

## **Transtextuality in Contemporary Music: A Materialistic Approach - Bruno Cunha**

**Thesis Response - Dr. Ravi Kittappa**

**6 September 2020**

Mr. Cunha's analysis of his chosen topic is thorough and provides a clear argument and explanation, founded in the deconstructionist and post-structuralist ideas of late 20th Century French philosophers. While his ideas are well founded, at moments they seem to be merely a transplant of philosophical concepts to the field of contemporary music - colloquially, "making the square peg fit the round hole". I was lucky enough to have the privilege of studying with Jacques Derrida while I was a philosophy student at The Johns Hopkins University. One of the points he would stress is that weak deconstructive analyses were the ones that wandered aimlessly without purpose or context. The purpose it would seem, in Mr. Cunha's analysis, is an internal one; the elucidation of the processes and methods of his own personal understanding of composition - ultimately providing a justification, motivation, and deeper context for his artistic work. Although Mr. Cunha is not a philosopher, I would prefer that upon invoking these large names of Western Philosophy, the argument would equally take up a deeper rigor providing a analysis whose purpose can more strongly "transcend" his own work into the work of others, whether they be composers, philosophers, or researchers in various fields.

The crux of the writing arrives in the section which describes the development of Mr. Cunha musical language. It is here that we arrive at the purpose of this philosophical inquiry. Clearly presented, the motivations and rationale for his work are explained. However as he concedes at one moment, *dEus*, leaves some of these ideas behind in sacrifice for feasibility of performance. Nonetheless, the blending of contrasting materials as well as combination of influences of previous works is done successfully and in a compelling manner. The piece was certainly composed with great and care and rigor.

On another note, I would like to comment that both the philosophical precedents and musical examples are mostly couched in a western tradition. It seems quite obvious to me that when discussing this notion of transtextuality there are many historical examples that pre-date the western tradition and certainly many non-western contemporary examples.

Overall, I think both the composition of the piece and the paper were thoroughly done. However, I think this topic would allow for deeper and further investigation. In terms of musical examples, oral traditions in non-notated musics from Asia, Africa, and Oceania should be considered. Obviously when appropriation is invoked, discussion of cultural boundary

crossings and the historical impacts of colonialization and globalization should be taken into account. This interesting topic could be explored further and could provide a more impactful result.

#### **Evaluation of dEus:**

I found the piece to be compelling. It is clearly notated and the score appears to be approachable in terms of playability. Some of the notation regarding feathered beams could be confusing to certain performers who may be used to interpreting this as a mensural notation. Overall the piece is attempting to invoke some “free” elements which may defy Mr. Cunha’s choice for a more traditional notation. Nonetheless, for the instrumentation and the performers, this may be the most practical solution. The resulting recording shows that this decision was wise. The piece is compelling in its combination of disparate elements, blending them into a milieu that seems to express the voice of the composer.

This work should be defended by Mr. Cunha. I would suggest a mark of **A**.

#### **Evaluation of the Text:**

As stated above the text was written with great care and does satisfactorily explain Mr. Cunha’s methodology and impetus for his compositional work. However, I believe that the discourse could have a much wider scope. The specificity of Mr. Cunha’s philosophical interpretations and chosen examples are completely valid within his own contexts and personally, but a broader base of research philosophically and within compositional examples would bring about a more vibrant discourse.

This work should be defended by Mr. Cunha. I would suggest a mark of **B**.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Fitzgibbon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.