Berberian, can be performed on its own or in combination with *Fontana Mix* (1958)[9] or with any part of *Concert for Piano and Orchestra* (1958).[10] As the composer explains in the score, and as can be seen in its reading, the musical notation is not according to the traditional system, but is created and adapted to the specific work. As a result, it indicates the tempo horizontally and the timbre vertically (see Figure 1 below). Despite the imprecision that this representation may suggest at first glance, the original work was composed for a duration of approximately ten minutes, about thirty seconds per page, although this is not a *sine qua non* for the performer.

The vocal lines are drawn in black. The continuous or discontinuous lines, as well as the colours, represent the singing styles. However, the correlation established between a

[9] Available at: https://johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=79 (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

[10] Available at: https://www.johncage.org/pp/John-Cage-Work-Detail.cfm?work_ID=48 (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

style and its graphic representation is up to the performer. Singing is characterised by the alternation of performance styles or vocal emissions between syllabic execution and *glissandos*, the latter graphically noted by wavy lines suggesting melodic directionality and visually reminiscent of certain neumas in pre-Gregorian adiasmatic notation. Accompanying these vocal lines, the score is punctuated by a series of black squares representing any noise, considered by the composer to be "'unmusical' use of the voice, auxiliary percussion, mechanical or electronic devices" (Cage, 1960, n.p.). It should be noted that any other aspects of performance that are not indicated by the composer in the notation, such as rhythm, articulation or nuances, must be stipulated by the performer himself. This composition of a contrasting expressive character is framed within atonality, alternating aleatoric vocal interpretations with recorded 'non-musical' noises or sonorities close to concrete music, although following certain recommended guidelines.

As we can see, the performer is given a lot of freedom through the notation: in Cage's composition for Berberian,[11] by way of example, colour is correlated to style: dark blue to jazz, green to folk, orange to oriental and brown to nasal, among other indications. As for noises, finger snapping, clapping, shouting, barking dogs, laughter and moans of pleasure are added.

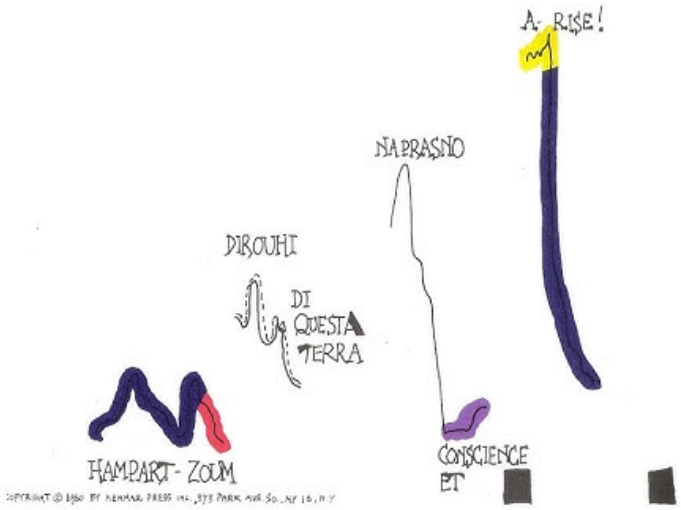


Figure 1. Score for the first part of *Aria* (John Cage, 1960)

Perhaps the most salient feature of this work, from a translational prism per se, is that the text includes vowels, consonants and words in Armenian, Russian, Italian, French and English. If there is one thing that Cage's work reveals, it is that its conceptual and formal complexity goes beyond what is apparent at first reading. In this instance, the intertextuality underlying the multilingual line is not as evident as on other occasions, but it endows the work with a richness that verges on the metalinguistic.

[11] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a15xkowPEPg (Cathy Berberian, voice). (Accessed: 30 October 2024).

The debate about the translatability of *Aria* lies not only in the simplification of translating an original work written in several languages into a target language, but also in the complexity of understanding what it narrates in each of these languages and why it chooses each of these linguistic systems as a system of representation. In this sense, I believe that it can and should be translated, but the translation strategy in this case is different from the usual procedure, as explained below. In a metaphorical contraposition between aria and counterpoint, the voices flee here from the title of the work to dialogue with each other, to establish a kind of choreography in which they contradict and complement each other. In this sense, it is worthwhile to briefly outline some aspects of the narrative not previously studied.

As a metalinguistic proposal, Cage quotes some canonical artistic, literary and historical works and authors not only through their original language, but also through translation. In the French passages, for example, the voice of Stéphane Mallarmé stands out from works like *Igitur ou La Folie d'Elbehnon* (1925) or *Diptyque* (II. *La Littérature. Doctrine,* 1929). In the English lines, however, we find Frank Pfeiffer's translation of Meister Eckhart's German work. Most of the selected fragments are, in fact, references to religion, an aspect that is also very present in all three works under analysis in this paper. Similarly, in the Italian fragments, the voice of e.e. Cummings, translated by the poet Salvatore Quasimodo, winner of the 1959 Nobel Prize for Literature, stands out.

Additionally, Cage uses his own transliterations of fragments written in Russian and Armenian, languages that do not share an alphabet with English. This practice of adaptation establishes certain processes of representation of power through the use of language adaptations in order not only to be heard, but also to be read. For example, Cage's journeys through 19th century Russia through the works of poets, playwrights and musicians such as Afanasi Fet, Aleksandr Griboyédov, Nikolái Nekrásov, Aleksandr Pushkin, Mijaíl Lérmontov, Iván Krylov, and Mijaíl Lérmontov, among others.

Considering the multilingual intertextuality evident in Cage's work, in addition to his references to canonical works, the question arises as to whether it is appropriate or not to offer new translations. Each of the languages chosen by Cage represents a particular locative and temporal culture. The vocal work becomes a kind of choreography in which different stories, each told in its own system, intermingle. The conceptual background of the work, therefore, lies in this linguistic hybridisation. To homogenise the text and translate all the lines indistinctly into the same language would go against Cage's compositional process. However, one could justify playing with certain combinations, as he does in the case of English or Italian. As in any translational process, something is always lost along the way and, perhaps on this occasion, this loss is related to wondering what the target languages would be, what the relationship between them would be, or whether it makes sense to speak of 19th century Russian authors and their respective works in a language other than one's own.

In this sense, the conceptual and linguistic complexity of Cage's original work requires, as previously mentioned, a translation strategy that differs from the procedure

followed in the other case studies. With regard to the vocal and musical line, and unlike the other examples presented, not only is it not written entirely in an original language to be translated entirely into a target language, but also the choice of each of these languages has a connotation, as has been explained. After an exhaustive analysis, and although the translated work will be published in the doctoral thesis to be presented soon, the score has been kept intact. Visually, the work is identical to Cage's work. However, having ensured that it can and should be translated, each of the pages has a table on the back as an explanatory footnote. In it, not only is the interlingual translation of the text into Spanish included to know the meaning of what is being listened to, but each of the lines is studied in depth. As an example, and in accordance with the information already mentioned, the distinction between lines in different languages is established, the original writing in other alphabets is included, references to works mentioned are added, as well as their interrelation with other works, and certain aspects whose previous reading allows a much fuller listening of the work are complemented.

Finally, to mention just a couple of derivative works of *Aria*, Cage composed two other arias with similar features and identical initial performance instructions. Beyond the visual and formal resemblance, at the interlingual level the language combination also includes words from Satie and Thoreau in French and English respectively, among other examples. These works, entitled *Aria Nº2* and *Aria Nº2B* are included in *Songbook I* (Song 52 and Song 53), published in 1970. Cage's composition *Solo for Voice 35* was also included in *Songbook I*, and is discussed in the next section.

3.2. The translation of a vocal line in the form of variations: Solo for Voice 35

Thoreau's political, social and philosophical essay *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (1849) was a vitally important piece of writing for modern thought on the relationship between the individual and society. In his opening lines, Thoreau condenses the premises on which he would later develop his thought, quoted by Cage as the starting points for his musical variations (see Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 4).

Cage composed *Solo for Voice 35* to be performed "in an optimistic spirit as though you believe what you are singing, and in such a way as to 'blur' both the pitch and the text as though your voice had not been trained" (Cage, 1970, p. 113). Through an AABA structure, he offers a series of thirty-two variations on each of the themes, derived from Thoreau's quotations, opening up the possibility of indeterminacy, but through precise instructions: "having sung any of them, the singer may substitute its A or B for any other A or B providing the latter A or B belongs to an AABA already sung" (Idem). The themes that constitute such variations at the linguistic level derives from Thoreau, whose thoughts influenced Cage's work on both a personal and artistic level (*Empty Words. Writings '73-'78*, 1981). References to Thoreau are a constant in Cage's work, not only in his musical and

literary compositions (the most important of which is the work *Mureau,*[12] in *M: Writings '67-'72*, 1973), but also his pictorial ones, as exemplified below.

Accordingly, intertextuality is a leitmotif in Cage's work, not only in terms of Thoreau's work, but also his own composition appears in his publications. For example, the literary work *John Cage, Writer*, alludes to the composition for solo voice in his text *Political/Social Ends?* (1969), where he is asked if anyone, including himself, has ever used his music for political or social purposes. His answer is as follows:

> I am interested in social ends, but not in political ends, because politics deals with power, and society deals with numbers of individuals; and I'm interested both in single individuals and large numbers or medium numbers or any kinds of numbers of individuals. In other words, I'm interested in society, not for purposes of power, but for purposes of cooperation and enjoyment (p. 115).

Following this textual composition, Cage adds the first part of variation 22 of *Solo for Voice 35*, as shown in the following figure:

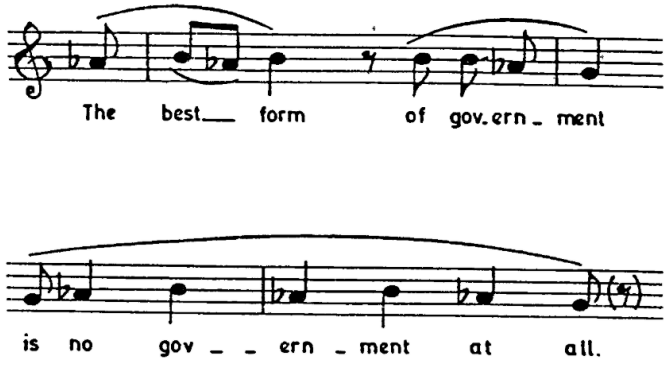


Figure 2. Score for *Political/Social Ends?* (John Cage, 1969) [first part of variation 22 of *Solo for Voice 35*] (John Cage, 1970)]

On a performance level, in *Solo for Voice 35*, Cage stipulates the following:

> before singing this solo, raise either the black flag of Anarchy or the flag of the Whole Earth. Having raised the flag, do not lower it at any time during the performance. Any number of flags may be raised during a single performance, one before each performance of this solo.

Beyond the disruptive and theatricalised character of the proposal, and its clear political and social component, Cage's commentary that completes the instruction at the linguistic level deserves special mention, especially from a translational point of view: "if possible,

[12] In this literary work, Cage plays a linguistic game to hide the title and, drawing on Thoreau's words, he makes the frontiers between paragraphs, sentences and syllables disappear, converting the work into a text that is no longer illegible, but almost untranslatable. In *M* (2023), Battistón translates the voices of both authors (Cage and Thoreau) into Spanish, and offers his own proposals for the solo voice piece. Battistón shows that translation has become an indispensable element to represent the form and content of these political and artistic discourses born in interlingual and dynamic ecosystems in which natural phenomena are reproduced through musical and literary representations.

the text should be sung by at least one singer *in the language of the audience* (making melodic changes where necessary)" (Cage, 1970, p. 113, emphasis added). Cage, therefore, removes any doubt about the function of the text in the work. The importance lies in the message: Cage's intention is for the audience to understand the background, beyond the musical variations. Consequently, the text must be translated and, as he notes, must be melodically adapted to the prosodic idiosyncrasies of each language.

Considering Cage's instructions, the process of translation here is complex and poses several challenges. On the one hand, there is the rhythmic question: the conciseness of English, added to the contractions that are possible in that language, makes it difficult to adapt it to the number of syllables and notes in the process of translating it into a polysyllabic language, such as Spanish, especially in those cases where it plays with the repetition of monosyllabic words through notes of short duration such as eighth notes. On the other hand, there is the question of terminology: in a sentence with such a semantic and conceptual background, there are certain words which cannot easily be replaced with synonyms. This is the case with the term 'government', which has a ready cognate in Spanish, for example ('gobierno'). Furthermore, the number of syllables and the diphthong in this word mean that a rhythmic adaptation of the term is difficult to achieve. Finally, on the question of originality, several translations of Thoreau's political treatise into Spanish that have been reprinted over the years across Spain and Latin America. Therefore, in terms of rhythm and terminology, a comparison between the translations published in Spain and Latin America may reveal parts of the translations that respect not only Cage's lexical choices, but also his random compositional procedure.

Taking Thoreau's themes chosen by Cage for these musical variations, a literal translation, closer to the original, but seeking idiomaticity in the target language could be something like: '*La mejor forma de gobierno es no tener gobierno alguno*'. This option respects the lexical selection and grammatical categories of the original but increases the line quantitatively. Another version, which also fits rhythmically with the linearity of the information and the progressivity between silences, would involve playing with the melisma of 'best' and the diphthong of 'government', as well as verbalising the nouns. Although expressive nuances of the original are still lost, especially with the adverb 'at all', one of the options, but certainly not the only one, to combine the rhythmic and conceptual issues could be: '*La mejor forma de gobernar es no tener gobierno*'. The discrepancy in the number of syllables between English and Spanish shows that, in order to maintain the conceptual charge of the discourse, as well as the rhythm and linearity through the distribution of the most semantically important terms, it is necessary to play with the diphthongs in Spanish and offer a couple of games with the melody. The first of these would be to convert the monosyllabic word 'best' into its direct bisyllabic translation 'me-jor' by taking advantage of the two quavers. The second, just below, would involve converting the crotchet of 'form' into two quavers at the same pitch, modifying the duration, but not the note. Both licences respect the structure and nature of Cage's text, while allowing idiomatic discourse to be offered in the target language.

It is sufficient to note that although the translation conforms to the musical variation selected by Cage in the 1969 work, the musical possibilities are varied, and the textual combinations have to be subordinated to the various melodic lines included in the 1970 publication. The first variations of which are presented in Figures 3 and 4 by way of example:

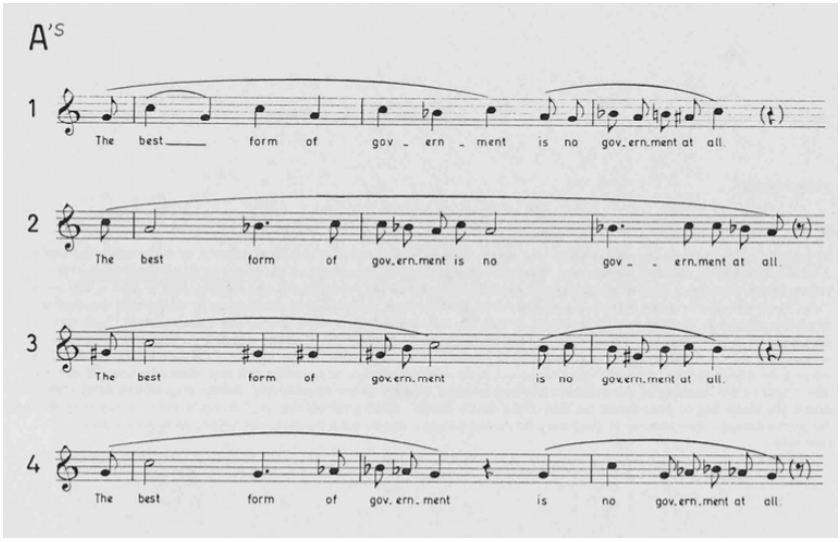


Figure 3. Score for *Solo for Voice 35* (John Cage, 1970): first four textual and musical variations of the A part

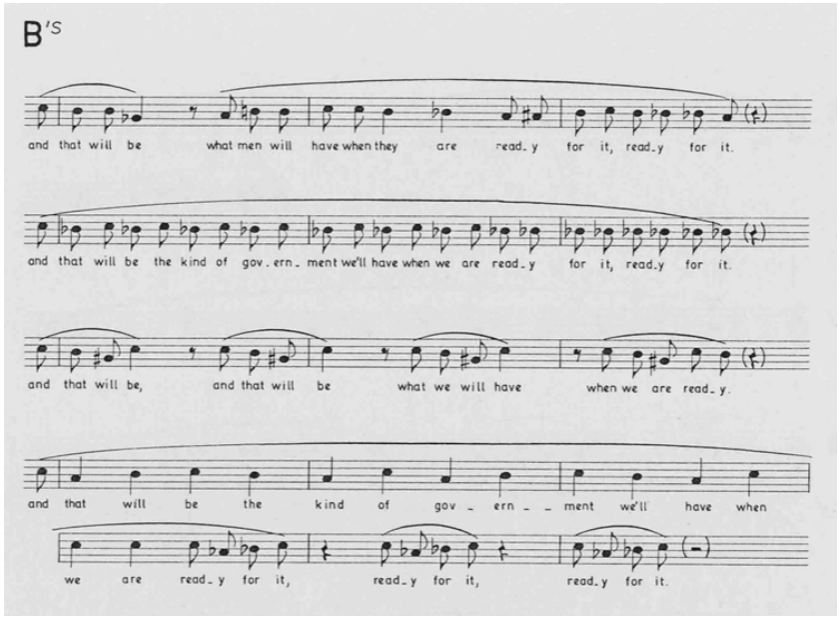


Figure 4. Score for *Solo for Voice 35* (John Cage, 1970): first four textual and musical variations of the B part

As for the notation (a fundamental aspect of Cage's experimentation with musical composition), in this work, it is more conventional than that of the other compositions analysed in this study. However, although the variations are presented on a stave structured with bar lines and a treble clef, there is no reference to the time signature that would mark the tempo of the performance. In terms of tonality, the absence of a key

signature suggests that the work is apparently in the key of C major or A minor in all the variations, though some of them are subject to some musical accidentals which embellish it[13] and which offer certain parameters for their representation and reading.[14]

Taking into account that it is impossible to include in this publication the complete translation of all the variations that make up the work, we have chosen, by way of example, the one that constitutes the work *Political/Social Ends,* published in the compilation of John Cage's textual works edited by Kostelanetz (2000)*?* As shown below at the visual level, in the translation I finally opted for a combination of the two versions recently exposed, in which the linguistic translation is combined with its adaptation to a score that has been personally created with a music editing programme:

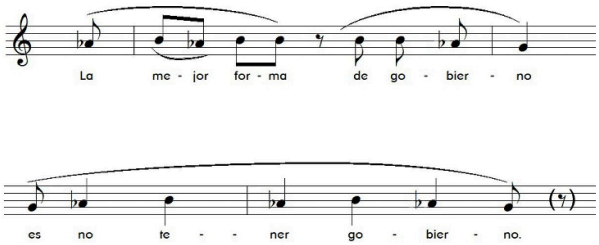


Figure 5. Score for *Political/Social Ends?* (John Cage, 1969) translated into Spanish by Sofía Lacasta Millera

Thoreau's philosophical and artistic influence on Cage can also be gleaned from his visually experimental works. In 1974, Cage published *30 Drawings by Thoreau*, a thirty-two-colour silkscreen on Japanese paper. Four years later, in 1978, he published *Score without Parts (40 Drawings by Thoreau)* and *17 Drawings by Thoreau*. In the first of these later two works, Cage superimposes Thoreau's illustrations on twelve lines divided into a Haiku structure (5+7+5), a procedure analogous to that used in *Renga* (1976). The twenty or so pages that make up this visual score are unnumbered and can be performed in whole or in part by an indeterminate number of pianists not exceeding the number of pages. Similar to his other works, such as *Indeterminacy*, it does impose certain questions relating to tempo, but always with freedom for the performer, who must compose a programme of a given duration and extrapolate it to the parts to be played. Other aspects relating to dynamics

[13] It should be noted that in other variations of the same work, which are not analysed on this occasion due to the formal limitations of the present publication, Cage also includes signs of articulation: the use of *tenutos*, which sustain the sound between one note and the next, and *staccatos*, which shorten them to produce the opposite effect, stand out. Considering the musical ornaments, Cage adds a series of tremolos which, although they are more typical of string instruments, on this occasion, allow for the rapid and continuous repetition of a note, and, therefore, of a textual phoneme. The use of *acciaccatura* is also notable.

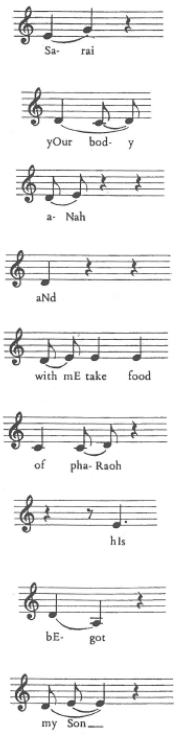
[14] In some of his works, such as *Lecture on Nothing* (1961), published in *Silence* (1973), Cage employs a notation that allows the text to be read "with the rubato one uses in everyday speech" (p. 109). On this occasion, however, the lines of expression and slurs do define a natural cadence on a prosodic level, but the elements mentioned above force the text to be subordinated to the score. To facilitate this last aspect, certain crotchet and quaver rests and end-of-line textual sentences appear in parentheses, giving the performer (and the translator) the possibility of playing with them in order to match the discourse to the tempo and rhythm.

are not specified. In this kind of eternal spiral, this work can be interpreted with *Atlas Eclipticalis* or *Song Books*. For *17 Drawings by Thoreau*, Cage's inspiration derives from the ink drawings of natural elements in Thoreau's diaries, such as a rabbit's footprint, a hawk's feather and a hazelnut, among others, to transform an empirical description into an aesthetic composition. Through random operations based on the *I Ching*, Cage decides on formal elements such as the arrangement, orientation, size and colour of the illustrations, as well as the selection of the elements themselves, revealing not only the conceptual, but also the compositional interrelationship between literary, musical and pictorial works.

3.3. The translation of a mesostic vocal line: Sonnekus2

Sonnekus2 was composed in 1985 and lasts approximately six minutes. It is a series of nine short songs with texts derived from the *First Book of Moses* or *Genesis*. As can be appreciated on a visual level, in this case the message is structured in the form of mesostics, a poetic form typical of Cage's literary composition as explained above. On this occasion, and given its relevance for the translation, it is important to mention the formal constraints stipulated by the composer and first commented on in the prologue of *M. Writings '67—'72*, namely that "[a] given letter capitalized does not occur between it and the preceding capitalized letter" (1973, p. ix). In other words, the second letter cannot appear between two of the letters that make up the vertical word.

In order to present a more detailed visual and, above all, textual analysis, the first poem is presented below (Figure 6), both in its version set to music on the stave divided into lines, and in the textual transcription, which allows the form of the mesostic to be seen more clearly.



Sarai
yOur body
aNah
aNd
with mE take food
of phaRaoh
hIs
bEgot
my Son

Figure 6. Score and mesostic for the first song of *Sonnekus2* (John Cage, 1985)

In addition to the formal complexities of this textual score, lexical selection has direct consequences for what is narrated in discourse and how that discourse is narrated. Hence, the explanation of my translational process of this first poem requires an exhaustive analysis on several levels. On the one hand, the title and the vertical word that forms the backbone of the mesostics is a reference to one of Erik Satie's piano compositions. *Trois sonneries de la Rose+Croix*, which was published in 1892, when Satie worked as chapel master of the Order of the Temple of the Rosicrucian Cross, and lasts approximately eleven minutes[15].

As this is the title of a work, I made the decision to keep the word in French, so the vertical line '*Sonneries'* is not translated (see Figure 7). Moreover, none of the phonemes require graphic adaptation, since they are all commonly used in Spanish, so the only thing left to do is to respect the spelling in capital letters. As for the formal restrictions, stipulated above regarding the appearance of certain letters, they are complied with in all the lines. On the other hand, as far as the musicalisation of the poem is concerned, the message has generally been conceptually translated and then adapted to the rhythm of the work. Numerous changes have been necessary for this purpose, which are explained in detail below.

The greatest challenge was respecting the number of syllables to match the rhythmic arrangement of the original work. The first three lines allow for a *quasi*-literal translation, adapting the spelling of the proper names. Lines four and five are the most creative. On the one hand, the monosyllable 'and' followed by a black silence made it necessary to look for an option that would leave the cadence of the speech open as well as the conjunction. On the other hand, the fourth and longest line is a sample of a line in which Cage draws on chance compositional procedures, via the *I Ching*, for example, to combine lines from Genesis, resulting in a conceptually abstract sentence. In order to solve both issues, I opted for an enjambment of both lines through the word 'con-migo' and the reformulation with the verb 'comer', which makes it possible to maintain the letter of the vertical line and to unite the two meanings of the original idea. In the sixth line, the hiatus of 'pharaoh' is pronounced as a hiatus in the corresponding note. In the last three lines, the preposition in the fifth line allows the possessive 'his' to be changed to 'mi' without changing the meaning of the original and facilitating the structure of the vertical letter. In the case of 'begot', a term very specific to religious discourse, is modified by a more colloquial term with the same meaning (a begotten son is a new son) and with the central letter included. In the last line, the two monosyllabic words become a bisyllable. Given the impossibility of finding such a specific term, the Latin translation 'filius' is used, a procedure also used by Cage in other compositions, as the language of religious discourse is easily understood in the target language. The result is as follows:

[15] It is performed in three movements: *Air de l'Ordre*, *Air du Grand Maître* and *Air du Grand Prieur*. While this composition has a free metrical structure with no meter lines, Gillmor (1988) argues that in all three movements the proportions bordered on the golden ratio, something Satie and Debussy had fantasised about.

Sarai
tu cuerpO
aNah
coN-
migo comE
del faRaon
mI
nuEvo
váStago

Figure 7. Mesostic for the first song of *Sonnekus2* (John Cage, 1985) translated into Spanish by Sofía Lacasta Millera

It is worth remembering that such a textual translation must follow Cage's performance instructions:

> To be sung without vibrato as in folk singing […] The singer will make a program including silences of any lengths (and changes of dress) that presents all nine of these songs in the auditorium space. Elsewhere with accompaniment any cabaret songs by Satie may be performed (at a distance from the audience) (1985, n.p.).

With regard to this last aspect, Cage intersperses the vocal line of *Sonnekus2* with the sound works of the French composer, listening, between the lines, to the works *Je te veux* (1902)*, La Diva de l'Empire* (1904) and *Tendrement* (1902).[16] *Je te veux* is a *valse chantée* with lyrics by Henry Pacory. *La Diva de l'Empire* is a popular song of *café-concert* with lyrics by Dominique Bonnaud and Numa Blès. The lyrics of *Tendrement* are by Vincent Hyspa. Beyond the sort of semantic oxymoron between the biblical narrative and the cabaret lyric, the syntactic parallelism between the compositions allows their conceptual amalgamation. For example, in Pacory's lyrics, we find lines like "tes vœux, ta maîtresse, la sagesse, la tristesse, des regrets, la vie, mon cœur, la divine promesse, des flammes, des rêves, nos deux âmes"[17] and in the lyrics by Bonnaud and Blès, other examples, such as "un amour tendre et pur, mon âme, la chapelle, votre grâce immortelle, prie à deux genoux mon fidèle amour, le mystère, un douce prière, païenne si légère".[18] All of them could be interpreted from one lexical field or another and raise, once again, the relevance of offering a translation also of these works that act as a backdrop to the mesostics.

[16] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SsvdTc2NTSs (Joan La Barbara, voice). (Accessed: 30 October 2024).
[17] "your wishes, your mistress, wisdom, sadness, regrets, life, my heart, the divine promise, flames, dreams, our two souls".
[18] "a tender and pure love, my soul, the chapel, your immortal grace, pray on two knees my faithful love, the mystery, a gentle prayer".

4. Conclusions

The analysis of these textual scores and sound poems shows that the source texts, both those used by Cage for his intersemiotic creation and his own works for my interlingual translation, do not disappear in the process of translation, but are manifested again through other linguistic and semiotic systems, through other cultures, other voices and at other moments in time.[19] The intersemiotic nature of Cage's work, especially in his compositions for solo voice, reinforces the idea that, "[l]ike a translation and its original, we can understand Cage's individual works more fully when approaching them pluralistically" (Saletnik, 2012, p. 76). Thus, Cage's interdisciplinary composition not only allows for an analysis of his analogous compositional procedures, but also complements and enriches them in the creation of a plural work:

> For John Cage the significance of art lay, not in the production of artifacts, but in the making of meaning in an active collaboration with medium, performers, and audience. So the work that John Cage has left behind can be seen as just that—"work," which has always yet to be done—to be engaged in by a participatory audience, viewer, reader at a specific intersection of material, place, and time occasioned by a performance, an exhibition, a screening, or the presence of a text. What I mean to say is that what we call the work of John Cage exists entirely in the form of a collection of "scores" —visual and auditory notations—music (on the page and in performance), texts, drawings, prints, and paintings, which are invitations to realization (to use the musical term for performance) of ous aesthetic potential in a "poethics" (a practice or form of life in which ethics and aesthetics come together) of everyday life. (Retallack, 1994, pp. 242-243)

Therefore, it becomes clear that:

> translation subjects an original work to experimental play replete with contingencies and idiosyncrasies, furnishes it with performative resources for aesthetic expression in excess of the linguistic signs, and extrapolates it toward multiple trajectories and plural media" (Lee, 2022, p. 2).

In this new, more open-minded perception of the transfer process, the question arises: "Is originality a prerequisite of creativity?" (Malmkjaer, 2020, p. 23). If the premise of any translational process resided in the search for the longed-for equivalence, perhaps the translation of these interdisciplinary and experimental texts requires changing the prism from which the work is viewed.

In one of the latest Spanish translations of an unpublished selection of Cage's work, Battistón stated, in a note to the translation that is more necessary than any other, that *"[u]n libro que hace toda una celebración de la forma y de los extremos posiblemente pida,*

[19] This process echoes other compositions, such as *Exercises de style* (1947), in which Raymond Queneau narrates the same story ninety-nine times in ninety-nine different ways; *Spleen* (1973), in which Nicholas Moore presents thirty variations on a poem by Baudelaire; or *Via (48 Dante Variations)* (2004), in which Caroline Bergvall offers forty-seven translations as variations on the opening sentences of *Inferno*, the first of the three canticles of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In all of these compositions, the process of rewriting and translation does not run away from the original, but becomes part of it through new voices.

a su manera, formas extremas de ser traducido" (2023, p. 229).[20] As in its 2016 translation (*Ritmo, etc*., Interzona), Battistón's 'ludic s' (Lee, 2022) is committed to following the compositional procedure proposed by Cage to the letter in order to determine formal aspects such as the number of words in each sentence or the number of characters in each line, among other aspects:

> *La sintaxis muchas veces extraña, revirada, de las frases en el original le debe mucho a ese rigor, que no excluye forzamientos, carambolas ni contorsiones más bien quiroprácticas, porque Cage obedece siempre los límites que se impone, pero sin hacer ningún intento por ocultar los efectos caóticos que tienden a producir* (2023, p. 229).[21]

In this way, the translation of musical texts, music and words by other authors, comes to life in Spanish, following in the wake of the English text.

Similar phenomena have occurred in the dramatized version of *Un Alfabeto*, performed in 2005, at the Teatro San Martín in Buenos Aires, in which the translator Gerardo Jorge took part; in the dramatized reading organised at the Librería Falena in Buenos Aires, in 2022, in which Patricio Grinberg represented the reading of *Indeterminación*, timing the reading time of each of the anecdotes; in Gandini's concert at the Biblioteca Nacional in Buenos Aires in 2007, with Fogwill's reading of the *Conferencia sobre Nada*, also translated by Gianera. Finally, in terms of Cage's most experimental texts, Battistón notes:

> …aunque celebro que no sea necesario traducirlos, es cierto también que soy un gran defensor de las cosas innecesarias. Hay un extraño atractivo en todo eso que podemos evitar, en todo eso que perfectamente podríamos no haber hecho (2023, p. 233).[22]

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[20] "a book that is a celebration of form and extremes may well require, in its own way, extreme ways of being translated."
[21] "The often puzzling, jumbled syntax of the sentences in the original owes much to this precision, which does not exclude forced, convoluted and rather chiropractic contortions, because Cage always obeys the limits he imposes on himself, but without making any attempt to hide the chaotic effects they tend to produce."
[22] "although I welcome the fact that it is not necessary to translate them, it is also true that I am a great advocate of unnecessary things. There is a strange appeal in all that we can avoid, in all that we could very well not have done."

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