WRITING MODERNIST AND AVANT-GARDE MUSIC IN MEXICO:
PERFORMATIVITY, TRANSCULTURATION AND IDENTITY
AFTER THE REVOLUTION, 1920-1930

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
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School of The Ohio State University

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* * * * *

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ABSTRACT

In my dissertation I study the traditional rhetoric of Mexican cultural history that interprets post-revolutionary artistic manifestations as a “natural,” almost teleological outcome of the Mexican Revolution. As with every historical narrative, this revolutionary hegemonic discourse developed out of a “myth of origin” which homologated the identity of the nation with the ideology of the new state. As part of this process, the modernist and avant-garde works of Julián Carrillo (1875-1965), Carlos Chávez (1899-1978), and Manuel M. Ponce (1882-1948) were written into the “official” discourse of the Mexican Revolution by adjusting them (as imitation of European styles, and nationalist and proto-nationalist musics respectively) to its ideological requirements. I propose an alternative reading that recognizes the complex social and cultural construction of that ideology and the uncertainties created by this process. To study these events I develop a model of identity construction that emphasizes agency and choice as individual action within changing ideologies. Under this paradigm, I analyze the artistic activities of Carrillo, Chávez, and Ponce in the 1920s as the result of individual action confronting power and struggling for hegemony, and consider their musical styles as sites of individual ideological struggle.
My work re-enacts a double performative exercise. First, the composers’ self-representation and identification through musical style, and second, the composer’s role in the construction and execution of a hegemonic discourse that re-wrote them a posteriori, according to the nationalist principles of the dominant regime.
To Claudia
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Circuit of Social Change and Cultural Meaning
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INTRODUCTION: WRITING MUSIC

A few years ago, when I was an undergraduate guitar student, a friend and I were walking down Xicoténcatl Street in Coyoacán, Mexico City. We had just witnessed an extraordinary class on Manuel M. Ponce’s *Sonata Clásica* (1928) at UNAM’s Escuela Nacional de Música, and were discussing the event. My friend kept saying that he considered Ponce’s music to be the best ever written for the guitar, and only regretted that “he [Ponce] did not compose enough large-scale works in his own voice.” According to him it was only in pieces like the *Sonata mexicana* (1923) and Sonata III (1927) that we could hear the “true” voice of the Mexican composer, since works like *Sonata clásica, Sonata romántica* (1928), or Suite in A (1930-31) were only “imitations of older styles,” and therefore not “authentic” reflections of Ponce’s individuality. I was bothered by that opinion since I thought that even in those so-called imitations Ponce’s individuality was clear and recognizable. I remember hearing the Suite in A for the first time, without knowing what I was listening to, and thinking: “that sounds like Ponce… it has to be Ponce!” even though later on, an intellectual tradition would force me to listen to it as “in the style of Sylvius Leopold Weiss.”

Later, when I was searching for a topic for my master’s thesis in musicology, I stumbled across a CD of amazing works by Mexican composers Víctor Rasgado and Juan
Trigos. When I requested information on them from a Mexican friend I received a shocking but somewhat familiar answer: “Why are you interested in their music? Theirs, like all the music written by the students of Franco Donatoni, sounds exactly the same.” Needless to say, I did not think Rasgado’s or Trigos’ music sounded like Donatoni’s at all; so I embarked on an analytical project in an attempt to refute those opinions, which I heard reproduced over and over again by people who had not even heard music by Donatoni and were unfamiliar with any of his other students.

Today, more than sixteen years after I heard my friend’s opinion on Ponce’s “imitation,” I find myself struggling with the same issues that made me feel uneasy in the past about the reception of Ponce, Rasgado, and Trigos: what are the processes that inform practices of cultural consumption and production. The fundamental theoretical questions that inform and permeate this project are the problematization of the idea of imitation and its intersection with the political construction of intellectual discourses that perform tradition and heritage, and thus allow us to imagine our current place in society and history.

This work focuses on the intersection of individual agency and hegemonic discourses in the performance of identity as exemplified in the Mexican modernist and avant-garde traditions developed after the revolution, between 1920 and 1930. The verb in the title, “Writing Modernist and Avant-Garde Music in Mexico,” refers not only to the act of writing or composing music; it also refers to processes that discursively write music and musical heritage into objects that, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes, offer a virtuality that “produces something new in the present that has a recourse to the
past.”¹ Following this idea, I re-enact a double performative exercise. First, the composers’ self-representation and identification through musical style, and second, the composer’s role in the construction and execution of a hegemonic discourse that re-wrote them a posteriori, according to the nationalist principles of the dominant regime. I should clarify that my object of study is neither music nor musical style per se. I understand music as a process that is shaped by and also shapes its cultural surroundings. Therefore, I use music as a window into the study of Mexican culture in a specific historical period. Since I am interested in musical processes as depositories of the cultural values of the societies where they are generated, comprehending them is a step toward understanding their cultural surroundings. Another pertinent clarification is that my object of study is an intellectual elite, one that played a decisive role in the representation of modernity and nationality in the country from the 1920s onwards, but also before the revolution. Issues of continuity and discontinuity between the ideological principles of pre-revolution and post-revolution ruling elites, however masked by post-revolutionary ideological discourses, are a fundamental problem in the examination of the representations of identity, nationality, and modernity, as well as the numerous intersections among them. Furthermore, the intellectual elite I examine is from Mexico City, from the political and cultural center of the country, and the analysis should also be considered a presentation of how the center performed itself while discursively homogenizing and neglecting the cultural differences of the periphery inside the country.

This study reinterprets the traditional rhetoric of Mexican cultural history that considers post-revolutionary artistic manifestations as a “natural”, almost teleological

outcome of the Mexican Revolution. As with every historical narrative, this post-revolutionary discourse in Mexico was developed out of a “myth of origin” which equated the identity of the nation with the ideology of the new state. As part of this process the modernist and avant-gardist musics of Julián Carrillo (1875-1965), Carlos Chávez (1899-1978), and Manuel M. Ponce (1882-1948) were interpreted and accepted into the “official” discourse of the Mexican Revolution only as far as they could be adjusted to its ideological requirements. I propose an alternative reading that recognizes the complex social and cultural construction of that ideology and the ambiguities created by this process. My study takes music as a point of departure to analyze the construction of myth and hegemonic discourses by the post-revolutionary Mexican state. I explore the relationship between individual searches for identity in a society challenged by the Mexican revolution and the “official” ideological discourse of nation-building that subjected those individual actions to a larger nationalistic project. I suggest that the modernist and avant-gardist music languages that Carrillo, Chávez, and Ponce developed in the 1920s show them repositioning themselves within a changing society, a society that contested the pre-revolutionary ideology and social order and produced new institutions of power and codes for social interaction.

I take the work of Gesa Mackenthun (Metaphors of Dispossession, 1997) as a general historiographic model for my own exploration of the Mexican music scene in the 1920s. Mackenthun, under the belief that “every text is situated in a field of conflicting interests and power relations, which it reproduces or negotiates,” challenges historical texts and questions the validity of the discourses that have been constructed after them.

She focuses on how those texts shaped the hegemonic discourses that came to be dominant in the Americas after the colonial period. Mackenthun is interested in finding the marginal voices that may contest the ideology established by the colonizers. To achieve her purposes, she borrows ideas from Carlo Ginzburg’s microhistory, and proposes to find the “hidden heritage” of early American history through a close analysis of any “Freudian slips” in the texts written by the colonizers. Mackenthun performs an indexical and comparative investigation of certain elements and contradictions that appear in several texts written by early European settlers and colonizers. She is interested in finding those “passages where the texture of the narratives forms knots and flaws that may give us insight into some hidden fears and motives of European colonialism.”

Mackenthun bases her suggestion that the contestant voices of dominated people found their way into texts designed to validate a dominant ideology on the premise that every hegemonic discourse requires the presence of the dominated as a counterbalance.

Furthermore, according to her almost Bakhtinian approach, intertextuality denies a monological reading of any given text at any given time, thus every text is always preceded by several different pre-texts—or even simultaneous texts—that provide it with a deeper, more complex meanings than the one acknowledged by dominant discourses. I apply these concepts to the Mexican situation in the 1920s, after the revolution, suggesting that in order to legitimize its ideology, the post-revolutionary government molded the Mexican cultural reality into a paradigm that, although reconfiguring ideas already alive before the revolution, worked as the new regime’s claim

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to authenticity: nationalism-indigenism. I show this was possible through the creation of a “myth of origin” that necessarily excluded the artistic manifestations that did not agree with or support it, and naturalized those that might be construed as harbingers of the new state’s hegemonic discourse. Like Mackenthun, I find “marginal voices” in the contradictions found in the documents created to support the post-revolutionary ideology; in the ideas behind the production and representation of the musics that did and did not make it into the hegemonic discourse; and in the appropriation and consumption of these manifestations by audiences and critics.

Forming the axis of my study are four important events that took place in Mexico between 1924 and 1926, events that have been largely misinterpreted by music historians in order to make them fit the post-revolutionary hegemonic discourse: the premiere of Carrillo’s first microtonal compositions, the rise to fame of Chávez as an avant-garde artist, Ponce’s move to Paris, and the First National Congress of Music. I take these events as evidence of the multi-ideological social context that characterized 1920s Mexico, a plurality born out of the condition of crisis permeating a society whose foundational values were turned “upside down” by the revolutionary struggle, a condition that was later homogenized into a thesis that would endorse the State’s dominant discourse on revolution and nationalism. These events also become points of departure for a larger discussion of how musical myths were constructed and composers were excluded and dispossessed of their aesthetic heritage in order to support the nationalistic discourse that permeated Mexican cultural history during the 20th century. I intend to recover those “lost” voices, showing the plurality of cultural manifestations before it was homogenized by historians subscribing to the state’s ideological discourse.
A MODEL FOR INTERPRETATION

Following Dick Hebdige’s work on subculture theory, I analyze the modernist and avant-gardist music of Carrillo, Ponce and Chávez as subcultural endeavors — creating either continuities or discontinuities within a tradition— that provided them an individual identity and a place in post-revolutionary society. To study these processes without losing their dynamic quality, I develop a model that recognizes individual action and choice as fundamental aspects of agency between socially positioned groups and individuals and hegemony. I have called this model the “circuit of social change and cultural meaning” (see figure 1).

For this model, I adapt the “circuit of culture,” where Paul du Gay, Stuart Hall, Linda Janes, Hugh Mackay, and Keith Negus present representation, identity, production, regulation, and consumption as the five basic concepts necessary in any complete cultural analysis. Representation is concerned with the construction of meaning using signs and language. Identity refers to the way in which individuals and groups come to be associated with specific cultural practices. The process of producing a cultural artifact is known as production. Regulation alludes to the distribution and cultural introduction of a new product. Consumption refers to the processes of cultural appropriation of these products. According to my model, alterations in those five processes impinge on changes in social meaning, and I focus on the way these transformations play a role in the development of subcultures that cooperate with, reproduce, resist, or contest dominant ideologies and institutions of power.

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Agency plays a fundamental role in this model. Anthony Giddens points out that agency refers to the capability of people to do things that may have a consequence in the future, notwithstanding whether they do it intentionally or not. In my circuit agency

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appears as both self-reflexivity and action against or in favor of social and cultural discourses. This process creates new socially positioned groups and individuals, and continuous acts of agency between these groups, individuals, and dominant ideologies allow the cycle to be dynamic and fluid. The “circuit of culture” of du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, and Negus is at the center of my own “circuit of meaning,” but I slightly adjust the terms (distribution and appropriation instead of regulation and consumption) for the sake of clarity and to acknowledge the active participation of consumers —audiences, in the case of music. This model enables me to pay attention to individual actions of self-identification without losing sight of the larger processes of hegemonic negotiation. As a matter of fact, my choice of different symbols in the model intends to show the dynamic quality of these processes. I have chosen to represent the relationship between hegemony and socially positioned individuals as intersecting flags in order to show that neither hegemony is possible without the participation of the individuals, nor the social position of those individuals is possible without the action of hegemonic discourses. My model allows me to take into consideration the role of individual identity in the construction of hegemonic discourses of identity such as nationalism. In this work in particular, my point of departure is the premise that music has a semiotic value, and that musical texts are blueprints that show how processes of composition might synthesize the composers’ interaction with different social and cultural practices and systems of signs that carry culturally produced meaning. My intention is not to ascribe meaning to music texts themselves, but to take them as maps where one can trace back the cultural processes that made them possible; for the purpose of this study, music texts are meaningful in as much as they show the significant routes a composer might take in self positioning at a specific historical moment.

I developed my model out of ideas on construction and negotiation of individual identity by Soviet composers, as presented in public lectures and research papers by
Margarita Mazo. She treated identity as a pluralistic and heterogeneous phenomenon that is open to the individual’s choice and construction through processes of negotiation. I further developed her ideas by incorporating Giddens’s ideas on individual action as a trigger for social change and the well-known Foucauldian notion of power as an omnipresence shaping and disciplining social and individual actions. Particularly important is Giddens’ concept of human agents as “highly knowledgeable and skilled individual[s], who appl[y] that knowledgeability in securing autonomy of action in the course of day-to-day life.” As such, individuals are able to contest specific aspects of their social and cultural surroundings, creating a space where social change is possible.

I further complicate this equation by incorporating my own “web of ideologies” or multi-ideologies concept. This notion equates moments of social, cultural, and economic crisis in postcolonial settings with the Western postmodern condition in that fragmentation and alienation prevent both the critical postcolonial and the postmodern subject from mapping his/her position on social spaces, and as such they show collisions of multiple ideologies and an erosion of the universality surrounding them. Under a paradigm that recognizes the impossibility of absolute Truth —and thus also of absolute Falsehood— the Marxist definition of ideology as false consciousness collapses. In crises, such as the postcolonial or the postmodern conditions, discourses of ideology operate on different levels, and individuals are not surrounded by one ideological discourse, but rather by a complex web of ideologies. In that sense, each of these

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ideologies works as an intertextual construction that acquires meaning only through its relationship with other ideologies. As Slavoj Žižek states, the identity of a given ideological field is determined by a multitude of ‘floating signifiers’ that are themselves “overdetermined by their articulation in a chain with other elements.”¹² I propose that as part of this intertextual web ideologies are only true or false in relation to other ideologies and discourses.

Multiple identity allows individuals to develop strategies that allow them to move freely from one ideological discourse to another with a minimum of effort and without losing their individuality. In moments of social or aesthetic crisis multiple identity demonstrates to be an essential tool in providing individuals with a plurality of roles with which they might identify in order to navigate the complex cultural, social, and economic context that such circumstances generate. That there is a web of ideologies suggests that agency is not only a possibility, but also a necessary tool for the survival of the individual. Indeed, as Foucault argues, every discourse of power and ideology provides the space and the choices for this agency to take place, but the presence of multiple identities would indeed seem to indicate that agency occurs in personal, local, and regional contexts where individuals need to navigate a multiplicity of ideologies in order to survive.

Furthermore, my model brings together Giddens’ idea of “human agents” and Chela Sandoval’s notion of oppositional consciousness. Arguing against Frederic Jameson’s “nostalgia” for modernity as a condition of social and cultural certainty for centered individuals, Sandoval suggests that the ambiguous, borderline condition described by Jameson as postmodernity is nothing new and has been experienced by peripheric –postcolonial– subjects for hundred of years. She does not imply a postmodernism avant la lettre for these cultures, but rather points out that studying their

strategies to survive and navigate the dominant discourses that have determined their peripheric condition would be fundamental in developing a consciousness of the multi-ideologic environment and the plurality of discourses that collide in the construction of hegemony. According to Sandoval, being aware of one’s position within this ideological web is a necessary step to map our way through them: she calls this a model of oppositional consciousness. Sandoval’s criticism of Jameson results in a reevaluation of the term postmodernity. Her criticism points out that such a concept is actually a construction of dominant Western thought, one that attempts to designate a condition of social and cultural uncertainty attained by Western societies at the end of the twentieth century. Following Sandoval’s assessment we can understand periods of cultural, social, and economic crisis at different junctures in the history of peripheric, postcolonial societies as conditions that share the characteristics of Western postmodernity; conditions where agency, as oppositional consciousness, plays a pivotal role in mapping the individual’s way through contending ideological systems. My Circuit of Social Change and Cultural Meaning recognizes the notions and ideas discussed by Sandoval and Giddens, and emphasizes agency as the subjects’ interpellation into ideology, rejecting Althusser’s idea that interpellation occurs only vertically from ideology down to the individual subjects.

MODERNITY, MODERNIZATION, AND MODERNISM IN THE MARGINS

The term “modernity” denotes specific modes of social, economic, and political organization that originated in Europe from the 17th century onwards. Lawrence Cahoone

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characterizes modernity by traits such as capitalism, a largely secular culture, liberal democracy, rationalism, and humanism that in their combination are unique to this period in the history of humanity. Therefore, modernity refers to the condition distinguished by these modes of organization. “Modernization” describes processes of development that strive for the condition of modernity, while “modernism” refers to an ideological discourse that embraces modernity. Most often, the term “modernism” defines artistic aesthetics that reflect on the condition characteristic of late modernity, a highly revolutionized period that, according to Marshall Berman, produces in the modernist artist a desire to change but also a terror of disorientation.

Modernity and the processes of modernization developed differently in metropolitan and peripheric societies. While Europe and the United States pushed for a colonial expansion of the “civilizing” project of modernity –also referred to as the project of the Enlightenment– and generally profited from its spreading out, the majority of people in peripheric societies seldom shared the benefits of this project and most often were casualties in the expansion of capital. However, achieving modernity became the primary political goal of the elites that dominated peripheric societies, as shown in the variety of policies implemented throughout their histories to stimulate processes of modernization. Nevertheless, the inequalities of these societies –a consequence of their postcolonial condition– prevented a homogeneous and inclusive process of modernization; historically, the characteristics of modernity in the periphery have tended to be heterogeneously localized mostly in the cultural, economic, and social urban

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centers. This does not mean that the failure to achieve a homogenous, national modern condition prevents the development of valid artistic modernist movements in the periphery. We should only be aware that modernist movements in the margins ought to be different to modernist movements in the metropolis, because they reflect different occurrences of modernity and histories of modernization; they echo a postcolonial experience of modernity.

One of the main characteristics of modernity is a structure of social organization that emphasizes large, wide-ranging institutional formations over localized, disconnected, and individualized groups. Institutions create a sense of security that guide and control individuals within social settings but also allow them to act and develop interpersonal bonds and groups of identification in specific ways. The nation-state is a uniquely modern institution that organizes individuals by creating and implementing a number of discourses and practices that, as Giddens states, “lift out” social and organizational relations from local contexts to reorder them on larger geopolitical systems.\(^{17}\) A nation-state cannot appear, however, without the existence of a global context of relations among other nations; therefore, one of the basic premises of the nation-state is to clearly define itself—its real and imaginary (political, economic, cultural, etc.) boundaries—and its membership—the identity that binds its citizens together—. As such, like every modern institution, the nation-state is a decidedly self-reflexive organization, one that defines its members and offers them the sense of a secure existence while guiding, controlling and supervising their personal interrelations.

The cult of modernity in Mexico was not a consequence of the Mexican Revolution, it was already the governmental ideal of Porfirio Díaz, and could effortlessly be traced back to the liberal policies of President Benito Juárez.¹⁸ Both Juárez’s and Díaz’s political efforts targeted the development of a national identity in an attempt to create a strong unified nation-state. These efforts were necessary, especially after the Guerras de Reforma, the civil wars between liberal and conservative political factions that further fragmented an already weak sense of nationality, and that facilitated the French occupation of the country between 1861 and 1867. Ideally, a strong nation-state is fundamental in establishing the basis for an efficient industrial and economic network, and such efficiency is necessary for the citizens of that nation to trust the state, to benefit from the system and allow its reproduction.

The situation in Mexico after the revolution was similar to that following the French invasion; a generalized economic, social, and cultural crisis fragmented the nation-state and prevented the development of a modern society. In these circumstances, the promotion of a new sense of national identity—a renewed national identity, one that supported the revolutionary state—as the foundation for modernization could not be postponed. However, and in spite of the distinctly new revolutionary angle, the fundamental ideas of modernization in Mexico can only be fully appreciated as a continuation of the project of the Enlightenment initiated with the independence of the

country and very clearly articulated in the *Leyes de Reforma*\(^{19}\) and the late 19\(^{th}\)-, and early 20\(^{th}\)-century liberal policies of Juárez and Díaz. This historic and social background, a result of the postcolonial condition of the country, is fundamental in understanding the specificity of artistic modernism in Mexico, in recognizing the reasons for the “desire to change” of Mexican modernists, and the sources of their “terror of disorientation.”

TRANSCULTURATION, PERFORMATIVITY, AND PERFORMATIVE COMPOSITION

The notions of transculturation and performativity work as two fundamental theoretical frameworks for the implementation of my interpretative model. Since I propose that individual subjects are empowered with the ability to contest ideology and elicit social change, I need to present a theoretical framework that acknowledges the possibility of these transformations. I find this in the theory of cultural change known as transculturation. The term transculturation has undergone a long process of transformation as has, as Diana Taylor puts it, transculturation itself.\(^{20}\) It was originally coined in 1940 by the Cuban writer Fernando Ortiz to explain broad processes of social and cultural change under conditions of multicultural and colonial contact.\(^{21}\) In Ortiz’s essentialist perspective, the idea of transculturation recuperates a “natural” process of national development since it is through transculturation that Ortiz arrives at claims about “authentic” Cuban culture. Ángel Rama reevaluated the term in the 1970’s in order to study processes of cultural change in Latin American literature. For Rama, transculturation suggested a degree of resistance from a community that bears the impact

\(^{19}\) The *Leyes de Reforma* (Reform Laws) from 1859 separated church and state, and guaranteed the liberty of religious belief for the first time in Mexico.


\(^{21}\) Fernando Ortiz, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (Madrid: EditoCubaEspaña, 1999), 80.
of a foreign culture; according to him, this translates into an active creativity that reshapes both the local as well as the foreign culture, permitting the creation of new and original aesthetic values. Rama incorporated the notion of individual choice, although he remained mostly interested in the aesthetic possibilities of agency as part of a larger modernist project. In the 1990’s, Mary Louise Pratt and Diana Taylor reevaluated the term for Anglo-Saxon academia in order to describe “how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture.” In their new reformulation, transculturation is not only an aesthetic phenomenon but also a social one. Taylor proposes that “the theory of transculturation is a political one in that it suggests the consciousness of a society’s own, historically specific, cultural manifestations [and] exemplifies the political positioning and repositioning of collectivities in their pursuit of empowerment.”

I subscribe to Taylor’s notion of transculturation to understand the personal aesthetic choices of Julián Carrillo, Carlos Chávez, and Manuel M. Ponce as individual exercises of agency within a larger quest for political, social, and cultural power. I interpret their individual searches for aesthetic identity in the 1920s not only as a reflection of the social, cultural, and economical conditions they faced in post-revolutionary Mexico, but also as a sort of cognitive mapping that engaged individual consciousness, ideology, hegemony, and artistic coalition. As part of this reading, I will interpret compositional processes as performative acts in Judith Butler’s sense. The act of composition would have to be understood as a performance of agency and transculturation that is both the expression of an idea and a form of conduct: the content of such a performative act can only be understood as the transculturizing action that

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makes it possible. According to J. L. Austin, the term performative “is derived, of course, from ‘perform’, the usual verb with the noun ‘action’: it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action —it is not normally thought of as just saying something.” It is after this early definition that I articulate my own endeavor to bring the notion of performativity into the act of composing musical works. I suggest a musical text is the utterance of an individual attempting to resolve the tensions within the web of ideologies that surrounds him/her, but also that individual’s solution to those conflicts. As such, the musical text becomes a map of transculturation processes, while the individual composer could be accepted as a “contact zone” in Mary Louise Pratt’s sense, a site where conflicting cultural paradigms meet and resolve their differences.

The process of creating such a map is what I call “performative composition.” In my analyses, I focus on discovering traces of the composers’ individual process of transculturation and performativity in their particular musical styles. I take style as the map of performative composition, and thus, style testifies to the importance of agency in the interpellation of ideology and the definition of a modernist identity in 1920s Mexico.

My idea of performative composition finds a precursor in Della Pollock’s notion of performative writing. For her, the act of writing “answers discourses of textuality not by recovering reference to a given or ‘old’ world but by writing into a new one,” taking “its value from the context-map in which it is located and which it simultaneously marks, determines, transforms.” In her interpretation, performative writing is the result of individual agencies that challenge the assumptions of dominant hegemonic discourses. As I have mentioned earlier, my own idea of performative composition rests on the

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Premise that music is a system of signs that carries culturally produced meaning. When a composer writes a musical composition his or her works become an individual solution to the ideological conflicts that surround him/her, making the composition meaningful not only as the aesthetic reflection of a socio-cultural condition, but also as an individual’s answer to the ambiguities of this condition. However, performative composition does not describe the development of an individual style within a mainstream aesthetic tendency; it rather illustrates the development of a style that contests tradition in ideologically contradictory settings. Performative composition is the negotiation of an individual position in the multi-ideological context of a liminal condition. Briefly, the idea of performative composition combines the notions of transculturation and performativity within a larger circuit that emphasizes their power in producing cultural meaning and identity in changing socio-cultural circumstances. When I use the concepts of transculturation and performativity to challenge the hegemonic nationalist rhetoric about Mexican music, my intention is not to question or recover a notion of what “Mexican” music is or can be. Neither do I attempt to re-inscribe Carrillo, Chávez or Ponce into a new canonic narrative of Mexican music. I would rather wish to establish that any claims to nationalist meaning are always contingent and unstable. What is at stake in this project is an understanding that inherited discourses on Mexican authenticity, identity, and tradition are constructions developed under specific historical and socio-cultural circumstances, and with the purpose of fulfilling explicit historical and socio-historical necessities. By recognizing the contingency of the essentialist, post-revolutionary claims to nationalist meaning we can better grasp the continuous processes of identity renegotiation that have allowed Mexicans –and other peripheral subjects– to become more effective in their interregional relations.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

With the model and theoretical framework I have discussed, I study the decade of social and cultural crisis that followed the Mexican Revolution. This is a period that witnessed the final collapse of old and the construction of new political, economical, social, and cultural structures and relations of power. Framed by the end of the armed phase of the Revolution and the establishment of new national institutions, the decade between 1920-1930 in Mexico could be considered a sort of “primeval sea” for twentieth-century Mexican culture. The assassination of Venustiano Carranza and the election of General Álvaro Obregón as president of Mexico in 1920 put an end to the chaotic military violence of the previous decade and marked the beginning of a period of national reconstruction founded on a cultural crusade headed by Obregón's minister of education, José Vasconcelos, and an almost Machiavellian alliance between his government and worker and agrarian leaders. It also marks the ideological collision of a number of local projects of nation, from the socialist experiments of Adalberto Tejeda and Felipe Carrillo Puerto in the states of Veracruz and Yucatán respectively, to the fascist radicalism of Tomás Garrido Canabal in the state of Tabasco. Mexico became a site for the encounter, negotiation, and (in the best of cases) reconciliation of a great variety of ideologies, as well as economic, social, and cultural programs.

After former president Adolfo de la Huerta’s a massive rebellion was crushed in March 1924, Plutarco Elías Calles was elected president of the country for the 1924-1928 period. A strengthening of the ties between the state and the unions and an expansion of the economic role of the government characterized Calles' term. The government was now in charge of developing a national infrastructure that ranged from irrigation systems and agricultural colleges to highway and railroad systems. However, Calles’ anticlerical pronunciations also gave birth to the Cristero rebellion, a civil war in west-central
Mexico between militant Catholics and the state’s army that outlasted his own government and did not end until 1929. Calles’ presidential succession in 1928 is full of historical importance. Former president Álvaro Obregón ran —and was elected— for a second term in the presidency, stepping over one of the most sacred revolutionary principles: no reelección (no reelection). Nevertheless, this adventure ended up with his assassination before he could be sworn to office for the second time. This circumstance allowed President Calles two very important political moves. The first one was the creation of the National Revolutionary Party (the origin of the current PRI) to exercise a tighter political control over the nation's politics. Second, the provisional presidential period of Emilio Portes Gil (1928-1930) provided the foundation to establish the Maximato, a period from 1928-1934 when Calles was the strong man behind three presidents: Emilio Portes Gil, Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930-1932), and Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1932-1934).

1929 was one of the most decisive years in the development of the national project of the revolutionary government. Granting autonomy to the National University (UNAM) secured a strong institution able to play a definitive role in the construction of that project. However, the Great Depression forced Calles, the real political power behind the presidency, to embrace an increasingly conservative agenda, especially hostile toward agrarian reform and land redistribution. And last, 1929 was also the year that José Vasconcelos, former dean of the National University and former minister of education during Obregón’s regime, de facto ended his political career, after losing that year’s presidential campaign against Calles’ candidate Pascual Ortiz Rubio. It is intriguing that the political rise and fall of Vasconcelos seem to frame the decade I focus on, since it is his mystified –and debatable– role as ideologue of the government’s post-revolutionary project that lays at the root of the hegemonic discourse I deconstruct in my study.
In a statement that resonates with the notion of performativity, Michel de Certeau points out that in dominant/subaltern relations “the conqueror will write the body of the other and trace there his own history... This is writing that conquers.” This allegation holds true for the discourse on Mexican history produced by the post-revolutionary regime. The diversity of political and ideological discourses alive during the 1920-1930 decade was homogenized into a narrative that incorporated historical events only to reinterpret them as forerunners of the new ideology. Moreover, as I have mentioned before, such is the case in the development of the hegemonic, nationalist discourse that permeates the understanding of the music and the arts from this period.

APPLYING THE MODEL

As Thomas Benjamin points out, there unfolded over the 1920-1930 decade a national reconstruction marred by the “fluidity of the power and interests that existed at every political level [making] the reform process uncertain and imperfect, conflicted and often violent, uneven across the country, and subject to slowdowns.” I explore the role of modernist and avant-gardist music as aesthetic agency within this “unfolding process.” Borrowing notions from philosophers like Adorno, Heidegger, and Greenberg, Neil Larsen suggests that modernist and avant-garde works of art retain the notion of the work of art as social/historical agency. As such, the “crisis in representation” of the work of art is a translation of the “crisis in agency” that affects the construction of social and political identities. I argue that the crisis experienced by Mexican composers with the collapse of the economic, social and cultural stability of the pre-Revolutionary regime, pushed them

30 Thomas Benjamin, “Rebuilding the Nation” in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, 467.
to reevaluate their artistic positions not only as strictly aesthetic manifestations, but as complex individual practices of cultural and social agency within larger processes of production of meaning and social change.

Following this interpretation, I apply my Model of Social Change and Cultural Meaning in every chapter of the dissertation, concentrating on the composer’s agency and construction of identity. However, I understand that these are only two aspects of a larger cycle, where individuals produce meaning and social change through their interaction with the web of ideologies created by institutions of power and dominant discourses in their culture. Within this theoretical framework, I approach the music that Carrillo, Chávez, and Ponce wrote in Mexico during the 1920s as attempts to come to terms with crumbling and nascent ideologies. Under this paradigm, I interpret the musical activities of these composers as the result of individual agencies with power, ideology, and the social institutions of a community whose codes of social interaction were being contested by a new political order. I see modernism and avant-gardism in Mexico as subcultures that helped their members reposition themselves and find their own identity in a society where codes of social interaction were contingent on the clash between pre-revolutionary and revolutionary societies. My intention is to show how the hegemonic, nation-building discourse implemented by the post-revolutionary Mexican government had to exclude, dispossess and mystify certain aspects of these manifestations in order to validate its own ideological discourse. I establish that the voices that entered this “official” history and canon succeeded in doing so only because they could be retroactively converted into harbingers of that nationalistic discourse or could be modeled to fit its “myth of origin.” My work shows the richness, complexity, plurality, and individuality of cultural manifestations in Mexico during the 1920s in opposition to the rather rigid and teleological “official” version developed by the Mexican government.
The music of Julián Carrillo was systematically excluded from this post-revolutionary canon of Mexican music. Carrillo’s closeness to the pre-revolutionary government of General Porfirio Diaz, as well as his activities in favor of the short-lived dictatorship of General Victoriano Huerta in the mid 1910’s, made him an easy target. His creation of a microtonal system in 1924 only made things more difficult for him, since this new language and his own representation of it as a teleological consequence of the German tradition of absolute, organicist music, convinced many that as an artist he was uninterested in the incipient nationalist campaign of the post-revolutionary state.

In the first chapter, “Modernism, Teleology, and Identity: Toward a Cultural Understanding of Julián Carrillo’s Sonido 13,” I explore the position of Carrillo’s microtonal system within the general crisis of language that characterized modernism in the early 20th century, but also within the particular searches for a modern identity in 1920s Mexico. My study of Carrillo’s music focuses on three interrelated aspects of my circuit of meaning: production, representation, and appropriation. To understand Carrillo’s process of production I use linguist Émile Benveniste’s notion of paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes, to analyze the syntactic and grammatical relationships in three compositions by the Mexican composer: Preludio a Colón (1924), En secreto (1927), and Cuarteto atonal a Debussy (1927). By adopting an analytical method founded on post-schenkerian ideas of dissonant prolongation similar to those expressed by Robert Morgan in “Dissonant Prolongation: Theoretical and Compositional Precedents” (1976), I show that stylistic development in Carrillo’s microtonal music is a direct consequence of the problems of style and idea that permeated the modernist music of the German tradition in the early 20th century, a tradition that had nurtured him as a student. My analysis shows

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that the use of microtones as elements of foreground activity in these works is balanced by a new understanding of background unfolding, one that allows elements other than the tonic triad to serve as fundamental structures for a composition. I propose that Carrillo’s position as an outsider to the German tradition allowed him to conceive his microtonal style as a continuation of that tradition, but also as a reflection of his individuality and his position in a non-European society.

In Carrillo’s microtonal system, aspects of production and representation are closely connected. In his writings, Carrillo presented himself as a continuator of the German tradition, but analysis of his works reveals a process more complex than mere imitation. My study shows that appropriation played a determinant role in the development of his microtonal system, and therefore we need to understand his music and his construction of self-identity results of individual processes of transculturation. In my text, I show that clashing ideologies and discourses of power permeate processes of identity construction, and that these processes are themselves the consequence of these particular historical circumstances.

Among Mexican composers, Carlos Chávez is one of the better known to American scholars. Nevertheless, most music history texts label him a nationalist composer, disregarding his important activities as an avant-garde artist. The reason for this misconception is that Chávez’s music was taken as a symbol of the hegemonic identity constructed by the post-revolutionary government in Mexico during the 1930’s and 1940’s. This construction placed Chávez and his _El fuego nuevo_ (1921) at the center of the indigenist movement and traced his nationalist activities to the early years of the revolutionary government installed in 1920, when he was, allegedly, a musical ally of José Vasconcelos. In the post-revolutionary myth of origin, Chávez has been reduced

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solely to a nationalist composer in order to comply with that revolutionary mythology. Chávez’s musical personality was much more complex, synchronically embracing tendencies that would seem contradictory (indigenism, neoclassicism and avant-gardism) if they were not understood under the particular political circumstances of 1920s Mexico.

In the second chapter, “Performing Identity through the Avant-Garde: Style and Ideology in Carlos Chávez’s Early Music,” I present a quite different picture of Chávez’s role during the years of Vasconcelos’ cultural crusade. After recognizing the political and historic importance of his multiple identity, I focus on the avant-garde side of Chávez’s personality and music and explore his relationship with one of the most radical artistic movements in the history of Mexican arts: *estridentismo*, a short-lived futurist trend that had a strong influence in Mexico’s cultural and political circles between 1921 and 1926. I study ideology and identity in post-revolutionary Mexico as reflected in Chávez’s construction of meaning in his output between 1923 and 1927, focusing on a detailed analysis of “36” (1925) from *Siete piezas para piano* (1923-1930) and *Energía* (1925).

I analyze the style of Chávez’s avant-garde music from the viewpoint of the artist (as encoder) as well the audience and critics (as decoders), understanding the avant-garde as a subculture in the terms proposed by Hebdige. Borrowing ideas from the theories of codes of Umberto Eco and Stuart Hall,35 I survey Chávez’s activities and music as polysemic experiences where meaning arises not only in the production and representation of a specific work of art or a style, but also through the processes of decodification and appropriation during their performance. In processes of identity formation, the individual and the social experience of the artist and the audience are continuously intertwined—as well as their relationship with dominant ideologies. I conclude that in order to understand Chávez’s position as a member of a subculture, and

to understand his construction of identity from this position, it is necessary to understand how the public identified him as part of that subculture and how he managed the ideological implications of this choice in relation to his multiple identity.

The name of Manuel M. Ponce is well known to scholars of Mexican culture and music. He has been considered one of the precursors of musical nationalism in Mexico, and it is under those terms that he found a place within the canon of Mexican art music and the post-revolutionary cultural discourse. As one of the first advocates of music nationalism—even before the Mexican Revolution “officially” legitimized this aesthetic—Ponce found his way into the pantheon of cultural heroes of the post-revolutionary state. Nevertheless, this process carried a high price for Ponce himself and his modernist works. Richard Taruskin has noted that Russian composers were able to enter the canon of Western music only as “exotic” representations of Otherness, which already reserves them a place as “second-class” composers. The paradox is that Russian composers may have a place in the history of Western music as long as they remain the Other. This situation brings an incomplete representation of their musical activities: it disregards anything that does not fit the category of “nationalist” because that is what they “ought” to be in the mind of Western listeners and scholars. This is the same attitude that surrounds Ponce and his music. Ponce was eligible to enter the discourse that places Mexican art’s origin with the triumph of the Revolution in 1921 only as a “nationalist” composer, therefore, as a “precursor” of that revolutionary ideology. The consequences are the same as those exposed by Taruskin: an incomplete account of Ponce’s musical activities and his place in the cultural context of the post-revolutionary decade, as well as an aberrant reductionism that oversimplifies an otherwise rich and complex cultural

manifestation. It is a cultural dispossession performed with the only intention of validating a specific ideological discourse; as Gesa Mackenthun has stated, “the truth claims of a historical narrative [...] depend on the rhetorical [performative] power of narrative to adjust past events retrospectively to the ideological requirements of the present.”

In the third chapter, “Agency and Dispossession in Changing Worlds. Manuel M. Ponce and Representation as Identity in Post-Revolution Mexico,” I explore how the discursive writing of Ponce’s musical activities as those of a “nationalist” composer overlooks larger cultural and representational issues. I will show that these “excluded” issues are essential in trying to understand not only this composer, but also Mexican culture and society as a whole in the 1920s. In this chapter, I study Ponce through a novel explanation of his move to Paris in 1925. The traditional interpretation of this event shows a composer at the height of his compositional powers who suddenly decides to abandon a successful life in his native country in order to pursue his compositional studies. This interpretation results in an artificial periodization of Ponce’s compositional output, with a nationalist period before 1925 and a modernist period after this year, such an assessment disregards the elements of continuity throughout Ponce’s compositional career. I offer a different reading, one that acknowledges the hardships and professional difficulties experienced by Ponce during the early 1920s as the consequence of his alignment with the modernist aesthetic of the group of writers known as modernistas. As a modernista artist, Ponce was unable to find a place within the new Mexican society and was forced to reevaluate his artistic identity. In this cultural framework, the early nationalistic searches of Ponce need to be understood as the particular manifestation of a larger desire to renovate the traditional music languages.

favored by Mexican composers at the end of the nineteenth and during the first two
decades of the twentieth century. Analyzed from this perspective, Ponce’s seemingly
eclectic compositional career acquires a new coherence; the modernist music he wrote
after 1925 —for which he was severely criticized, to the point of being called an
“insincere composer”\textsuperscript{40}— appears to be a consequence of the same modernist drive that
had pushed him to explore Mexican folklore more than ten years earlier. My
interpretation repositions Ponce’s music as part of a larger \textit{Zeitgeist}, and explains his
output as more than just a precursor of the nationalist discourse favored by the post-
revolutionary regime.

In chapter 4, “Real, Imaginary and Symbolic Modernity. The First National
Congress of Music as Synecdoche of Discourses” I borrow the notions of the “real,”
“symbolic,” and “imaginary” from Lacanian theory in order to explore the intersection of
different discourses on nationalism, modernism, and modernity as expressed in the call
for papers and the actual essays submitted to the Primer Congreso Nacional de Música
(First National Congress of Music). Held in Mexico City on September 1926, this
congress was one of the earliest attempts to organize the music scene in Mexico around
ideas of folklore and modernity, and as such, it reflects the struggle for power that
developed between older and younger generations of composers in Mexico by the mid-
1920s. The organizers of the congress published a call for papers on music education,
criticism and aesthetics, as well as composition, pedagogy, and acoustics. Presenters were
asked to address the “pitiful state of national music and the lack of a nationalist attitude
from creative minds [el lamentable estado de la música nacional y la falta de actitud
nacionalista de los creadores].”\textsuperscript{41} In this chapter, I ask which musicians represented the
institutions of power that selected the prize-winning papers and compositions, and which

\textsuperscript{40} Jesús Bal y Gay, quoted in Moreno Rivas, \textit{Op. cit.}, 125.
\textsuperscript{41} Quoted in Gabriel Pareyón, “Congreso Nacional de Música,” \textit{Diccionario de música en México}
(Guadalajara: Secretaría de Cultura de Jalisco, 1995), 134.
and whose discourses of power were represented in these texts. The examination of the congress supports the case for a plural and complex musical life in Mexico during the 1920s, but most important, as a practice of “institutionalizing” precepts about music, the congress is a discursive process through which hegemony is articulated and negotiated between different actors and among a great variety of imaginary discourses of nationality and modernity. The use of Lacan’s framework allows me to focus on the negotiation of symbolic discourses while still paying close attention to Giddens’ ideas on reflexivity and Foucault’s notions of power and discipline in modern societies.

By the early 1930s a new hegemony was developed, one that took pre-Columbian cultures as the basis of an indigenist, essentialist understanding of Mexican identity. In the fifth chapter, “Conclusion: Contingency and Negotiation of Identities,” I show that the dominance of the indigenous-nationalist discourse was possible due to a long and complex process of negotiation among intellectuals, politicians, entrepreneurs, and artists, and within a climate that considered aspects of continuity and discontinuity with the pre-revolutionary regime. I explore the relationship between the individual practices of self-definition of Carrillo, Chávez, and Ponce –as explored in the first three chapters– and the process of hegemonic negotiation in the Mexican music scene –which I suggest in the fourth chapter. Bearing in mind this socio-historical context, I ask whether the performative exercises of Carrillo, Chávez, and Ponce were indeed failed performatives erased by the imposition of a dominant discourse, or if they played an active role in the construction of that hegemony, and therefore in the hegemonic counter-performance of themselves and their heritage.
MUSICOSTY AS CULTURAL STUDY

The field of musicology in the United States has undergone a number of important changes in the past thirty years. From Leo Treitler’s and Joseph Kerman’s shift from positivism and evolutionary history to heremenutics and interpretation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to the cultural turn pushed forward by scholars like Susan McClary, Ruth Solie, Richard Taruskin, and Gary Tomlinson in the late 1980s, the discipline of musicology has been continually transformed. Nevertheless, regardless of the great epistemological transformation of the field, a look at some of the programs of recent meetings of the American Musicological Society (AMS) shows that much of current musicological scholarship still tends to focus on European music and the aesthetic understanding and appreciation of specific musical works. Although the cultural turn experienced by the discipline in the 1980s and 1990s was a welcomed epistemological revolution, it does not seem to have affected the perception that the object of study of musicology should be musical production and, at best, its surroundings. In musicology, culture is most often studied as an undeniably necessary step in order to better grasp the aesthetic value of a given piece of music, or to historically situate the artistic activity of a given composer.

Historiographic approaches in Mexican musicology have developed out of specific concerns regarding the state of music research in the country; they have responded –it could not be otherwise– to the particular socio-political situation of Mexican intellectuals and their ideas regarding the question of heritage. Such a situation favored the development of a tradition of paleographic and archival work, as well as fieldwork intended to unearth and make available colonial music scores to contemporary musicians and record the musical manifestations of different indigenous groups in the country. These approaches were championed by musicologists like Gabriel Saldívar, Raul...
Hellmer, Hiram Dordelly, the Americans Robert Stevenson and Thomas Stanford, and are being continued by scholars like Aurelio Tello and Juan Manuel Lara. Most recently, Mexican musicologists have been interested in exploring a variety of interpretative approaches. In the work of Yolanda Moreno Rivas, Leonora Saavedra, Ricardo Miranda, Luisa Vilar-Payá, Joel Almazán Orihuela, Gonzalo Camacho, and José Manuel Valenzuela, we witness a vast array of interpretative approaches, from criticism, hermeneutics, and structuralist music analysis to semiotics and social theory.

My musicological work takes as points of departure both, the hermeneutic, cultural, and analytical work of scholars like Saavedra, Miranda, and Vila-Payá, as well as Solie, Taruskin, and Tomlinson, but disagrees with the general academic assumption that the object of study of musicology should be music. My study, making use of the ideal ethnomusicological goal, understands musicology as the study of culture through music, realizing that the study of music as a process that is not only shaped by culture but also shapes it, provides a new angle to the study of culture and society and a perspective that illuminates larger cultural and social processes in significant ways. Borrowing Eric Hobsbawm’s definition of the history of mentalities, and cultural and social histories, my work intends to “discover the internal logical cohesion of systems of thought and behavior which fit in with the way in which people live in society in their particular class and in their particular situation of the class struggle, against those above or, if you like, below them.”42 Following these concepts, I study modernist and avant-gardist musical manifestations as they played a role in defining individual and group identities within the clash of institutions of power in Mexico during the 1920s. By taking the approach of a critical theorist, I consider that the works written in the 1920s by Julián Carrillo, Carlos

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Chávez, and Manuel M. Ponce are indexes of different processes that enhance an understanding of the complex social relationships and the ideological struggle experienced by the intellectual and artistic elite of Mexican society at the time.

My approach, as that of the cultural theorists, is interdisciplinary; I borrow methods from musicology’s sibling disciplines —ethnomusicology and music theory— to better apprehend the spirit of the musical processes I have chosen. From ethnomusicology, I take an ethnographic approach to the study of historical documents and data in order to place them within their cultural and social contexts. From music theory I bring systematic methods of music analysis —Schenkerian, post-schenkerian, post-tonal, and set theories— in order to locate the aesthetic resonance of specific musical works with their historical surroundings. In doing this I am interested in two things: first, to find the stylistic particularities that make these music scores into maps of performative composition; and second, to take analytical tools that carry considerable colonialist implications, and use them to clarify the ways in which music produced in the peripheries can contest colonialist aesthetic discourses by failing to completely fulfill the expectations inherent in those analytical tools. The final epistemological claim of my work is that 21st-century musicologists should engage on a more productive relationship with the humanities by avoiding the narrow perception of their discipline that prevented them from going beyond the aesthetic sphere of the music, its practice, or at best, the composer’s cultural surroundings. In subjecting the results of my musicological examinations to an interpretation based on a variety of notions from social theory, as well as performance and cultural studies, I wish to establish social and cultural patterns and interconnections that not only establish the foundation of a larger cultural study but also shed new light on the theoretical concerns of social and cultural theorists. After all, asking myself the same questions cultural studies have dealt with for a long time marked the beginning of my intellectual journey into musicology.
In an article published on November 29, 1924 in *La Antorcha*, the Mexican composer Julián Carrillo (1875-1965) stated:

“How could we eliminate European influences? I do not understand it. On the other hand, I believe it is possible for our race to produce its fruits within the European culture we have inherited, and within those possibilities, I do not believe we should deny the Mexican *mestizos*, nor anyone else in the world, the right to produce something new that Europeans have not found so far [...] in this regard I have to clearly state that I understand my musical knowledge as a continuation of the glorious German music tradition [la tradición musical alemana].”¹

Carrillo wrote this article as a response to the criticism of the young composer Carlos Chávez (1899-1978). In a series of articles that appeared regularly between August 24 and October 11, 1924 in *El Universal* and *La Antorcha*, Chávez had criticized Carrillo’s ideas about the future of music and described his microtonal system —known by the symbolic name of *Sonido 13* (the 13th sound)— as a mere copy of what had

already been done in Europe. In fact, with these writings Chávez repeated the allegation—stated after the Mexican premieres of Carrillo’s Sextet (1900) and Symphony No. 1 (1901), almost twenty years earlier—that Carrillo’s music was nothing but a replica of European models. These accusations came to be voiced by many, and such European “influence” caused Carrillo and his music to be excluded from the hegemonic discourse that supported the dominant, nationalist ideology of post-revolutionary Mexico.

Nevertheless, Carrillo’s quotation works as a point of departure to explore his position in Mexican music history as part of the complex cultural and social relations that were discursively homogenized after the revolution.

Through a detailed study of Carrillo and his *sonido 13* as a cultural artifact, I show that Chávez’s criticism does an injustice to Carrillo and his music. I also explain that such judgment, and therefore, Carrillo’s final exclusion from the canon of Mexican music, resulted from the ideological struggle over the period of nation building and identity formation that followed the military phase of the Mexican revolution. The attack on Carrillo was understandable coming from a part of Mexican society eager to cut its ties with Europe since they reminded it of the pro-European dictatorship overthrown by the revolution. However, the relationship of Carrillo’s microtonal system to the European tradition needs to be understood in terms of both continuity—as suggested by the sentence: “I understand my musical knowledge as a continuation of the glorious German music tradition”—and discontinuity—as expressed in the qualifying phrase: “I do not believe we should deny the Mexican *mestizos*, nor anyone else in the world, the right to produce something new that Europeans have not found so far”—and not as just a copy of them (as Chávez proposed). This interpretation recognizes Carrillo’s *sonido 13* as the result of fluid processes of cultural change that imply individual agency and shifting

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relations of power. The notion of transculturation is key in elucidating the individual and social roles of Carrillo’s music as performative because it recognizes the hybrid nature of the phenomenon. As such, Carrillo’s music becomes an utterance that both negotiates and enacts political and cultural transformation within multi-ideological contexts.

The concept of transculturation challenges the traditional belief that institutions of power exercise total control over individuals, and acknowledges individual choice and agency in the construction of social and cultural meaning. It is true that Carrillo had studied in Germany and early in his career had embraced the genres of that tradition: symphony, sonata form, string quartet; but it would be unfair to say that Carrillo had just copied these genres. My interpretation stems from Diana Taylor’s assessment that, “in spite of Latin America’s history of colonization, which included the imposition of Western forms of self-expression and identity — such as language, artistic models, and religion— the fact remains that native peoples of Latin America do not by and large speak, worship, or create like their dominators. Their languages, their world-views, and their art are mestizo to varying degrees, just as they themselves are.” In “Transculturación, performatividad e identidad en la Sinfonía No. 1 de Julián Carrillo” I reveal how the genres he had adopted became conceptually different from those produced by his European colleagues, and show how processes of transculturation are detectable throughout Carrillo’s compositional work. However, it is with the appearance of his first microtonal compositions in 1924 that a more radical personalization of the German music tradition took place.

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5 I use the term “German music tradition” as it was used by Carrillo and several music critics in Mexico during the early 1900s, to identify an organicist, structuralist musical paradigm often exemplified with both, the formalist approaches of Beethoven and Brahms (use of sonata-allegro form as well as the idea of absolute music), and the motivic-based cohesion in the works by Wagner and Liszt. Such paradigm was absent from Mexican musical thought up until the early 20th century.
In the quotation that opens this chapter, Carrillo’s preoccupation with establishing a clear link with the European tradition—as opposed to Chávez’s anti-Europe rhetoric—indicates that the issue of identity was already central in the dispute for ideological hegemony in Mexico by the mid-1920. Identity is a continuous process of marking difference through social and cultural factors by creating what Benedict Anderson calls “imagined communities.” In order to position ourselves as active elements in our social environment it is necessary to define the attributes that distinguish us from other individuals or groups, and to distinguish the characteristics that identify us as members of specific social and cultural organizations. Establishing difference is a signifying practice that not only determines the “other,” but also defines the identity of the one who performs such an exercise.

Marking difference and formulating an imaginary community require systems of representation to differentiate between members and non-members of the group, and to characterize that community or culture. According to Stuart Hall, these systems of representation arrange, categorize, share, communicate, and reproduce information, knowledge, and meaning within these imaginary communities, giving them internal cohesion. It is through the shared codes of languages that the specificity of social groups can be experienced. Hall recognizes the centrality of codified languages in the construction of identity when he defines representation as “the production of meaning through language.” Furthermore, as Michel de Certeau explains, representations not only determine a community in its totality, but are susceptible to control, and exercise distinctive operative functions through the use power. As such, representations are

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8 Ibid, 28.
always culturally created conventions that locate the boundaries of imagined communities and determine individual identities within that framework.

I propose that *Sonido 13* is the result of Carrillo’s individual search for identity through a process of transculturation, and suggest that this microtonal system was the composer’s attempt to reposition himself within a changing society where older forms of representation were being contested and new cultural codes formed. It was at this moment of social and cultural uncertainty that Carrillo chose to develop his own modernist creed creating a subculture or imaginary community based on the microtonal intervals of his *Sonido 13* as codes of musical identity. He could not realize that this bold endeavor would exclude him permanently from the incipient hegemonic, nationalist discourse supported by the revolutionary state.

My study of Carrillo and his microtonal system focuses on two aspects of my “circuit of social change and cultural meaning”: representation and production. The first part of the chapter deals with Carrillo’s representation of himself and his *Sonido 13*, and the relationship between this construction and contemporary modernist discourses from the German tradition. I concentrate on how Carrillo positioned himself as part of the German tradition by embracing its teleological principles. The second portion of the chapter examines Carrillo’s production of codes through a detailed analysis of his music. I emphasize the technical qualities and compositional style that support certain aspects of the identity discourse I examine in the first section, but also discuss how they contradict some of these ideas. My analysis of production shows that Carrillo’s *Sonido 13* compositions mark the beginning of a shift away from the German tradition, a movement toward a more personal style, and thus contrary to Chávez’s assertion, a more independent conception of self-identity.
Representation plays a key role in the construction of identity since, in the words of Katherine Woodward, “[it] includes the signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced and which positions us as subjects.”\textsuperscript{10} The construction of a discourse through representation allows us to identify ourselves as parts of a system of knowledge and locates us within a particular process of negotiation between contested powers. Carrillo’s writings help us understand the modernist discourse with which he identified himself as a continuation of the German music tradition, and such analysis provides us with tools to relate his ideological alignment to the cultural and historical situation of his native country. To establish ideological links with European modernist discourses I compare Carrillo’s ideas with those of two contemporaries: Arnold Schoenberg and Heinrich Schenker. In the case of Carrillo, representation is the signifying practice through which he was able to create a self-identity within a social and cultural space, and infuse it with cultural meaning.

The musical mainstream in Mexico had been influenced by Spanish music during the Colonial period and by Italian and French throughout its history as an independent country. Leonora Saavedra suggests that, throughout the 19th century, we could make a case for a history of music in Mexico without having to refer to the organicist paradigm that shaped Western music history until rather recent times.\textsuperscript{11} Carrillo was one of the first Mexican musicians who studied in Germany, and upon his return to Mexico, he introduced some of the basic ideas of the German music paradigm into the musical mainstream of his country. Due to his positivistic background, Carrillo was fertile soil for


the development of further Eurocentric ideas. When in Europe he felt strongly attracted to
organicism, as an idea for coherence and unity in musical works, and to a teleological,
Hegelian concept of music history that would lead him to the development of his
microtonal theories. A fine example of Carrillo’s interest in organic constructions is again
found in Pláticas musicales, in an article dealing with his participation in the
“International Music Congress of Rome” in 1911, where he read a paper titled “Unidad
ideológica y variedad tonal.” In this work, Carrillo proposes a principle similar to Liszt’s
thematic transformation as a device to secure cyclic cohesion among the different
movements of traditional European multimovement works.

Critics openly rejected Carrillo’s String Sextet and Symphony, works embodying
these principles, at their Mexican premieres. In 1905, Melesio Morales, a former teacher
of Carrillo, published an article against the ideas of his former pupil:

“When composing in the German style, the Mexican master [Julián Carrillo]
involuntarily discovers —it could not be otherwise— that the pronunciation, and
the accent of the language itself are as unfamiliar to him as they are to his fellow
countrymen; it is music they can neither taste nor enjoy [...]

12 Melesio Morales, “Julián Carrillo,” El Tiempo (July 27, 1905). Reprinted in Melesio Morales (1838-
aesthetic unity in the symphony by means of several metamorphoses and a great
variety of treatments, producing a homogeneous and harmonious “wholeness,”
derived from one fundamental idea.”\textsuperscript{13}

This organicist principle is the foundation of what Carrillo would later call his
“laws of musical metamorphosis”: a technique developed in the late 1920’s to bring
thematic unity and coherence to music that combined traditional, diatonic instruments
with microtonal ones.\textsuperscript{14}

In 1922, Carrillo presented his “Teoría del sonido 13,” a preliminary explanation
of a microtonal system that proposed the division of the half step as the beginning of a
change that, in his opinion, would transform music. In this article, Carrillo explained the
history of music as an evolution from the monophony of the 9th century to the chromatic
procedures of the early 20th century.\textsuperscript{15} He took a teleological view of polyphonic and
harmonic developments, one in which new intervals from the basic overtone series are
gradually “conquered” as consonances.

The dominant European understanding of history was well anchored in the
Enlightenment tradition that sought to apply the rigor of natural science to the
humanities, and some of the assumptions Carrillo made were also basic premises for
several European music theorists. In 1911, Schoenberg, following a similar path, had
come to conclusions that supported his atonal style. In his \textit{Harmonielehre}, Schoenberg
states:

“There are, then, no non-harmonic tones, no tones foreign to harmony, but
merely tones foreign to the harmonic system. Passing tones, changing tones,
suspensions, etc., are, like sevenths and ninths, nothing else but attempts to

\textsuperscript{13} Alba Herrera y Ogazón, \textit{El arte musical en México} (México: Departamento Editorial de la Dirección
General de Bellas Artes, 1917), 195.
\textsuperscript{14} See Julián Carrillo, \textit{Leyes de metamórfosis musicales} (México: Julián Carrillo, 1949).
\textsuperscript{15} Julián Carrillo, “Teoría del sonido 13,” \textit{El Universal} (September 17, 1924).
include in the possibilities of tones sounding together — these are of course, by
definition, harmonies — something that sounds similar to the more remote
overtones. [...] There are no limits to the possibilities of tones sounding together,
to harmonic possibilities; [the limits are] at most to the possibilities of fitting the
harmonies into a system that will establish their aesthetic valence.”

Both writings share the same teleological postulate, and the ideological
similarities between Carrillo and Schoenberg were clearly as large as the geographical
distance that separate them. Following this principle, once the twelve pitches of the
chromatic scale are used in a single harmony, the system would need to be revitalized by
adding the next overtone in the series, thus moving to the realm of microtonality. For
Carrillo, the future of Western art music could only follow the path of microtonality,
since that was the logical “next step” in the process of musical “evolution.”

It is clear from his 1922 article that Carrillo’s microtonal interest did not develop
from the study of non-Western musical systems, as was the case with European
composers also interested in microtonality at the time. For Carrillo microtonality came as
the result of a pure theoretical concern based on a historicist view of the Western music
tradition. Let us remember that Schoenberg arrived at the same conclusions in the first
edition of his *Harmonielehre*, when, after explaining the origin of the major tempered
scale in the overtone series, he points out that:

“This reduction of the natural relations to manageable ones cannot permanently
impede the evolution of music; and the ear will have to attack the problems,
*because it is so disposed.* Then our scale will be transformed into a higher order,
as the church modes were transformed into major and minor modes. Whether

321-322.
there will then be quarter tones, eighth, third, or (as Busoni thinks) sixth tones, or whether we will move to a 53-tone scale that Dr. Robert Neumann has calculated, we cannot foretell.”17

The notion of the overtone series as a “natural” validation of the Western system of music was another “child” of the Enlightenment, and it gave birth to Heinrich Schenker’s “chord of nature” theory. Schenker’s was another teleologically inspired theory that accounted not only for the origin of the major-minor system, but also for the superiority of Western music on the grounds that it was the system of Nature. “It is true that in founding the tonal system the artist was not left by Nature as helpless as in discovering the motif. However, also in this respect, it would be erroneous to imagine Nature’s help to be as manifest and unambiguous as that afforded by her to the other arts. Nature’s help to music consisted of nothing but a hint, a counsel forever mute, whose perception and interpretation were fraught with the gravest difficulties. No one could exaggerate, hence, the administration and gratitude we owe to the intuitive power with which the artists have divined Nature. In broad terms, mankind should take more pride in its development of music than in that of any other art. For the other arts, as imitations of Nature, have sprung more spontaneously—one might even say more irresistibly—from the innate human propensity to imitate.”18

For Schenker and his contemporaries Western music was superior to other types of musical systems because, in terms of the Enlightenment, it was the system that “conquered nature,” and the system that could achieve its ultimate teleological goal.

17 Ibid, 25.
The teleological angle found in Schoenberg and Schenker is undoubtedly one of the basic premises for Carrillo’s own ideology:

“Up to the almost unknown Leo Ornstein, it is the Russians who have the honor of achieving the greatest [musical] development in modern times. Ornstein’s procedures baffle even the greatest minds in the subject, he has employed more frequently than anyone else the chromatic scale as a chord, in other words: all the sounds at the same time [...] What will come after that? [...] The evolution will keep its always-ascending march. WE ARE ON THE VERGE OF WITNESSING THE MOST TRANSCENDENTAL EVENT PRODUCED IN MUSICAL TECHNIQUE NOT ONLY SINCE THE RENAISSANCE OR THE MIDDLE AGES BUT ALSO SINCE THE TIMES BEFORE JESUS CHRIST. The 13th sound is coming [...] What is the 13th sound? In the logical order of my previous prediction, the thirteenth sound can not be anything else but the subdivision of the half tone.”

In 1924, a public discussion of Carrillo’s theories took place in the pages of El Universal. A group of intellectuals headed by Jesús Romero, Estanislao Mejía, and Carrillo’s former collaborator, Alba Herrera y Ogazón questioned Carrillo’s theory and eventually challenged the composer to offer a practical example of it. Carrillo responded by writing Preludio a Colón for soprano, flute, two violins, viola, cello, harp and guitar (the harp and the guitar were able to produce intervals of 1/16 and 1/8 of a tone respectively). About this work, Carrillo wrote the following:

[...] That way the public could hear my Preludio a Colón, which I dedicated to the great Admiral who discovered America, thus incorporating the Indians of

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19 Julián Carrillo, “Teoría del sonido 13,” El Universal (September 17, 1924).
these blessed lands into the European civilization, and that does not mean I do
not lament that the conquerors destroyed our marvelous cultures [...].

A closer look into Carrillo’s *Preludio a Colón* would partially corroborate his
assertions of continuity. By showing the conceptual connections between Carrillo’s
microtonal music and the Western tradition, I hope to illuminate the diverse reasons
behind his personal “microtonal revolution.”

There is no question that after a first listening, especially in the conservative
musical context of Mexico in the late 1910’s and early 1920’s, *Preludio a Colón* may
sound like a radical challenge to all the principles of traditional music. Certainly,
sixteenth-, eighth-, and quarter-tones may baffle an ear used to the twelve pitches of the
chromatic scale. It does not come as a surprise that there was a wide spectrum of
opinions. Some considered microtonalism the beginning of a musical revolution: “If
*Sonido trece* currently means ‘revolution,’ we, guitar in hand, will go around the world
singing the ‘Third International’ in eighths of a tone;” while others thought of it as
“absurd futuristic fantasies.” Unfortunately the historical discourse about *Sonido trece*
has been dictated by political and even personal invectives and agendas; few analyses of
the discussion have seriously taken into account the musical texts themselves and their
relationship to the overall compositional output of Carrillo within his particular cultural
experience.

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20 Julián Carrillo, *Errores universales en música y física musical* (México: Seminario de Cultura Mexicana,
1967), 198.
21 Manuel G. Linares, “Las nuevas teorías del “Sonido 13”, en la estación de El Universal y la Casa de
Radio,” *El Universal* (September 20, 1924).
22 Carlos Chávez, “Consecuencias del movimiento de 1911,” *El Universal* (December 15, 1936), reprinted
To grasp a cultural artifact such as a music composition or a music system like 
Sonido 13, one must understand how the object is technically produced but also how it is 
made culturally meaningful.23 Understanding the production of new musical codes in 
Carrillo’s microtonal system is only the first step toward a larger analysis of those codes 
as a process of transculturation. The point is to show how these codes presume 
continuation with the German music tradition, as Carrillo himself stated — but also how 
they suggest a discontinuity with that tradition in an attempt to stress a more personal, 
independent identity. The cultural meaning of Sonido 13 is achieved not only through 
Carrillo’s representation, but is completed by the process of production and the cultural 
understanding of that production. We cannot explain Sonido 13 solely as a continuation 
of the German tradition, as Carrillo wants us to believe, since it also exemplifies a 
personal departure from that paradigm. This abandonment is only clear when we analyze 
the relationship of the new musical codes with the fundamental ideas of foreground and 
background proportion of the so-called German music tradition.

My analysis shows that Carrillo uses musical codes to create an increasingly 
individual style that, although born of the German tradition, was finally estranged from 
its original source. To achieve my goal I base my musical evaluation on Stuart Hall’s 
description of music as a language system. For Hall, musicians use music as a system of 
representation that constructs and depicts meaning through its interaction with the world, 
and is able to communicate that meaning to people who share his or her codes.24 For the 
structural and textual part of my analysis I borrow from linguistics the ideas of axis of 
selection and axis of combination, as proposed by Roman Jackobson and later adopted by

Émile Benveniste as paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes. Encompassing the above, my analytical system considers pitches on the level of phonemes, which acquire value only through their combination with other phonemes in forming words. Although Carrillo invented a numerical notation for his microtonal music, I use an alternate notation also used by the composer to represent his microtonal interval within a traditional notation system. By adding small lines above the note heads, Carrillo represented the microtonal variation affecting that specific note. An explanation of this notation is offered in table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Microtonal notation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><code>'</code></td>
<td>1/8 of a tone higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>\</code></td>
<td>1/8 of a tone lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>/</code></td>
<td>1/4 of a tone higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>\</code></td>
<td>1/4 of a tone lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>'/</code></td>
<td>3/8 of a tone higher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><code>\\</code></td>
<td>3/8 of a tone lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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25 Émile Benveniste, “The Semiology of Language” in *Semiotics: An Introduction*. Ed. by Robert E. Innis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 236-237. In my analysis the paradigmatic axis refers to the type of music elements that could be used (for example passing notes, suspensions, resolutions, etc.), while the syntagmatic axis refers to the way those elements are put together in combination (for example a harmonic tone + a passing note + a harmonic tone prolonged into a suspension + resolution = a musical motif).
The overall formal structure of *Preludio a Colón* is rather conventional, a ternary form (A-B-A’-Coda) based on a regular juxtaposition of internal motivic material that is organized in clear subsections (Table 1.2).

The contrasting qualities of each of the large sections —the rhapsodic A section, the lamenting B section, and a coda that is more animated and fuller in texture— support a traditional reading of the form. Nonetheless, it is only when we closely examine and compare the materials that make up these subsections that we can grasp the unique formal details. My first analytical segmentation will consider the syntagmatic (axis of combination) and the paradigmatic (axis of selection) functions in relation to the construction of the larger formal arch of the work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A2</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>B2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subsection</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A1'</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>B1'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segment</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A1</td>
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<td>A1</td>
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<td>Components</td>
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<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>A1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonal center</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>B/E</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2. Julián Carrillo, *Preludio a Colón*. Formal design.
As observed in table 1, the A section is divided into two parts, subsections A1 and A2. Two major criteria help differentiate these two subsections:

1) Component “Aiia,” which was only a fragment of segment “AII” in the first subsection, becomes segment “AII” in A2. From then on, Aiia will be the only component of the “AII” segment (Ex. 1.1).

2) Segment “AI” is composed of only one component: “Ai,” which is continuously transformed every time it returns throughout the piece. As we may observe in example 1.2, the differences in the four presentations of this segment reside in the different microtonal scales used each time: “AI” is based on a scale of eighths of tone; a scale of intervals of one tone and a quarter is used for “AI1;” “AI2” is made out of intervals of a quarter of tone (AI2’ is only a rhythmic variation of AI2); “AI3” and “AI4” are both based on a scale made out of intervals of three quarters of tone (I have labeled them differently because they prolong the pitch E through different mechanisms). Segment “AI” has the same paradigmatic role every time; heard vertically it is used as an introduction to the melodic gesture of segment “AII” (or component “Aiia” accordingly). This level of segmentation allows us to perceive a syntagmatic function based on the juxtaposition of different motivic material, which projected into the larger structural scale, translates into the overall ternary form of the work.
Ex. 1.2. Carrillo, *Preludio a Colón*. Different presentations of segment AI.

Nevertheless, the most interesting aspect to examine is the paradigmatic role of both segments in a smaller level of segmentation. If we pay attention to the foreground level in examples 1.1 and 1.2, we may observe that both gestures function harmonically to prolong a central pitch. In all examples of “AI” the microtones of the foreground level play the role of neighboring notes that embellish E, and such is also the case with “Aiia.” Example 1.3 shows the details of prolongation. In the case of “Aiib,” the melodic gesture is different but the harmonic role is the same: the first three pitches of the “Aiia” gesture
are used as a sequence to move chromatically down an octave. Thus, the microtones play the role of embellishments for the chromatic passing tones between the head and the goal of the gesture: pitch E (Ex.1. 4).


“B2” presents the components heard in “B1” in reverse order. I have labeled these components “Bia” and “Bib’”, the only difference being their rhythmic presentation (Ex. 1.5).

Ex. 1.5. Carrillo, *Preludio a Colón*. Segments BI and BI’.

As might be observed in example five, the harmonic material consists of a diminished chord with a minor seventh that moves up and down, fulfilling the same paradigmatic function seen in the different presentations of “AI”: the quarter tones work as passing notes between chromatic pitches, embellishing a central note. The difference in texture between sections A and B is quite noticeable; while section A presents melodic fragments on top of pedal notes, the B section is dominated by the diminished sonorities of its harmonic texture (Ex. 1.5). The parallel motion and the tonal ambiguity of the diminished chords both play an important role defining the character of the section. Carrillo resolved these ambiguities by ending this section with a cadence that presents a harmonic
diminished fifth moving into a perfect fifth (Ex. 1.6); not to notice the tonal implications of such a paradigmatic function would result in an inadequate analysis of the piece as a whole.

Ex. 1.6. Carrillo, *Preludio a Colón*. Final cadence in section B.

The A’ section is an abbreviated recapitulation of the opening material, mainly a presentation of “A2” with a slight emphasis on pitch B as tonal center, especially in the presentation of the melodic fragment “AII,” although the E continues to dominate the spectrum with its role as pedal.

The coda section emphasizes a new texture with the introduction of new material presented in contrapuntal lines, which contrasts with the drones and harmonic emphasis in sections A and B. Two clearly different segments form the coda: “CI” (Ex. 1.7) is composed of scales in intervals of three quarters of a tone moving in contrary motion, and the second part, “CII,” (Ex. 1.8) introduces diatonic elements and also for the first time a certain emphasis on pitch G, again over an E pedal.
This event appears as an extreme surprise, since this confirmation of mode happens only seven measures before the end of the piece — it is almost as if the composer waited until
the last minute to show the listener that he was aware of the referential power of the triad. Carrillo nonetheless maintains the modal mystery here by introducing the F# as passing note between the pitches of the E major triad, producing with this a “lydian” inflection that counterbalances with modal ambiguity the sense of certainty created by the triad.

However, in the middle of Carrillo’s modal and tonal interplay, the question of the paradigmatic function of the microtones comes back, and the answer is the same as in the previous sections: microtones take part only on the foreground level, again as non-harmonic elements, passing notes within larger prolongations of tonal centers.

Schenker criticized performing musicians of the early twentieth century for incoherence of interpretation. He stated that performers were only concerned with musical events on the surface of the pieces and would not project the large-scale structure that gave meaning to those surface details. Based on a reading of Ferruccio Busoni’s *Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (1906), Robert Morgan suggests that one of the most important aspects of the main currents of modernist music is a new relationship between the elements of musical language. While in some cases the grammar remains the same, the syntax—the relationship of those grammatical elements to each other—is radically changed. In other words, what Schenker considered a fundamental aspect of tonal language in music, the prolongation of the major or minor triad at the structural level and its reflection in the events that take place in the foreground of a composition, might be replaced by structural elements other than the major triad. For Morgan, nevertheless, coherence between foreground and structural levels is still fundamental to the success of a modern musical language:

“A solution [to the problem of foreground and background relationships in modern music] demanded a major restructuring of the received musical

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language. In the broadest terms, it involved a projection of musical phenomena previously considered to belong solely to the foreground — elements that are ephemeral, passing, structurally unessential, and thus, in a sense, accidental (the chance results of voice leading, etc.) — onto the structural background. I have already noted a tendency in this direction in nineteenth-century music, in the increasing emphasis on individual foreground features.\(^{27}\)

As I have shown in the first segmentations of my analysis of Carrillo’s *Preludio a Colón*, the presence of microtones at the foreground level of the work could be easily explained as mere embellishments that support longer prolongations of central pitches, prolongations which belong to the first level of middle ground. In the view of Schenker and Morgan the question determining musical coherence that arises from this analysis is whether the elements of the foreground find their way into the structural background of the composition, and if they do, how and under which conditions the background-foreground relationship takes place. Is this a traditional relationship in the sense proposed by Schenker or does it follow the modernist principle of coherence discussed by Morgan?

Robert Morgan also proposes to apply some of the principles of tonal prolongation that Schenker considered fundamental in his comprehensive theory of tonal music, to late nineteenth-century music and twentieth-century post-tonal music.\(^{28}\) Based on Morgan’s idea that modernist music incorporates structural prolongations different from the major triad, I have attempted a reading of the background level of *Preludio a Colón* that looks for the tonal centers that create the structural support of the piece. In example 1.9, I offer a graphic analysis of the background level of Carrillo’s composition.


My analysis shows that the work represents a basic prolongation of one central pitch: E. Although there are some movements to the fifth degree (mostly melodic), none of them is a true, supported structural presentation of the dominant as it would be in a tonal composition. In example 1.9 we may observe more clearly some of those melodic movements to the fifth degree, especially clear in the middle of the B section.

In strict Schenkerian terms, the structural prolongation of a single pitch would automatically deny the existence of a composition. The idea of a piece of music, in the traditional Schenkerian sense, is the variety of harmonic construction around the pitches of the major tonic triad as a fundamental structure as well as the melodic elaboration of a descending line from the third, fifth, or more rarely, the eighth degree. None of these two basic requirements of the Schenkerian model is fulfilled in Carrillo’s *Preludio a Colón*. Nevertheless, and unlike traditional Schenkerians, I propose that we cannot judge Carrillo’s composition with a set of values designed to evaluate tonal music, since, by abandoning that paradigm, Carrillo’s music entered the realm of modernist languages. If
that is the case, we might consider Morgan’s ideas of changing foreground-background relations as a more suitable rule of thumb for this music. Moreover, a comparison of events at the foreground and background levels shows that if microtones do not transfer to the fundamental structure, their function still dominates this level of the piece. Carrillo carefully balanced foreground and background events, projecting the function of the paradigmatic elements of the surface into the deeper level of the piece, its syntagmatic background.

My analysis of Preludio a Colón determines that Carrillo’s microtones remained at the surface level of his music, as new elements of grammar. But my analysis also shows that Carrillo clearly understood how the paradigmatic function of the new grammatical material –namely the fact that the microtones serve as prolongations of one pitch– had to be reflected in one way or another in the structural level of the composition, in order to effect coherence according to some basic principles of the tradition he stemmed from. In other words, Carrillo’s assertion that his musical development was his own personal extension of the German tradition seems verified by the internal behavior of this work.

The idea of transculturation implies that no tradition can be adopted without being changed by the cultural experiences of the community that receives it. Appropriation always insinuates transformation, and that is the case in Carrillo’s appropriation of the German music tradition. My analysis shows this is true in Carrillo’s microtonal music. We could describe Preludio a Colón as a transitional composition; although the style of the piece is very personal, we still observe that the paradigmatic axis operates much like traditional tonal music, and notwithstanding that, the background level could never be compared to a Schenkerian Ursatz, it still prolongs elements that could be traced back to the tonal triad. However, Carrillo’s style, and his further departure from the so-called German paradigm, is more clear in some of his later pieces,—where the structural level
shows a completely different approach to sound organization, a mode of organization based on non-diatonic, artificial collections or scales, an angle that places him closer to the Russian tradition rather than the German.29

Hans Rudolph Zeller has stated that the microtonal composers of the first two decades of the twentieth century operated independently of each other.30 In 1924, Ivan Vishneggadski published an article in La revue musicale, where he reviewed the current microtonal scene. Vishneggadski recognized the efforts of Richard Stein, Busoni, Arthur Lourié, and Alois Haba, as well as the intention of Behrend-Senegalden and Moellendorf to build quartetone keyboards.31 Nevertheless, the absence of Carrillo, who by 1924 had already published his “Teoría del sonido 13,” —the text had been translated into English in 1923— indicates that European composers were not familiar with Carrillo’s writings. Indeed, there is no evidence that Carrillo was aware of European microtonal developments either, at least not before 1922, when he encountered an article from Le menestrel that advocated quartetone music.32 However, after this year it became customary for Mexican opponents of Carrillo’s microtonality to refer to the writings of Busoni and Schoenberg, as well as to the compositions of Haba —in particular his String Quartet (1921)— to try to disqualify Carrillo as an innovator. Carrillo would generally object to these accusations by constructing his own “myth of origin,” and noting the more detailed and systematic nature of his Sonido 13;33 the premises of his defense were:

29 Namely the use of artificial collections and sets in the music of Rimsky-Korsakov, Scriabin and Roslavets.
31 Ivan Vishneggadski, “La musique à quarts de ton.” La revue musicale (Vol. 5, No. 11, 1924), 231-234.
33 The construction of this “myth of origin” is apparent throughout Carrillo’s writings, for an example of his discourse on the origin and originality of the sonido 13 system see Julián Carrillo, El infinito en las escalas y los acordes (México: Ediciones Sonido 13, 1957), 21.
a) He had already experimented with sixteenth-tones —in one of his typically historicist rhetorical twists, he said he had “conquered” them— as early as 1895.

b) He went beyond the division of the semitone into two quarter-tones —as with Haba— or the tone in six sixth-tones —as with Busoni—, and built instruments capable of playing sixteenth-tones.

Nothing substantiates the so-called “conquest” from 1895 but Carrillo’s word. He did not formulate any theoretical writings until 1920 —although an interest in microtones is in evidence in a couple of articles from his Pláticas musicales (1913). Therefore, taking him at his word, as many scholars have done, is the only basis upon which to assume that Carrillo’s microtonal ruminations started at the end of the 19th century. Obviously, Carrillo devised his rhetoric to answer his critics and validate the importance of his system.

The point of my argument is that although we cannot be sure if Carrillo knew Busoni’s microtonal ideas or not, it is clear that he was aware of them after 1922, and that they became a shadow that would haunt Carrillo for the following years. In many of his writings from the late 1920’s, most of which appear in both the Spanish and English version of his propagandistic magazine El sonido 13, we can find several references and quotations from Busoni’s Ästhetik der Tonkunst. These writings show Carrillo’s constant struggle to come to terms with Busoni’s ideas, which he often dismisses as “purely theoretical speculations.”34 Nevertheless, Carrillo’s positive connections with Busoni’s rhetoric would appear clearer in later writings and compositional interests.

As Schoenberg stated in his Harmonielehre, Ferruccio Busoni had already mentioned the possibility of microtones in his Ästhetik der Tonkunst. Nevertheless, Busoni’s interest in microtones, although an example of a teleological concept of music history, does not indicate a “blind faith” in the overtone series, as was the case in

34 See El sonido 13 (Vol. II, No. 1, 1925), cover.
Schoenberg, Schenker, and Carrillo’s writings. Busoni’s curiosity developed from a preoccupation with new scales and with mystic ideas that would place him closer to the Russian tradition, especially to Scriabin, and therefore would make him a harbinger of Ivan Vishnegradsky:

“[...] the unity of all keys may be considered as finally pronounced and justified. A kaleidoscopic blending and interchanging of twelve semitones within the three-mirror tube of Taste, Emotion, and Intention — the essential feature of the harmony of to-day (sic). The harmony of to-day, and not for long; for all signs presage a revolution, and a next step toward that “eternal harmony.” Let us once again call to mind, that in this latter the gradation of the octave is infinite, and let us strive to draw a little nearer to infinitude. The tripartite tone (third of a tone) has for some time been demanding admittance, and we have left the call unheeded.”

In Busoni’s rhetoric, we find a curious combination of mysticism and determinism, since the “eternal harmony” that was to be attained with the introduction of microtones was both a mystic conception as well as the inexorable goal of a teleological force. These writings foreshadow the later work of Ivan Vishnegradsky, who, influenced by Scriabin and Lourié, also proposed a teleologic history of music that culminates with the dissolution of tonal hierarchy. The absence of tonal hierarchy implied that the notion of “acoustic value” would replace that of “acoustic origin,” where the quality of the interval depends on their number of vibrations and not in their relation to a fundamental pitch. Such a shift in intervallic organization de-emphasized a harmonic understanding.

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of music, and allowed Vishnegradski to re-focus on uniformly divided scales. Based on this principle the **continuum** of sound could be marked by using equally divided scales of chromatic or “ultrachromatic” [microtonal] nature.\(^{37}\)

Both Busoni and Vishnegradski invoked a theory of artificial scales as validation for their microtonal propositions. This finds an echo in Carrillo’s later writings, in his own rhetoric on microtonalism, and most importantly, in his music. The Mexican composer had shown a concern for non-tonal, symmetric scales since the early 1900’s. Chapter XI of Carrillo’s *Tratado sintético de harmonía* (sic) (1913) is entirely dedicated to whole-tone scales, which he traced back to Liszt’s *Dante Symphony* (1856). As may be expected from a composer still rooted in tonality, Carrillo always understood the treatment of the whole-tone scale within the tonal system. He tries to balance the non-tonal nature of the scale with tonality by proposing a harmonization with diminished seventh chords. In his book, Carrillo approaches this problem by stating that:

“[…] not a single pitch from a whole-tone scale could be used as a leading tone, therefore [these scales] cannot be used to modulate (when used without accompaniment). This is the reason to assure that a whole-tone scale might or might not be used to modulate, it depends on how it is harmonized.”\(^{38}\)

Carrillo’s microtonal interests also caused him to shift focus from the harmonic motion of tonality to an emphasis on scales and their variety. The use of a variety of different microtonal scales on the foreground level of *Preludio a Colón* shows that this idea is already present, although in a rudimentary form, in this composition. Carrillo clearly addresses these preoccupations in *El infinito en las escalas y los acordes* (1957), where he states:


“On July 13, 1895 I made an experiment in Mexico City where I achieved the 1/16 of a tone, and with that, the sounds in music grew 800%. Since that date, the conquests of the Sonido 13 revolution have increased in such a way that there is no possibility that more sounds will be achieved in the future, since the only limitations to my revolution are the possibilities of the human ear’s perception. When the interplanetary connection is achieved, it will be possible to find new timbres; but no new sounds.”

Following a mathematical approach that foreshadows aspects of Allen Forte’s set theory, Carrillo was able to come up with 1.193,556,232 different scales or chords—he insisted that the presentation of these collections in either melodic or harmonic fashion made no difference—using the twelve pitches of the chromatic scale. In a development that reminds us of Vishnegradski’s notion of “acoustic value,” Carrillo embraced a conception of music radically opposed to that of any tonal composer. His music is no longer based on harmonic and melodic practices but rather on the notion of collections of sounds that might be used as either melodies or harmonies. Carrillo was so aware of the radicalism of this conceptual shift that he himself would label his music “atonal.” If we go back to Carrillo’s early descriptions of the tonal capabilities of the whole-tone scale, as expressed in his Tratado sintético de harmonía, we realize that the later conception is already suggested in his 1913 text.

This “atonal,” collection-centered conception is the reason behind the harmonic stillness of works such as Cuarteto atonal a Debussy (1927) and En secreto (1927), both for string quartet. In his Cuarteto atonal a Debussy, Carrillo juxtaposes blocks based on whole-tone and chromatic collections and one that, to use set theory nomenclature, I have

39 Julián Carrillo, El infinito en las escalas y los acordes, 21.
41 While they were radical ideas for Mexican audiences and composers, it is clear that these “proto-serial” approaches were not new in Europe, especially in Russia, where composers like Alexander Scriabin (1872-1915) and Nicolai Roslavets (1881-1944) had experimented with them since the mid-1910s.
called (0124589) (Ex. 1.10). The overall tonal result of the work is one of extreme motionlessness, which the composer tries to conciliate with a sonatina form with abbreviated recapitulation.\textsuperscript{42}


Juxtaposition of whole-tone, chromatic and (0124589) blocks.

\textsuperscript{42} There are some similarities in formal approach between the first movements of Carrillo’s \textit{Cuarteto atonal a Debussy} and his Symphony No. 1; however, the shift to a collection-centered paradigm instead of tonality, shows Carrillo’s personal deviation from the pre-Schoenbergian German paradigm.
A better example of Carrillo’s involvement with artificial scales and the concept of “collection” is found in his microtonal work *En secreto*, a piece that shows some of the same type of foreground activity that we found in *Preludio a Colón*. The microtonal material works on the paradigmatic level as passing and neighboring notes that prolong structural material at the background of the composition, as can be observed in example 1.11.


The difference between *Preludio a Colón* and *En secreto* is that the middle ground material in the second piece is composed of artificial collections: whole-tone and octatonic, and a microtonal scale made out of an intervallic sequence of 3,3,5,1,3,3,3, and 3 quarter-tones (Ex.1.12).
Ex. 1.12. Pitch collections used in Carrillo’s *En secreto*.

The presentation of these collections at the middle ground level is supported in most of the composition by the prolongation of a whole-tone set in the background level of the work (Ex. 1.13).

If analyzed with the same criteria, the microtonal material of Preludio a Colón and En secreto play the same paradigmatic role, and do so at the foreground level. However, a closer look at the middle and background levels of En secreto show us a composer working with a structural conception even more removed from tradition, the prolongation of artificial collections rather than the prolongation of diatonic pitches. Although Carrillo’s new emphasis on intervals and artificial collections could be traced back to his writings from 1913, they do resonate with Busoni’s understanding of microtonality and Vishngradski’s later theory of “ultrachromaticism.”

Comparative analysis of some of the first microtonal works of Carrillo shows that his music experienced a true process of transculturation. Based on aesthetic and historicist postulates borrowed from Western European culture, and especially the so-called German music tradition, Carrillo developed a microtonal system that, in the earliest works, supports his own representation as proponent of that structuralist tradition. However, soon after he had composed those pieces, he moved away from some of the principles of that tradition. In Carrillo, the process of transculturation actually helped him shift models and, ironically, move the organicist tradition he wished to develop into a paradigm parallel to the serialism formulated by other composers from that tradition.

In a study that attempts to understand the aesthetic differences between Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde (1857-59) and Debussy’s Pelléas et Mélisande (1902), Lydia Goehr proposes criteria based on the relationship between style and idea to differentiate between a romantic and a modernist aesthetic tendency in a given musical composition. According to her position, a romantic tendency “seeks synthesis and absolutism in this relation [while a modernist tendency] stresses the fracture and failure.” Based on Schoenberg’s own concepts of style and idea I propose that Goehr’s criterion actually works to

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discriminate between two contrasting notions of modernist aesthetics. Stemming from the musical German paradigm, Schoenberg believed that a work’s “personal characteristics” —its style— is only a superficial representation of the essential idea behind it.\textsuperscript{44} Such a statement resonates with Goehr’s description of the romantic tendency in Wagner’s \textit{Tristan} as an example of the romantic tendency, and it could not be different since Schoenberg’s modernism is firmly grounded in the German organicist ideology, it is indeed an extension of the German romantic tradition. The notion of style as the foreground representation of the idea remains at the core of Schoenberg’s compositional technique even throughout his modernist phase. It is this concept of modernism that Robert Morgan borrows to argue that the projection of foreground elements onto the background level is still a fundamental aspect of the striving for cohesion in a modernist work. The fracture between style and idea that Goehr calls the modernist tendency in Debussy’s \textit{Pelléas} is a contrasting definition of modernism, one that rejects the organicist construction of the German musical paradigm by emphasizing a non-organicist principle of foreground-background relationship.

These concepts illustrate how the process of transculturation reflected in Carrillo’s microtonal works also enacts an ideological break with the German tradition. The foreground-background relations featured in \textit{Preludio a Colón} show the work of a modernist composer still anchored in an organicist, synthetic principle of musical construction. On the other hand, the stylistic features in \textit{Cuarteto atonal a Debussy} and \textit{En secreto} fail to be projected into the respective musical ideas of the works; style, in these pieces, does not represent the idea but rather a tacit rejection of the German paradigm. The development of style, in Carrillo’s early microtonal works, is a performative impetus that acts as the result of transculturation but also as the agent that

\textsuperscript{44} Arnold Schoenberg, \textit{Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg}, ed. by Leonard Stein (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1984), 177-178.
activates it. In these works by Carrillo, style acts, according to Dick Hebdige definition, as a challenge to hegemony, a place where opposing ideologies collide and negotiate their differences.\textsuperscript{45} Carrillo’s style is his aesthetic solution to the multi-ideological context that surrounded his development as a composer in Germany and Mexico, but it is also the agent that ultimately breaks with the German musical paradigm.

III

Hegemonic discourses are constructed to validate dominant institutions of power and their specific ideologies. As Gesa Mackenthun proposes, it is often through the creation of a “myth of origin” that a dominant ideology authorizes present and future conditions.\textsuperscript{46} The hegemonic discourse produced in post-revolutionary Mexico is no exception, and it should be understood as a narrative that, in order to construct a coherent story, had to perform exercises of agency with the many discourses that coexisted in the country in the 1920’s. These practices resulted in the exercises of dispossession, exclusion, and preference needed to ratify the myth of origin behind the new institutions in power. Since Carrillo’s microtonalism did not conform with the nationalist aesthetic favored by the post-revolutionary government, it came to be considered a sort of modernist oddity that remained rarely performed and even less frequently studied or analyzed. Useless in validating the discourse of the new dominant ideology, Carrillo was excluded from its hegemonic narrative. One of the most important and influential musicians of Mexico during the first two decades of the twentieth century, Carrillo had exited the musical mainstream of his country by 1926, after a series of political miscalculations and a radical shift in his professional interests.

Julián Carrillo was a modernist artist and we must understand his contribution to modern music languages through the idea of transculturation: his own appropriation, transformation, and ultimately tacit rejection of the German music paradigm. An appropriation was in tune with his time since Carrillo shared the aesthetic and technical principles and beliefs that permeated and gave birth to European modern languages in the early twentieth century. If we take into consideration the historical, cultural, and social contexts that produced Carrillo’s Sonido 13, then we should interpret it as the result of two different processes of agency. On the one hand, Carrillo felt it necessary to reinvent himself within the cultural institutions of the new state that came to power in Mexico in 1920, after the revolution —Carrillo’s continuous call for a musical “revolution” through microtonality is symptomatic of his conviction that a radical musical movement was needed as cultural validation of the social revolution experienced in his country. At the same time, Carrillo wanted to represent himself as part of the teleological, progressive side of the Western music tradition. This is why he always substantiated his microtonal system as the “natural” goal in a deterministic understanding of music history. For Carrillo, the microtonal system was a direct response to what he considered the highest achievement of functional tonality up to the early twentieth century: the equivalent harmonic use of the 12 pitches of the chromatic scale. Carrillo’s Sonido 13 was the result of a process of transculturation defined by the particular historical circumstances of Mexico —and Carrillo’s place within that context. It was a triple-sided exercise in agency between the composer and the discourses of teleology, modernism, and nationalism in and outside of his country.

Lawrence Grossberg suggests that agency allows an individual to navigate the processes by which social meaning is created, institutions transformed and power
enacted. In this study, I have approached the idea of “power” not only as an inhibitory institution, but also as a constructive one that, by its mere existence, forces individuals to negotiate and transform their identities. From this perspective, we should interpret Carrillo’s microtonal system as a powerful element of personal agency within shifting institutions of power in his country, as well as a very personal appropriation of the German music tradition. But the construction of identity is never a one-way avenue, it is never a complete self-construction; one’s identity is also shaped by the “others” and their own necessity to mark difference and create individual and group identity. Carrillo’s discourse was also balanced by the interpretation that “others” made of that discourse, an interpretation that did not necessarily coincide with Carrillo’s attempts at representation.

I have shown that as early as 1905 critics were accusing Carrillo of speaking a musical language incomprehensible for Mexican audiences. As soon as Carrillo’s Symphony No. 1 and String Sextet were premiered in Mexico, he was charged with copying German genres notwithstanding Mexican audiences’ distaste for them. This opinion was reproduced by several generations of Mexican musicians and historians. Carlos Chávez criticized Carrillo in his article “La importación en México,” by adjusting Melesio Morales’s 1905 criticism to the social, historical, cultural, and political circumstances of Mexico in 1924. Otto Mayer-Serra’s Panorama de la música mexicana (1941), the first historical survey of Mexican music written in support of the hegemonic discourse of the post-revolutionary government, mentions Carrillo only once, asserting that his only musical achievement was the introduction of the style of Wagner and Strauss in Mexico. None of these authorities acknowledges that processes of transculturation are fundamental in understanding cultural change in multi-ideological

settings. The fact that these writers have been taken as accurate in representing Carrillo’s identity reveals that signifying practices producing meaning—and constructions of identity as such—are always permeated by relations of power, since it was the necessary suppression of Carrillo from the nationalist, hegemonic discourse of the post-revolutionary state, which permitted the furthering of these historical misconceptions.

My study of Carrillo perceives the 1920s in Mexico as a decade of complex social and cultural changes and struggles, and places the composer and his Sonido 13, within these circumstances, as an example of the search for identity and the ideas of modernization that saturated Mexico after the revolution. As such, we should understand Sonido 13 as the exercise of agency of a composer navigating between ideologies, trying to find a niche and an identity that could allow him to make sense of a changing world.
CHAPTER 2
Performing Identity through the Avant-Garde. Style and Ideology in Carlos Chávez’s Early Music

Carlos Chávez (1899-1978) is recognized as a composer of international stature thanks to his key role in 20th-century Mexican cultural life, his close relationship with some of America’s foremost musicians, and the high quality of his music. Today he remains the Mexican composer best known to American musicologists; and yet, music history texts commonly misrepresent him, emphasizing his nationalism/indigenism at the expense of his neoclassical and avant-garde activities.¹ The origin of this misrepresentation lies in the Mexican government itself, which, during the post-revolutionary period of the 1930s and 1940s, promoted a nationalist artistic rhetoric that was intended to validate the regime and to establish a renewed hegemony, a national identity that took pre-Columbian and Aztec cultures as its own “myth of origin.” This rhetoric placed Chávez at the center of the indigenist movement –what has often been called the “Aztec Renaissance”– and traced his nationalist activities to the early years of

the revolutionary government when he was a musical ally of José Vasconcelos. Such rhetoric re-appropriated, *a posteriori*, Chávez and his music as direct products of the revolution, and wrote his public persona as a sort of state composer in the Soviet-Shostakovich tradition.

Chávez’s aesthetic, however, is too complex and paradoxical to be classified simply as nationalist. There is not just one Carlos Chávez and thus we cannot categorize him under a single label. In *Rostros del nacionalismo en la música mexicana* (1989), Yolanda Moreno Rivas, while briefly mentioning some of Chávez’s modernist works, focuses on him as a nationalist composer. Carol Oja portrays him mainly as a neoclassicist in her *Making Music Modern* (2000). Of course neither Moreno Rivas’ nor Oja’s purpose is to paint a complete portrait of the Mexican composer, and their books deal with him only as far as his music exemplifies their specific targets of study: nationalism in Mexico and modernism in New York’s 1920s, respectively. Regardless, Chávez was indeed both of those composers at once. He was a nationalist and a neoclassicist, but also a modernist and an avant-garde composer although not in a chronological, linear, or evolutionary progression, as one might think of a modernist artist; in Chávez, all of those identities coexisted synchronically. It might seem contradictory or even schizophrenic for a historicist composer to embrace at the same time an avant-gardist and a neoclassical attitude, and this may be true for European composers such as Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky—as Adorno’s “progress vs. restoration” dialectic implies. Nevertheless, such an attitude does not entail a contradiction for a composer living under the specific multi-ideological context of post-revolution Mexico.
Analyzing a quotation from an article written in 1930 by José Gorostiza (1901-1973), who had been a close friend of Chávez while they were both students at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, is a good point of departure toward an understanding of the composer and his music as elements in the new network of power relationships developed in 1920s Mexico:

“To better explain this psychological mechanism named Carlos Chávez, I have arbitrarily suppressed the musician from the personal concept I have of him. I should say it. I do not really like him as a composer and I am not particularly interested in him as a conductor, but frankly, he seduces me as an agitator. Because I believe that Carlos Chávez is above all an agitator. An agitator whose instrument is music as it could have been politics.”

Chávez’s music is not only the result of his personal aesthetic search, but also a complex response to the entanglement of ideologies that characterized Mexican society after the military phase of the revolution. A response where solidarity and resistance intertwined with different aspects of those ideologies mark them as part of a structured system of meanings. Under these circumstances, we must understand Chávez’s multiplicity of identities—Chávez as a “psychological mechanism”—not as a schizophrenic act, but rather as a strategy in a nascent struggle for hegemony.

Leslie G. Espinoza has proposed that individual persons resolve the tension between group and individual difference in multi-ideological contexts by developing multiple identities. By learning to attach “the ‘right’ symbol to the ‘right’ knowing in the

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‘right’ context,’” subjects develop tactics that permit them to successfully sort through a complex, often contradictory web of ideologies. The variety of Chávez’s aesthetic and stylistic approaches is a response to the different ideologies that collided in post-revolutionary Mexico; they are the result of Chávez’s negotiation with his political and cultural surroundings, but they are also an attempt to exert an influence on this convoluted context. Furthermore, according to Edwina Barvosa-Carter, multiple identities are not only situational but also relational; they not only respond to their immediate context but also work as a social bond with those who share that context. Multiple identities allow individuals to establish groups of identification, coalitions, or subcultures that enable them to navigate the ideological web that surrounds them while proposing new understandings of their social reality. Multiple identity provided Chávez with a variety of identity frames of reference and allowed him to position himself within different political discourses, establishing common goals with members of different ideological tendencies. Most important, multiple identity offered the composer a chance to interpellate hegemony from a secure niche and establish a series of consensus that could (and would) in turn become hegemonic discourses.

Each of the identities assumed by Chávez –modernist, neoclassicist, indigenist, and avant-gardist– was a point de caption in the Lacanian sense, a nodal point that fixed the meanings of specific ideological signifiers; and his ability to create partial

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intersections among them—his multiple identity— permitted him to make political
alliances beyond the aesthetic realm. Certainly, Chávez’s multiple identity forces and
enables him to name the ideological situation that surrounds him in a variety of
languages, and, as Lacan would argue, perform or write his ideological context. This is
undoubtedly a political practice, one that both negotiates Chávez’s position within
ideology and re-evaluates hegemony. As Gorostiza wrote, Chávez’s music is indeed the
instrument of an agitator, an instrument that opened a path for him and created sites for
coalition and group identification.

In this chapter, I focus on the avant-garde side of Chávez’s multiple identity and
the partial intersections that linked it to his other identities. I am particularly interested in
showing how Chávez’s rise to fame during the 1920s is in fact connected to the complex
notoriety of the avant-garde—and therefore to what Gorostiza called his role as an
agitator—and not to the nationalist crusade of José Vasconcelos, as the “myth of origin”
developed by the Mexican government would certify. Such a hypothesis places a
definitive emphasis on Chávez as an agent, a political individual making his way through
an ambiguous ideological web, but also re-naming, reconstructing, and, in the tradition of
Judith Butler, performatively reconstructing that web. To support my point I perform a
study of ideology and identity in post-revolution Mexico as reflected, contested and
created in Chávez’s construction of musical meaning between 1923 and 1925, the period
that marked the first establishment of the composer as a public figure.
Roberto García Morillo states that it was José Vasconcelos, President Obregón’s Minister of Education, who commissioned Carlos Chávez to write his ballet *El fuego nuevo* (1921), upon recommendation from Henríquez Ureña. Based on the traditional nationalist discourse and García Morillo’s statement, the commission was to be the musical side of Vasconcelos’ nationalist project and Chávez’s break into the musical mainstream of Mexico City. This piece of information gave culture and music historians the opportunity to create one of the most recurring supporting myths of the traditional, hegemonic reading that understands Mexican cultural life in the twentieth century as a univocal product of the revolution. For this ideology, *El fuego nuevo* became a piece of propaganda that symbolized the beginning of musical nationalism, while Chávez, as carrier of this banner, came to be regarded as one of the most influential composers in 1920s Mexico. The recent research of Leonora Saavedra has shown that there is no evidence among Vasconcelos’ documents from the Ministry of Education supporting García Morillo’s claim. The fact is that regardless of whether the work was indeed commissioned by Vasconcelos or not, the historical importance of the ballet has been blown out of proportion.

Two often-overlooked historical situations contradict the traditional discourse on Chávez and *El fuego nuevo*. First, the piece was not premiered until 1930, after the composer made several revisions to the 1921 score, thus it could not have been a point of reference for any other composer nor the audiences of Mexico City during that decade.

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Second, although not inconceivable, it would seem unlikely that an unknown 22-year old composer, still struggling for recognition in the musical scene of the city, could so quickly become a compositional and aesthetic influence in a musical scene still dominated by the older generation of composers –Gustavo Campa (1863-1934), Rafael J. Tello (1872-1946), Julián Carrillo (1875-1965), Manuel M. Ponce (1882-1948), and Carlos del Castillo (1882-1957), among others.

If *El fuego nuevo* did not represent Chávez’s entrance into the music scene of Mexico, just how and when did he find his way into the musical mainstream of his country? An analytical interpretation of the events that accumulate between 1921 and 1926 proves fundamental in answering this question. In 1921, even considering Vasconcelos’ presumed role in the composition of *El fuego nuevo*, Chávez was nothing but an enthusiastic young musician with no professional credentials. My work shows that the indigenist aesthetic was only tangential to the musical identity chosen by Chávez to position himself in the music world. However, I am interested in presenting more than just a negative critique of the inherited discourse on Chávez and nationalism, therefore my study shows how Chávez’s avant-garde activities were fundamental in the creation of a hegemony-building network.

The earliest artistic achievements of Chávez were very closely linked to the success of a group of young poets and writers he befriended while in high school: Octavio G. Barreda (1897-1964), José Gorostiza (1901-1973), Enrique González Rojo (1899-1939), Bernardo Ortiz de Montellano (1899-1949), Carlos Pellicer (1899-1977), and Jaime Torres Bodet (1902-1974). Literary critics have labeled this group El Nuevo Ateneo de la Juventud, due to their coming of age under the tutelage of Vasconcelos and Henríquez Ureña, themselves former members of El Ateneo de la Juventud.9 The

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9 See Merlin H. Forster, *Los contemporáneos, 1920-1932. Perfil de un experimento vanguardista mexicano* (México: Ediciones de Andrea, 1964). The group has often been called Contemporáneos due to their collaboration in a magazine of that name between 1928 and 1931. I prefer to call them neo-ateneístas to
relationship of Chávez with these intellectuals went well beyond the usual high-school friendship, for as early as 1916 this group collaborated on the magazine *Gladios*, where Chávez played the role of music critic. After their graduation from the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, the group (with the exception of Chávez) entered the Escuela Nacional de Altos Estudios and the Facultad de Jurisprudencia of the National University, where they were influenced by Alfonso Caso and Enrique González Martínez. González Martínez had been a member of El Ateneo de la Juventud, the most important group of intellectuals at the end of Porfirio Díaz’s dictatorship and during the years of the armed struggle (1910-1920); a group that included among others José Vasconcelos, Pedro Henríquez Ureña, Alfonso Reyes, and Martín Luis Guzmán besides González Martínez and Caso’s older brother Antonio.

Defining the ideology of El Ateneo de la Juventud proves to be a difficult task. Although it had a rather short life as a group, the diverse activities of its members and the long stretch of time their influence was felt in Mexico makes it impossible to identify a single, univocal collective ideology. Nevertheless, one can easily observe two well-defined, contrasting positions throughout the life of the group. Established in 1909, towards the end of Porfirio Díaz’s regime, the early endeavors of the group consisted of poetic recitals, conferences and concerts for a well-educated audience; their basic premise was the diffusion of “high art” among an elitist audience. In 1912, with the early changes brought by the Mexican revolution, the ateneístas established the Universidad Popular Mexicana, a project designed to offer highbrow culture –some of the artistic manifestations offered included poetry by *modernista* writers such as Rubén Darío and

avoid anachronisms since I am dealing with an earlier period, when the group was closely related to former members of El Ateneo de la Juventud. However, I do not try to imply that their ideology was that of the Ateneo, in fact, the Ateneo did not exist as a group anymore. I use the term *neo-ateneístas* only as a unifying label to refer to a rather ideologically heterogeneous group working under the orders of former ateneístas.

chamber music by Beethoven— to the lower classes, especially workers. The classist discourse of the project emphasized a vertical relationship that placed the “cultured” *ateneístas* above and their working-class audiences below; it was a version of the *civilización-barbarie* dichotomy that failed to recognize the value of popular culture. By the mid-1910s, some of the most important members of the group (Henríquez Ureña, Reyes and Vasconcelos) abandoned Mexico in the middle of the revolutionary turmoil and the group was practically dismantled. Upon his return to Mexico, Vasconcelos re-evaluated some of the premises of the Universidad Popular and took them as the point of departure of his own educational project as head of the National University and the Ministry of Education. However, against the discourse that presents Vasconcelos as the instigator of the indigenist movement, his project stressed *mestizo* rather than Indian culture. By the 1920s, the highbrow-lowbrow dialectic of El Ateneo de la Juventud became in Vasconcelos’ rhetoric a *mestizo*-Indian dichotomy.

When Vasconcelos was named Dean of the National University in 1920, he surrounded himself with some of the young intellectuals who were studying with González Martínez: Ortiz de Montellano, González Rojo and Torres Bodet. A year later, Vasconcelos became head of the newly founded Ministry of Education and he named Torres Bodet director of the Department of Libraries. The support of the influential *ateneísta* translated into a powerful social validation for the group of young artists and intellectuals. However, the benefit came with a handicap: although the ideas of the

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12 For a deconstruction of this discourse and a discussion on Vasconcelos’ theosophical beliefs see Leonora Saavedra, “Minister Vasconcelos and Music, 1920-1924: The Practice,” in *Op. cit.*

ateneístas were somewhat progressive, they still formed the agenda of a rather conservative generation; the youngsters had to align themselves with the ateneístas’ ideology and support their cultural enterprises. Disregarding this inconvenience, with Vasconcelos’ and the ateneístas’ rise to power came the emergence of the young generation into public recognition.

If there is something we can learn from the myth of *El fuego nuevo* it is that, although Chávez was already beginning his music career, his association with the so-called *neo-ateneístas* gave him at least a very important moral impulse, an entrance into the inner circle of power. However, evidence shows that it was not Chávez’s alliance with Vasconcelos’ project, but his work as an avant-gardist that truly gave him a notable place in the Mexican as well as the American music scenes. The key work from Chávez was not *El fuego nuevo* but rather *Exágonos* (1923-1924), a cycle of songs based on poems by his close friend, the *neo-ateneísta* Carlos Pellicer.

From October 1922 to April 1923, Chávez traveled throughout Europe, and from December 1923 to March 1924, lived in New York. A letter from the poet José Juan Tablada sheds some light on Chávez’s early avant-garde acquaintances:

“[… ] when you sent me your music from Germany I was a member of the International Composer’s Guild, and took it to my dear friend Edgard Varèse, succeeding in making him interested in your talent.”

Tablada was a Mexican poet who had lived in New York since leaving Mexico during the years of the revolution and was a regular of the avant-garde circles, as Varèse’s use of his poem *La croix du sud* as the text for the second movement of *Offrandes* (1921) confirms. Tablada’s letter to Chávez implies that sometime at the end of 1922 or the beginning of 1923, Chávez had sent Varèse his music. We may securely assume that during Chávez’s later visit to New York, Tablada introduced him to Varèse. From that first encounter a

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small network was established: Varèse committed himself to premiere Chávez’s *Exágonos* in New York, as part of a concert organized by the International Composer’s Guild,\(^\text{15}\) while Chávez was to perform the recently composed *Octandre* (1924) in Mexico City.

After his return to Mexico, Chávez started publishing a music column in *El Universal*. It was through these articles that Varèse came to be known in Mexico. In an article from January 4, 1925 titled “Ser original” (To be Original), Chávez declared himself disinterested in Schoenberg, whom he called “a composer with talent but no genius, who writes music without musicality.”\(^\text{16}\) He sided instead with Varèse, whom he described as “naturally flexible, refined and profound, without traces of German transcendentalism, who makes pure music with musicality.”\(^\text{17}\) Although the relationship had been established, it was only after the success of *Exágonos* in New York, that the French composer started to really take Chávez seriously. In a letter written after the premiere of the work, Octavio G. Barreda, one of Chávez’s friends from El Nuevo Ateneo de la Juventud, said:

“The verses were very well said [sic], and for this the applause went to [Carlos] Pellicer. I assure you, my brother, that not even Varèse expected such success. You will see how he changes with you when you come back.”\(^\text{18}\)

It was true, Varèse was not only impressed by the success of *Exágonos*, but also thankful to Chávez for the article in *El Universal*. Soon after the performance of *Exágonos*, Varèse commissioned from Chávez a chamber piece to be premiered at another concert of the International Composer’s Guild, a piece that would carry the title *Energía* (1925).\(^\text{19}\)

\(^{17}\) *Ibid*.
It was in December of 1925 that Chávez returned the favor by conducting *Octandre* in one of the concerts of his series Conciertos de Música Nueva. In the same series, Chávez premiered a small piano piece of his own titled *H.P.* (1925) –the title of this composition meant “Horse Power,” and was later changed to “36,” which became one of the movements of *Siete piezas para piano* (1923-1930).\(^{20}\) This early piece later gave birth to his ballet *H.P.* (1926-1927).\(^{21}\) By 1925, Chávez was already close to the painter Diego Rivera (1886-1957), and after the premiere of the piano piece they decided to collaborate on a large project that would eventually become the stage version of *H. P.*

It is relevant to notice that also that year, Chávez composed his second ballet of indigenist inspiration: *Los cuatro soles* (1926).\(^{22}\)

Another connection of Chávez with the international avant-garde, although less fruitful than his Tablada-Varèse friendship, was with Marius de Zayas (1880-1961). On May 13, 1925, Varèse wrote a letter to Chávez requesting his permission to publish an English version of the article “Ser original”: “[Carlos] Salzedo wants to publish your article in his magazine. Marius de Zayas would translate it.”\(^{23}\) The fact that the French composer bothers to mention the name of the person who would translate the article indicates that it is someone Chávez was already acquainted with. And this is most probably the case since de Zayas lived in New York and was a close friend and collaborator of Tablada, it seems unlikely that Chávez and de Zayas did not meet during the three months Chávez lived in New York between 1923 and 1924.

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\(^{22}\) The only other two indigenist works composed by Chávez between 1921 and 1924, *El fuego nuevo* and *Tres piezas para guitarra* (1923) were both commissioned upon recommendation of Pedro Henríquez Ureña.

\(^{23}\) Letter from Edgard Varèse to Carlos Chávez, May 13, 1925. In Carmona, ed. *Epistolario*, 56. In this letter the title of the article is given as “Antecedentes y consecuencias.” Carmona fails to recognize the date and place when the article was published, but does offer an edited version of it as a footnote to the letter. After comparing their contents, there is no doubt that “Antecedentes y consecuencias” and “Ser original” are the same article.
Marius de Zayas was a Mexican artist, cartoonist and painter who had lived in New York since 1907 and was a fundamental figure in the avant-garde circles of the city. A friend of Guillaume Apollinaire, Marcel Duchamp, and Pablo Picasso, de Zayas had collaborated with Alfred Stieglitz in putting together the first exhibition of avant-garde art in New York, a historical occasion remembered as the Armory Show, and was well-respected by the Mexican avant-garde artists, the estridentistas.

Estridentismo was a short-lived futurist movement that had a strong impact in Mexico’s cultural and political circles between 1921 and 1926. Officially founded in December of 1921 by Manuel Maple Arce (1898-1981), Estridentismo was a re-elaboration of ideas from the European avant-garde, mainly Marinetti’s Futurism, Tzara’s Dadaism, and the Spanish Ultraísmo of Guillermo de Torre, Lasso de la Vega and Vicente Huidobro. According to their manifesto – known as Actual No. 1 – estridentistas were interested in the beauty of machines, an elimination of the “decadent” cultures of the past, as well as non-referential, abstract art: poetry created in the imagination and not copied from reality.

Estridentismo was strongly tainted with political ramifications beyond the purely artistic preoccupations of its members. Germán List Arzubide (1898-1998), one of the first followers of Maple Arce, was a ferocious critic of the older generation of poets: Luis

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25 According to Francisco Javier Mora, El ruido de las nueces. List Arzubide y el Estridentismo mexicano (Alicante: Universidad de Alicante, 1999), 33, the directory of supporters of the movement included only a few Mexican artists: Fermín Revueltas, Pedro Echeverría, José D. Frías, Mariano [sic] de Zayas, Silvestre Revueltas, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Juan Tablada. Schneider acknowledges this directory but gives the name as Mario [sic] de Zayas instead of Mariano [sic] de Zayas. I believe in both versions the name has been mistaken and should be read as Marius de Zayas.
26 Estridentismo comes from the Spanish word estridente, which translates into English as “strident” or “noisy.”
27 Luis M. Schneider, El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia (México: Ediciones de Bellas Artes, 1970), 36-38.
González Urbina, Amado Nervo, and Salvador Díaz Mirón, writers who had openly supported the pre-revolutionary regime of Porfirio Díaz. List Arzubide stated that Estridentismo was a violent reaction against them:

“[…] those poets from the past […] were discussing the possibility of reclaiming their juicy bureaucratic posts. But we showed the people how those ‘brown-noses of rhetoric’ had also sang for the dictatorship in exchange for crumbs from the banquet.”

The rejection of the past proposed by estridentistas was not just an attempt to separate themselves from the pre-revolutionary social and cultural order, but also from the intellectual generation that immediately preceded them. In 1922, Maples Arce stated that Estridentismo was “not an intellectual mafia like those so typical here [in Mexico], estridentismo is a strategy, a gesture, an irruption.”

His target was quite clear when he said that in Mexico there were only two important intellectual groups: “the falange [faction] of the estridentistas and the falange of the literary brown-noses.” It is obvious that Maples Arce was aiming his critique at Vasconcelos, the former ateneístas, and their protégées, the neo-ateneístas, who founded the magazine La Falange in 1922—a magazine that, according to Forster, emphasized the educational and cultural programs of Vasconcelos. The early reasons for these attacks are grounded not only in a different aesthetic and cultural project, but also in a subcultural attitude of rebellion that promoted discontinuity and attention mongering through scandal. In Schneider’s words, “the estridentistas wrote not only to combat, but also to ridicule. […] They were renovators and that is the reason they attacked traditionalist and conservative writers, they hated

29 Luis M. Schneider, El estridentismo. La vanguardia literaria en México (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1999), XI.
30 Ibid.
those who believed in a definitive aesthetic.”32 The antagonism between *estridentistas* and *neo-ateneístas* is well documented. The main criticism that *neo-ateneístas* formulated against *estridentistas* was their exaggerated avant-gardism, one that, according to them, would lead them into a “false modernism” due to the excessive influence of foreign ideas.33

As I have shown, Chávez’s rise to public fame was achieved through his association with two apparently opposite intellectual groups. In Mexico, it was his relationship with the *neo-ateneístas* and Pedro Henríquez Ureña’s sponsorship that opened the doors of local recognition. Abroad, it was his association with Varèse, Tablada and the avant-garde that brought attention to his music. The questions are how Chávez managed to reconcile these two ideologies and what his relationship was to the *estridentistas*, the true avant-garde movement in his own country. It is here that the notion of multiple identity acquires relevance as an interpretative tool.

Anthony Giddens suggests that the segmentation of everyday life into different social settings is a characteristic of modernity that makes multiple identity a necessary aspect of life; when individuals engage in and with a world of plural choices they should opt for alternative conducts that allow them to navigate these multi-ideological contexts.34 Chávez’s position between the *neo-ateneístas* and the avant-garde is one such case, one that provides evidence of how partial intersections of identity frames of reference, as Edwina Barvosa-Carter describes them, make it possible for people to share specific political projects.35 The construction of identity implies a process where personal and social definitions are intertwined. Chávez’s multiple identity should be understood,

32 Schneider, *El estridentismo. La vanguardia literaria en México*, XXXIX.
on a personal as well as on a social level, as a process that recognizes not only the
different personal choices made by the composer but also the social and cultural
phenomena that interacted with his music, sometimes performing it and sometimes being
performed by it.

According to Stuart Hall, meaning is articulated in practice,\(^{36}\) and if the meaning
of a work of art is to be understood as discourse, then it will be necessary to take into
account not only the moment of “encoding” an artistic message, but also the experience
of “decoding” it during the performance and hearing of the works. Reception plays a key
role in the construction of the meaning of a given work of art. This is all the more true in
the culture of Mexico in the 1920s because it was a time of highly contested ideologies
and identities. Chávez’s works have to be analyzed as polysemic experiences where
meaning arises not only in the expression of a message but also in the listener’s
understanding of it. Identity is then a cooperative effort, both private and public in nature;
it was not enough for Chávez to choose these identities, it was also necessary for the
public to identify him as connected with those identities.

Gloria Carmona points out that after the Conciertos de Música Nueva series in
1924 and 1925, critics labeled Chávez an *estridentista* composer.\(^{37}\) This reputation would
later affect the reception of his series of articles “Música y electricidad” (Music and
Electricity),\(^ {38}\) since, as Carmona suggests, for a public “reticent to accept ‘novelties’
within the [symphonic] genre, the issues dealt with in “Música y electricidad” should
have looked like another extravagance, the result of Chávez’s *estridentismo*.\(^ {39}\)

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\(^{37}\) Carmona, *Epistolario*, 16.

\(^{38}\) *El Universal*, July-August, 1932.

\(^{39}\) Gloria Carmona, “Prólogo” in Carlos Chávez, *Hacia una nueva música* (México: El Colegio Nacional,
As part of the series Conciertos de Música Nueva, Chávez offered performances of music by Varèse, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Bartók, Falla, Milhaud, Satie, Poulenc, Auric and Honegger, besides his own works (Exágonos and H.P. among others). For an audience used to the more conservative programs of Julián Carrillo’s National Symphony Orchestra, the music presented by Chávez could easily be heard as strident and noisy, as Manuel Casares’ review shows:

“I have deliberately left the works of Carlos Chávez and Edgar Varèse for the end. Frankly, I declare that regarding Chávez’s String Quartet I could not understand anything. Only for moments some outbursts of talent were revealed, but the desire to do “new music” erased them with tremendous and inconceivable dissonances. Harmony, rhythm, form, development, and all other characteristics of music have disappeared from this quartet. The composer wanted to do a progressive piece and was worried only with collecting dissonances and absurd combinations in an attempt that deserves a better cause.”

As Leonora Saavedra points out, Mexican audiences perceived in Chávez’s music “inconceivable dissonances or modern machines but evidently nothing particularly Mexican, much less Indian.” I argue that they would also easily make a connection between this type of music and the subversive, anti-traditional poetry of the estridentistas, and that is the reason why he was labeled an estridentista composer, as Carmona stated.

One can also find this subversive attitude toward tradition in the circle of artists that surrounded Chávez. In La vida en México en el periodo presidencial de Manuel Ávila Camacho, the neo-ateneista Salvador Novo recalled the musical evenings they spent at Chavez’s house: “[Chávez] introduced us to Les six, he and Pancho Agea played

40 Manuel Casares, “Crónicas musicales,” Excélsior, December 23, 1925.
[Milhaud’s] delightful *Le Boeuf sur le Toit*. We were renovators and our implicit motto was *merde a Beethoven.* The similarity to an infamous *estridentista* motto is self-evident: *Chopin a la silla eléctrica* (Chopin to the electric chair). It is important to notice the parallel between the ideas of discontinuity proposed by *estridentistas* and the frame of mind of Chávez and his friends from youth, the *neo-ateneístas*.

Evodio Escalante has shown that there were important points of contact between *estridentistas* and *neo-ateneístas* despite the discourses that present them as sworn enemies. The poetry written by Carlos Pellicer and Jaime Torres Bodet between 1922 and 1924 demonstrates that they were very interested in the languages and images of the European avant-garde. Elements usually associated with *Ultraísmo* and Futurism – particular vocabulary and imagery – might be found in several of their poems of the time. Escalante attributes the collapse of the group, and especially the failure of the *Vasconcelista* magazine *La Falange*, to their inevitable experience with the avant-garde, not only through the work of the *estridentistas*, but also through their relationship with other, non-partisan, independent artists – among them Diego Rivera, who collaborated with the *estridentistas*, and had a close relationship with the European avant-garde movements almost since they first appeared.

The aesthetic connections between Chávez’s friends and *Estridentismo* are a reflection of a generational fascination with the avant-garde. Chávez’s activities, his works and the public reception of them locate him also as an avant-garde artist. If Chávez

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43 See Schneider, *El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia*, 142.
engineered his rise to public fame by developing a distinct avant-garde persona, it is therefore curious that he never publicly supported Estridentismo until 1926, when he endorsed one of the last manifestos of the group.  

We should remember that Chávez, like the rest of the neo-ateneístas, was morally indebted to Henríquez Ureña and Vasconcelos (who had sponsored them since 1921), since it was through their backing that the artistic endeavors of the neo-ateneístas first achieved some level of recognition. Supporting the estridentistas would mean backing their systematic attack on the former ateneístas, and would be a betrayal of their early support. The deterioration of the great painter Diego Rivera’s relationship with Vasconcelos was an example of how ideological differences could affect an otherwise convenient arrangement. Rivera’s international recognition allowed him to break with Vasconcelos without damaging his career, but the young neo-ateneístas were not in such a privileged position. They could not afford to break with their powerful mentor without expecting a costly political reprisal, at least not before 1924, the year Vasconcelos left the Ministry of Education. Under these circumstances, Chávez’s relationship to the avant-garde, close as it was, remained peripheral to that movement in his native country, as did the impulses of neo-ateneístas like Salvador Novo, Jaime Torres Bodet and Carlos Pellicer. However, Chávez’s sympathies with Estridentismo, as recognized by him in 1926, cannot have suddenly begun that year, as his network of friendships and relations in the previous years suggest; and let us not forget that his public persona was always linked to Estridentismo, at least in the minds of Mexican audiences and critics.

It is precisely at this partial intersection of ideologies that Chávez’s multiple identity acquires relevance as an instrument to navigate among different discourses and

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45 Schneider, El estridentismo o una literatura de la estrategia, 142.
46 Vasconcelos was the first supporter of muralismo and commissioned Rivera’s well-known Ministry of Education frescoes, but by 1923, they had little in common politically, ideologically, and aesthetically. Also deleterious was Rivera’s vocal support of Estridentismo.
as an intermediary between practices of struggle for hegemony. Multiple identity becomes an instrument to achieve what Chela Sandoval calls a differential form of cognitive mapping, a method that enables subjects to recognize themselves at the center of multiple possibilities of hegemonic interpellation from a citizen-subject position. From such a position, Chávez was capable of pursuing a common goal of social change: the recognition, rejection and transformation of the social and cultural structures of the pre-revolutionary regime; his was an avant-gardist interpellation of hegemony that, thanks to his multiple identity, could also be channeled through the network established with the neo-ateneístas.

II

Marshall Berman considers modernism an outgrowth of the romantic emphasis on individual expression and originality, as well as of the ideas of progress promoted by Idealist philosophy and the Industrial Revolution. From his point of view, we may observe two different phases of modernism. The first one has its roots in the 19th century and tried to transform the social and cultural order in an attempt to establish new models of aesthetic organization and artistic communication. In art, these ideas spawned movements that intended to liberate the artist from the “prison” of what they considered exhausted expressive tools by offering them the possibility of new languages – Symbolism, Impressionism, and Expressionism are movements that attempted to establish new artistic paradigms and languages. The second phase of modernism stemmed from the same desire to change traditional languages that had moved the earlier modernists; nonetheless, their efforts did not end up in the creation of new languages but

rather in a nihilistic radicalization against tradition. This is a tradition of discontinuity, a
tradition against tradition that “implies the negation not only of tradition but of
discontinuity as well.”49 This extreme, uncompromising phase of modernism, represented
by movements like Futurism, Dadaism or Surrealism, is what Calinescu has defined as
the avant-garde. In the words of Calinescu, the avant-garde shares with modernism a
“sharp sense of militancy, praise of non-conformism, courageous precursory exploration,
confidence in the final victory of time and immanence over traditions that try to appear as
eternal, immutable, and transcendentally determined.”50 However, the avant-garde
implies a future utopia where it will achieve this success over the decadent tradition it
tries to overthrow; Calinescu says that this futurism “is frequently little more than a
justification for the most radical varieties of polemicism and for the widespread use of
subversive or openly disruptive artistic techniques.”51 While modernism implies the
extension of a tradition with the use of “advanced” techniques, the avant-garde entails a
counterculture and a rejection of existing institutions; as Richard Taruskin proposes, the
avant-garde expresses hostility against tradition.52

Peter Bürger considers that the difference between modernist art and the avant-
garde is that modernism could be seen as an expansion of traditional languages that may
or may not go beyond the pure aesthetic experience, while the avant-garde has to be
understood as an attack meant to alter the institutions that produce and reproduce that art.

49 Octavio Paz, Children of the Mire: Modernist Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde. Trans. by
50 Matei Calinescu, Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence (Durham: Duke
University Press, 1987), 95.
51 Ibid, 96.
52 Richard Taruskin, Defining Russia Musically. Historical and Hermeneutical Essays (Princeton and
Thus, the avant-garde is articulated when it understands its own social role; Bürger suggests that shocking and de-familiarizing the public became the most important goal in the avant-garde in order to provide a social critique through the arts.53

I have argued that Carlos Chávez entered the musical mainstream of Mexico City as an avant-garde artist. I have suggested that his development of an extreme music style, his anti-tradition rhetoric – expressed in his criticism of pre-revolutionary art as well as in his rejection of the European tradition – and the public reception of him and his music placed the composer as a member of a radical, contestant artistic subculture: the avant-garde. Following this, I propose that Chávez’s compositional practices and construction methods as manifest in “36” and _Energía_ constitute the expression of a “forbidden content in a forbidden form,”54 to borrow Dick Hebdige’s description of subculture.

Hebdige says that style emphasizes the particular over the general, the subordinate over the dominant; for him, style is the arena where opposing ideologies quarrel and thus the site where a subcultural struggle for hegemony can be safely articulated. Style challenges hegemony indirectly, “the objections are lodged, the contradictions displayed […] at the profound level of signs.” From Hebdige’s perspective, we can approach the different avant-garde movements as subcultures that produce subcodes, which defy traditional languages in an attempt to create identity markers beyond the boundaries imposed by hegemony. The avant-garde movements are thus intellectual minorities, subcultures whose subcodes express a form of resistance to the power that writes them as marginal.

“36” and _Energía_ are some of the earliest examples of Chávez developing a style that represents discontinuity with tradition. He achieved this through a process Umberto Eco calls undercoding, an operation where the communicator or artist rejects the

possibility of expression through an established code or musical language, and then proceeds to propose subcodes that are potential codes. In the case of Chávez, these subcodes violate the established codes of communication shared between audience and composer in the common practice period, and take as point of departure elements that in the previous code were considered forbidden or, at best, mere elements of foreground activity, but never structural or fundamental aspects of the musical text. These subcodes are the style that individualized Chávez’s musical language and provided the ideal background for the recognition of an avant-garde identity.

When comparing the interpretative procedures shared by Freud and Marx, Slavoj Žižek recognizes that they both shared a common belief, that the hidden meaning of dreams and commodity forms lies in the form itself. According to Žižek, an analyst interested in the ideological relations in commodity forms should question “the process by means of which the hidden meaning is disguised itself in such form.” Žižek echoes Hebdige’s argument that ideological contradictions are displayed at the level of signs. Analyses of “36” and Energía illustrate how these pieces articulate Chávez’s ideological interpellation in an avant-garde style that transgresses the codes preferred by Mexican hegemonic composers and their audiences in the decade following the revolutionary armed struggle.

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A principle that I shall call “modular construction” is the structural idea behind “36.” Each module presents ordered material that comes to be constantly recombined and rearranged throughout the composition, although the brevity of the fragments and the

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speed of the music make them practically impossible to recognize, with the exception of the 3-measure long initial gesture that itself breaks down into modules I and II. The piece resists analysis according to any traditional schematic form, but we could approach a better understanding of its formal structure by segmenting it in three parts according to the presentation of that initial gesture. It should be clear that this is an arbitrary segmentation based on the presence of a repeated gesture and with the purpose of better grasping its formal semiotic meaning, however the music does not present cadences at these points, nor does it stop the continuity of the rhythmic and melodic flux. Each of these three segments contains different combinations of the basic modules (Table 2.1).

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Table 2.1. Carlos Chávez, “36.” Formal segmentation.

There are six basic modules and one main gesture upon which the formal structure of the piece rests. Module I appears for the first time in measure 1, it is composed of two fragments that could be used independently, right hand material (labeled Ia) and left hand
material (labeled Ib). This module reappears in different versions in measures 4 (one octave lower), 15 (also one octave lower), 28 (the first part of the module transposed a fourth below, the second part a third below), 41 (only Ia), and 43 (as in measure 1). Example 2.1 shows the different presentations of module I.


The second module first appears in the right hand part of measure 3, reappearing in measure 17 (on single notes on the left hand) and measure 18 (rhythmically altered). Module II is only a secondary module that appears only as part of the repetition of the initial gesture that I have used to segment the composition (Ex. 2.2).
Ex. 2.2. Chávez, “36.” Presentations of module II.

Ex. 2.3. Chávez, “36.” Main gesture.
Modules I and II, together with the material of measure 2, make up the basic gesture that I have taken as reference for my segmentation of the piece. A transformed version of this gesture reappears in measures 15 to 18, where a module III replaces the free material of measure 2, and a double presentation of module II alters the ending of the gesture. A more literal presentation of the gesture takes place toward the end of the piece in measures 32 to 34 (Ex. 2.3).

Module III appears for the first time in measure 5 and reappears in measure 16 (as in measure 5) and in measure 27 (with an altered left hand part). It is used only two times throughout the composition but it plays a very important role, since it works to fragment the second presentation of the main gesture, and with its juxtaposition against module I, to emphasize the puzzle-like quality of the work (Ex. 2.4).

Ex. 2.4. Chávez, “36.” Presentations of module III.
Module IV, with the same opening motive as module I, appears in measures 7 and 42 only. It has the same role as module III, to emphasize the fragmentary character of the work by separating two presentations of module I at the very end of the piece (Ex. 2.5).

Ex. 2.5. Chávez, “36.” Presentations of module IV.

Ex. 2.6. Chávez, “36.” Presentations of module V.
Module V is an ostinato that brings contrast while keeping and emphasizing the dynamic character and the rhythmic intensity of the piece. It first appears in measure 6 and returns in measures 9 to 10 and measures 36 to 37 (Ex. 2.6).

Finally, module VI is an expansion of the basic trichord of fragment Ib. The trichord is transformed through a pedal-like ostinato that is also reminiscent of module V. In every presentation, module VI takes a secondary role to the melodic passages played in the right hand (Ex. 2.7).

Ex. 2.7. Chávez, “36.” Presentations of module VI.

Through the principle of modular construction, Chávez was able to recreate in music the non-linear poetic narrative and non-referential visual techniques of the avant-garde artists he had met in New York. Although he fragmented the initial musical gesture of “36,” his intention was never to create an organic form but rather the opposite, and he achieved it by means of juxtaposing the modules within a continuously unfolding musical flow. The fragmentary character of the piece creates an almost cubist atmosphere where the formal surface is a bizarre re-elaboration that only obliquely resembles any traditional or real (in the case of cubist painting) form. The result of Chávez’s modular construction
is a “forbidden form,” in terms of traditional musical structure, that combined with the continuous melodic flow and the rhythmic drive produced a musical artifact decidedly outside the musical framework of Mexican audiences of 1925.

One could compare the principle of modular construction used by Chávez to the surrealist techniques of free association of words and automatic writing. In both cases, the organic logic of traditional language is destroyed and replaced with a subcode that emphasizes and enacts its difference—it performs the artist’s marginality and writes him/her as a member of a subculture. For the surrealists, the goal is to destroy the ego through irrationality. In the case of Chávez, the production of an angular, fragmentary, continuous musical discourse lacking the consistency of phrase structure and formal anticipation of traditional music codes also exposes the falseness of that tradition’s rationality. “36” is created upon subcodes that challenge the codes of tradition in as much as they are what those codes forbid; thus, Chávez rejection of traditional codes of expression, namely phrase construction, harmonic support, and voice leading—as practiced by Mexican composers at the time—becomes an instance of undercoding when the composer chooses to use instead a musical grammar that was forbidden in the musical language of his immediate predecessors. To answer Žižek’s and Hebdige’s question, this ideological contestation of traditional rationality is the meaning hidden in the style of the form itself, a style that reached even more extreme heights in Chavez’s Energía.

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Carlos Chávez composed Energía for an International Composer’s Guild concert organized by Edgard Varèse at the end of 1925, however the piece was not ready in time
for the performance, and so the premiere was postponed until 1931, when Nicolas Slonimsky conducted it in Paris.57 The following year, it was finally premiered in New York to very good reviews, one of them written by Marc Blitzstein:

“[… ] The third interesting piece was the Energía of Carlos Chávez, whose bright and earthy music appears to undergo no development, almost no change. It would be hard to imagine music fresher, more candid and engaging than that of Chávez; but either he has not yet found a form which enable to grow, or it is not the sort of music which meant to grow. Hard, athletic, it has the galvanic charm that goes with health and with complete unconcern with nuance or suavity. It is delightful, but small-scoped; but delightful.”58

Even though the review was written almost seven years after the composition of the work, it still informs us of the main features a listener would grasp upon a first hearing. I am particularly interested in exploring Blitzstein’s unfulfilled expectations of development, change, form, and growth in Energía.

Energía presents a series of concepts and devices that, if not new in Chávez’s music, are used in a rather new fashion. The chordal use of intervals of the fourth and second, as well as their inversions, is already in evidence as early as 1923, in Tres piezas para guitarra. The concern with linear construction in continuous flux could also be found in works such as the three Sonatinas (1924) and “36,” as I have shown in my analysis. Nevertheless, all these elements are brought together in order to produce a work of abstract character that is unprecedented in Chávez’s output. Although there are some instances of repetition, doubling and contrapuntal imitation in Energía, the density of the orchestration and the absence of referential material (especially in the last two sections) obscure the technical procedures and the formal structure of the piece.

Formally, *Energía* is divided in three large sections clearly identifiable by their tempi and the contrasting differences in texture: *Mosso* (up to measure 59), *Moderato* (mm. 60-86) and *Senza rigore-Vivo* (mm. 87-116).

![Ex. 2.8. Carlos Chávez, *Energía*, mm. 1-4.](image)

The first section is built around the highly dissonant, noisy—it actually calls for the musicians to scrape the strings and play aleatoric glissandi—and melodically angular material presented in measures 1-5, which I shall call “factory music” (Ex. 2.8). This
material frames the section since it returns with small variants in measures 50-54. But it is the music played by the strings in measures 1 and 2 which takes a more dominant role since it not only returns at the end of the section and builds up its climax, but a version of it appears in measures 33-36. The texture created by this material brings cohesion and unity to the piece by returning at the closing of the piece in the third section. However, it is not thematic material in the sense of repeating sections of traditional forms (such as recapitulations in sonata allegro forms or refrains in rondo forms), it is rather a very dissonant, highly percussive musical texture of great rhythmic drive that returns more like a mass of sounds than a textual repetition.

The first section is itself divided in three parts; the first one goes from measure 1 to measure 25, where we find the only clear cadence of the work (Ex. 2.9). The second one goes from measure 26 to 49, where the return of the material from the beginning prepares the end of the section. With the exception of the cadence I have mentioned, this section follows a principle of continuous motion similar to “36,” with brief instances of modular reference also comparable to that piece. This could be observed in the return, rhythmically displaced, of the melodic material played by the flute, horn, trumpet and trombone in measures 19 and 20 back in measures 37 and 38. Nevertheless, this and the modular use of the material played by the flute in the first measure could not be taken as evidence of modular construction: in this case a much freer, non-repetitive approach is used.
The second section of the work is even more abstract since the idea of instrumental lines is abandoned in favor of a more pointillist, almost Webernian texture (Ex. 2.9).
However, a thinner version of the “factory music” returns from measures 72 to 75, breaking the austere atmosphere of the section, as well as two other brief instances of modular reference. The first one appears when the material from measures 79-80 reappears almost unchanged in measures 85-86 (Ex. 2.10), the second one when the melodic material of the cello in measure 68 is reused in measure 74 in the bassoon part (Ex. 2.11).

Ex. 2.10. Chávez, Energía. Comparison of mm. 79-80 and mm. 85-86.
Ex. 2.11. Chávez, *Energía*. Comparison of measures 68 and 74.

The last section is divided into two parts. First a slow, contrapuntal introduction (*Tempo senza rigore*, mm. 87-95); and second a rhythmically frenetic, continuously flowing version of the “factory music” (*Vivo*, mm. 95-116) that brings the piece to an abrupt close. No instances of modular reference appear in this section, which is based on the continuous unfolding of material, although always recreating the atmosphere of the “factory music.”
Features such as noises, modular references and the “futurist” references to machines of the “factory music” are just two examples of how Chávez’s style in Energía contests traditional music codes. What seems to be the more avant-garde trait in this work is an early use of Chávez’s non-repetitive techniques.

Eduardo Mata suggested that the principle of non-repetition that Chávez would later use in works such as Invención (1958) has its seed in Energía. Chávez himself described this principle as follows:

“Let us not exclusively favor or oppose any possibility for artistic creation. Therefore, let us explore new directions. The idea of repetition and variation could be substituted for the notion of a constant rebirth, a true derivation: a stream that never returns to its source, an eternally flowing stream, like a spiral, always connected and continuing its original source, but always in search of new and unlimited spaces. The spiral may be the best answer […] Unity and cohesion could only be achieved through the substantiation and perfection of a personal style.”

Whether Chávez was aware of it or not, this quotation shows that a new concept of identity, one where subjects go through change without development, is already present in the style of his early avant-garde works. In Energía, the notion of “constant rebirth” appears in an early stage and in combination with a few examples of modular reference – which I would not call “modular construction” since it does not form a comprehensive organizational procedure as in “36,” but is still there. To these specific characteristics we should add the more general principles that Energía shares with “36”: quartal harmony, absence of voice leading, absence of harmonic prolongation at deeper structural levels, linear construction based on scalar passages, unresolved dissonances, angular and dissonant melodic writing. All these qualities come together in a work whose main

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59 Eduardo Mata, Booklet notes for the CD “Carlos Chávez: Chamber Works” Dorian Records (DOR-90215).
cohesive principles are the notion of rhythmic drive, which not only fuels the continuous flow of material but also holds together the overall musical structure, and the notion of textural repetition offered by the pervasive use of the “factory music” material.

However, neither the use of the “factory music” material, nor the uses of modular references suppose an organicist idea behind this music. In fact, the formal idea of Energía is the opposite of the dialectic rationality behind traditional forms such as the sonata-allegro. The use of the “factory music” does not obey a traditional understanding of repetition as the resolution of a dialectical dilemma, but rather as mere referential posts for the listener. Blitzstein is correct when he comments that there is neither development nor growth in Chávez’s piece, however he is wrong when states that the music does not change. Constant change is the basic premise of the work, but in Energía change is not the dialectical type expected from music of the Germanic tradition, it is rather a type of change that seeks to contest that dialectic rationality; it is change that does not indicate development or organic growth.

III

As I have shown in my analysis of “36” and Energía, the avant-garde style of Chávez was an operation of undercodification that negated and transgressed traditional music codes. The process of composition, the creation of such a style, was then a performative act that, at an individual and aesthetic level, negotiated an ideological conflict and performed an aesthetic and ultimately political stance for the composer. Therefore, these performative acts are also acts of agency in that they helped Chávez identify himself as a member of a specific subculture.
Paul Smith defines agency as the formation of identity through a process of interpellation-identification. In a multi-ideological context, such as the one experienced by Chávez in the 1920s, subjects have the opportunity to interpellate hegemonic discourses through the construction of multiple identities that enable them to negotiate several subject positions. Each of these positions works as a subculture, an alliance or network that facilitates the construction of discourses of transgression; these discourses are marginal ideologies that have the opportunity to become hegemonic constructions depending on how the subjects that articulate them negotiate their position within larger power systems. Chávez’s interpellation of ideology through an avant-garde position, documented by his artistic activities, his musical style, and the reception of his music, is a case of subcultural transgression, as the style shown in “36” and Energía becomes an act of identification that shows his contestation of traditional music languages and at the same time writes him as an estridentista in the eyes of the Mexican audiences. In Lacan’s terms, Chávez’s self-identification with the avant-garde would have to be considered an imaginary one, since it is the subject who writes himself as part of a subcultural endeavor. But just as important as Chávez’s imaginary identification is the symbolic identification performed by audiences and critics who identify the composer with a given subculture, thus writing him as an avant-gardist.

The imaginary and the symbolic are fundamental aspects in the process of identity construction, and it is through the articulation of these two forms of identification that the subject finds a position in the social world. This is the realm of ideology, the site where the construction of relationships between representation (the imaginary and the symbolic) and reality takes place. As such, each subcultural group represents a sort of point de caption that codifies and makes sense of reality in a different way, and as the groups are immersed in the power relations of the social world, it becomes a political position.

61 Paul Smith, Discerning the Subject (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), xxxv.
Ricardo Roque-Baldovinos points out that one of the main differences between the European and the Latin American avant-garde is that the artists of the South actually had the opportunity to actively participate in the social institutions of their countries.⁶² In the case of Chávez, his identification with different subcultural groups enabled him to realize the possibility of sharing the goal of constructing hegemony outside the boundaries of each of these subcultures. Chávez’s multiple identity became a political tool and his avant-gardism a site for hegemonic contestation, an aesthetic critique of tradition that found its way into political action through his rise to power in the last years of the 1920s. As director of the Orquesta Sinfónica de México (1928-1949) and Dean of the National Conservatory of Music (1928-1933), posts that would eventually lead to his term as director of the Fine Arts Department at the Ministry of Education (1933-1934), and later to the foundation of the National Fine Arts Institute (1947) –of which he became the first Director–, Chávez became one of the most influential voices in shaping the post-revolutionary government’s intellectual agenda. It would be almost impossible to conceive Chávez’s political career without the multiple identity network he created during the early 1920s, since it was his position as a multiple subject and his ability to negotiate differences and emphasize common objectives that gave him access to the higher circles of power in his country. However, understanding Chávez as an agitator, as José Gorostiza described him in his 1930 article, means not only to recognize his important role as a public figure but also to acknowledge his ability to “attach the ‘right’ symbol to the ‘right’ knowing in the ‘right’ context.”⁶³ In other words, understanding him as an agitator means identifying him as a political subject in the Foucauldian sense, as defined by ideological power relations, but one who is also able to recognize these relations, and, as Chela Sandoval proposes, manipulate, juggle, transgress, differ from,

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buy, and sell them in ensuring survival.\textsuperscript{64} In Chávez’s multiple identity we can recognize the importance of individual agency and subcultural networks in challenging power, constructing identity, and struggling for hegemony.

I have chosen Chávez as a prime example of ideological upheaval at a decisive point in Mexican cultural history. His example helps us question the teleological assumption that post-revolutionary art was a “natural” consequence of the Mexican revolution. By recognizing the complex social and cultural manifestations that coexisted in Mexico (and in his own identity) during the 1920s, we can defeat the blinkered, essentialist ideology that dominated the studies of Mexican culture in the second half of the 20\textsuperscript{th}-century, and appreciate the role of individual subjects and group identity in the interpellation of hegemonic discourses.

\textsuperscript{64} Sandoval, \textit{Op. cit.}, 30.
Manuel M. Ponce (1882-1948) is well known to scholars of Mexican music and culture. He has often been called the “paladin of musical nationalism” in Mexico, and has under this label found a place within the canon of Mexican art music, and the post-revolutionary cultural discourse. It was as one of the earlier advocates of musical nationalism that Ponce found his way into the pantheon of cultural heroes of the nascent revolutionary state. This discourse emphasizes his musical activities as those of a nationalist composer and overlooks larger cultural and representational issues that affected Ponce’s compositional oeuvre. Traditional studies stress Ponce’s development of musical styles according to an evolutionary and schematic periodization of his creative output. Following these interpretations, Pablo Castellanos divided the compositional career of Ponce into four phases: 1891 to 1904 (before his first trip to Europe), 1905 to 1924 (after his first trip to Europe), 1925 to 1932 (during his second trip to Europe), and

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According to Castellanos’ division, Ponce’s musical styles are to be broken down into periods of romanticism (before 1904), nationalism (1905-1924), and modernism (after 1924). Needless to say, such periodization presents several epistemological, aesthetic, and historical problems; on the one hand, by taking Ponce’s trips to Europe as points of reference for his segmentation, Castellanos fails to recognize that the different aesthetic preoccupations of the composer have their roots in larger modernist concerns that flourished in Mexico by the early 1900s. Second, this diachronic, teleological segmentation implies that the modernist interests of Ponce occupy a more “developed” stage in a well-defined, goal-oriented evolutionary process. Such periodization ignores the composer’s place as an individual shaping and reacting to the historical, social and cultural circumstances of his time.

Marshall Berman proposes that all modernist art is born out of the necessity to reach a new understanding of the world in moments of social and cultural disorientation. Understanding the historically different developments of European and Latin American societies proves fundamental in appreciating the different social crises experienced by them in the early 20th century, and therefore, the different motivations behind European and Latin American modernist movements. While the European modernist anxiety intends to come to terms with fundamental economic and technological transformations closely associated with the rapid grow of capitalism after the Industrial Revolution, Latin American Modernismo reflects on the crisis of the cultural and social institutions that resulted from its postcolonial condition. Thus, the modernistas’ anxiety deals with a new type of relationship between tradition, modernity, nation, and identity in peripheric

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2 Pablo Castellanos, Manuel M. Ponce (México: UNAM, 1982), 18.
societies. In Ponce’s Mexico this crisis was crowned by a social and military struggle – the Mexican Revolution – that forced intellectuals, artists, and politicians to further reconsider these issues. Therefore, we should study Ponce’s *modernismo* considering the particular cultural and historical circumstances that created his modernist anxiety.

Gesa Mackenthun suggests that the success of a national, hegemonic discourse resides in finding and making credible an “origin” that would legitimize a present and future status. The Mexican post-revolutionary hegemonic discourse constructed its “origin” after an ideal – and ideological – “pre-Columbian paradise,” free from European influences, that was to be remembered and cherished – and indeed also covertly created and shaped – through the arts sponsored by the state. Such claims excluded from the discourse any manifestations that did not search for a national identity outside of Europe. Regarding Ponce, the question to ask is how a composer who so fervently embraced European forms and genres could find a place in the decidedly anti-European revolutionary canon. The answer is that Ponce’s nationalist-folklorist activities during the revolution – which I have already claimed were the result of a *modernista* artist – could be easily made into a meaningful precedent that would certify the official narrative. This is the reason Ponce’s affairs with modernist aesthetics have been largely ignored – as in the case of his music written after 1925 – or misrepresented – as in the case of his *modernista* music written before and during the Revolution –, in order to inscribe his production with the demands of the dominant nationalist ideology. However, central to Ponce’s aesthetic is the fact that notions of nationalism and modernism continuously intertwine in his music, being synthesized in a style that combines traditional rhetorical elements often

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disregarded by European modernist composers with some of their preferred grammatical elements. To focus on Ponce’s interest in folklore to the extent of overriding his larger modernist project, as the post-revolutionary apology has done, is to perform an exercise of dispossession on his intellectual heritage; such an exercise ignores the complex cultural and social web surrounding Ponce’s creative process and his experience of modernity and nationality from a specific peripheric situation.

Another shortcoming of the diachronic serialization proposed by Castellanos is that it does not account for Ponce’s synchronicity of eclectic styles. How to explain works such as the Sonata romántica for guitar (1928), Suite en estilo antiguo for orchestra (1933), or Danza de la pascola for piano (1937) as written in his so-called modernist period? Indeed, Ponce’s, like Chávez’s, is a case of multiple identity developed as a strategic tool to negotiate his complex and contradictory ideological surroundings. Notwithstanding the success, or lack of success, of Ponce’s strategic multiple identity, this process of self-identification has to be examined within a larger aesthetic concern, the balance between national and international notions of modernismo and modernism. I suggest that the unifying principle behind Ponce’s eclectic output is a modernist concern that goes beyond the Modernist style attributed to him during the last twenty years of his life.

Being aware that there are at least two contrastingly different practices of representation –individual acts of agency and identification, and hegemonic discourses–, I concentrate on Ponce’s self-representation through the consumption of European culture –as well as Mexican and Cuban– and his production of transculturated musical artifacts. I show that Ponce’s neglected modernist concerns are crucial in understanding him and his
music, and in achieving a substantial knowledge of the social and cultural scene in 1920s Mexico. The cultural dispossession of an extensive part of his musical heritage was the high price Ponce had to pay –when his own practice of self-representation failed– in order to enter the hegemonic cultural discourse of post-revolution Mexico, a deformation of his musical heritage that persists in academia.

Recent scholarship has acknowledged Ponce’s modernist tendencies. In *Manuel M. Ponce. Ensayo sobre su vida y obra* (1998) and *Ecos, alientos y sonidos: Ensayos sobre música mexicana* (2001), Ricardo Miranda shows an awareness of that overlooked facet of Ponce. In his work, Miranda focuses on modernism as an aesthetic trend, disregarding larger sociological implications. Departing from Miranda’s project, I propose that Ponce’s late modernist aesthetic should not be understood as the result of the composer’s artistic progression –as a teleological discourse would make us believe–, but rather, as a reflection of the social instability and uncertainty that permeated Mexican life during and after the revolutionary armed struggle. Ponce’s late modernism was an effort to reposition himself within a changing world, but also a continuation of the ideals of *Modernismo*, a pre-revolution literary movement very close to his artistic and aesthetic aspirations. Following this idea, my interpretation understands Ponce’s nationalist-folklorist ideas from the 1910’s –those taken as an example of the composer as a harbinger of the nationalist discourse later emphasized by the Mexican government– as an extension of his *modernista* ideals. By using folklore Ponce breathed new life into the

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5 I myself have already praised the estimable effort to reevaluate that “important bulk of Ponce’s output that remains neglected by musicians and, therefore ignored by audiences.” See Alejandro L. Madrid, “Manuel M. Ponce. Ensayo sobre su vida y obra de Ricardo Miranda,” *Viceversa* (No. 72, 1999), 14.

inherited European music language, and triggered a process of transculturation in much the same way as that proposed by the Uruguayan modernista José Enrique Rodó (1853-1895) with his Americanismo: a specifically American way to search for a place in the modern world. In the modernistas’ view modernity, modernism, the nation, and the local became inseparable notions.

A central aspect of my argument is based on the idea that languages are systems of representation. In doing that I borrow from semiotics the notion that music “works like a language” in that it allows members of the same culture to share sonic concepts and ideas, and helps them make sense of sonic experiences in similar ways, thus producing cultural meaning. Under these conditions, meaning is a source of personal identity and a cultural practice that is constantly produced, reproduced and exchanged in personal and social interactions. As part of this study, I examine Ponce’s processes of self-representation at different moments of his life, and explore the intersections of agency and discourse as they inform the adoption and appropriation of a variety of musical styles. In the end, style is my ultimate witness since I use Ponce’s music as a map that encodes ideological struggles as well as imaginary and symbolic alliances through musical style.

I start my analysis by challenging one of the least convincing moments in the hegemonic construction of Ponce and his activities during the 1920s. In 1925, Ponce made one of the most important and striking decisions of his career: he decided to leave

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7 See Ivan A. Schulman, “Modernismo/modernidad: Metamorfosis de un concepto,” in Nuevo asedios al modernismo, ed. by Ivan Schulman (Madrid: Taurus, 1987), 36. For Rodó as well as for many other Latin American intellectuals and artists, the notions of “America” and “American” have a more embracing, continental connotation, they refer to the Americas rather than to the United States of America.

Mexico City and move to Paris for further study composition with Paul Dukas. What is astonishing is not the decision itself, but the fact that in 1925 Ponce was a 45-year old composer with a well-established reputation as one of the most important musicians of his country. According to the traditional narrative that has systematically neglected his modernist production, Ponce felt the urge to modernize his musical language, and as a result of this aesthetic concern, he “dedicated himself to compose in an altogether European style, cultivating the musical language of Mexican inspiration, for which he is universally hailed, only occasionally.”9 Such an account, which endorses a teleological understanding of history and a belief that Ponce’s interest in modernist aesthetics is the result of his European trip, is still the favorite academic explanation regarding Ponce’s decision to abandon his country at a highly critical time. This interpretation informs the reception of Ponce’s activities in the late 1920s and throughout the rest of his life after his return to Mexico in 1932; even contemporary scholars like Miranda, who request a reevaluation of Ponce and his music, tend to favor this account.10

I postulate that Ponce’s French adventure has to be understood as a way of distancing himself from the social and cultural changes taking place in his country –in an attempt to make sense of them, as an effort to reposition himself in relation to these circumstances, as well as an expression of continuity with the modernista ideals he had embraced since his youth. To support my argument I explore Ponce’s personal and aesthetic relations with modernista artists in the 1910s, and compare the style of three of his works: Sonata for cello and piano (1922), Sonata III for guitar (1927), and Four

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Miniatures for string quartet (1929). With this exercise, I identify the elements that conform to what Miranda calls a “musical language of advanced harmonies, sometimes close to atonality.”¹¹ This comparison shows the stylistic similarities that connect Ponce with other modernist composers, but also traces aesthetic parallels between his pre-revolutionary and his post-revolutionary output that disturb the hegemonic writing of Ponce as precursor of revolutionary nationalism.

I

The question of language renewal—a pursuit of harmonic and melodic richness and variety expressed in the use of non-tonal modes and artificial scales— that clearly characterizes the musical production of Manuel M. Ponce after 1925, and that marks his works for the last 23 years of his life, is a concern that he shared with the modernistas, the important group of Latin American poets active at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Traditional scholarship on Modernismo has considered the movement a manifestation severed from the more international idea of modernism; however, recent studies have reconsidered such a position. Contemporary critics have recognized that these two manifestations have more in common than had been acknowledged.¹²

Richard Sheppard proposes that the crisis of language that permeated literature since the mid-nineteenth century, which fueled the European modernist search for new

¹¹ Miranda, Manuel M. Ponce, 112.
systems of expression, had a strong relationship with the larger decomposition of the social and cultural fabric. Sheppard argues that, as the social order collapsed, artists felt that “language ceased to exercise control over a fluid and elusive reality and became like a crust over [their] imagination; ceased to be a luminous vehicle for self-expression and turned into something like an oppressive super-ego; ceased to be a means of communication and became an opaque and impenetrable wall.”

The crisis of language in European art was also experienced in Latin America, although in Latin America it was a result of its particular cultural and postcolonial condition. A group of writers and poets known as modernistas was one of the first Latin American artistic movements to tackle this problem. This group included, among others, the Mexicans Salvador Díaz Mirón (1853-1928) and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera (1859-1895), the Cuban José Martí (1853-1895), the Colombian José Asunción Silva (1865-1896), and the Nicaraguan Rubén Darío (1867-1916). Jean Franco indicates that the modernistas were disappointed with positivism and the idea of intellectual progress that dominated Latin American thought during the second half of the nineteenth century. They felt that these ideas had only “undermined the edifice of traditional belief [while failing] to give any sense of purpose to the individual and to society.”

Like the European modernists, modernistas believed that traditional language could no longer be an efficient instrument of communication. The modernistas proposed a renovation of language and poetic forms through the appropriation of European models, especially those developed by the French symbolists. Alberto Julián Pérez points out that such an

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adoption, observed in light of the Latin American experience, gave rise to aesthetic questions foreign to European literature. Many of these questions dealt with issues of identity and the peripheral condition of Latin American artists and intellectuals regarding Western culture. Gutiérrez Nájera’s advice to the Spanish poets, published in 1894, clearly exemplifies the modernista credo:

“To the Spanish poets I do not advise imitation; however, I do want them to be aware of foreign models; to adapt foreign styles into the Spanish language; to revive those old beauties that will always remain young; in other words, to invigorate their poetry with cross-fertilization.”

Gutiérrez Nájera suggests that Spanish poets, like the modernistas, could achieve a level of artistic empowerment through a process of cross-fertilization [cruzamiento]. Such an idea rejects the notion that Latin American and Spanish poets should just mimetically adopt imported models. Gutiérrez Nájera’s cross-fertilization implies transculturation in the same terms proposed by Fernando Ortiz, as a process of permanent transitivity where cultural conflicts are resolved in the creation of new cultural phenomena.

Literary critics used to date the end of modernismo as early as 1910, with the beginning of the Mexican Revolution. Enrique González Martínez’s poem Tuércele el cuello al cisne (Twist the swan’s neck) from 1911, and his collection of poems La muerte del cisne (1915) have always been read as metaphorical rejections of the modernista motto of “art for art’s sake”; González Martínez’s poetry is usually interpreted as a plea

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17 Fernando Ortiz, Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar (Madrid: EditoCubaEspaña, 1999, first published in 1940), 83.
for a more naturalistic approach to language.\textsuperscript{18} Bart L. Lewis has noted, however, that the poetry of González Martínez still emphasizes perfection of form and precision of expression, typical characteristics of \textit{modernista} poetry.\textsuperscript{19} According to Lewis’s statement, it seems artificial to divide poets like Salvador Díaz Mirón and Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera from younger writers like González Martínez. González Martínez’s pseudo-repudiation of \textit{modernismo} could be interpreted as the discovery of a new route within the same trend; as Lewis puts it, “the swan’s twisted neck after all still produces a swan’s song.”\textsuperscript{20} Earlier \textit{modernistas} like Gutiérrez Nájera and Darío had solved their personal crisis of language by cultivating an ornamented style close to French symbolism. In Mexico, the same idea of language renewal drives the poetry of González Martínez, and, I may argue, other artists of his generation, such as the \textit{modernista} poet Ramón López Velarde, the painter Saturnino Herrán, and the composer Manuel M. Ponce. As I have mentioned before, here issues of aesthetics and identity are intertwined with larger notions of modernity, nation-building, center and periphery, and universality and locality.

The aesthetic preoccupation with language experienced by \textit{modernistas} was not unique to literary circles; it has a counterpart in all artistic manifestations of the time. Mexican composers felt their musical language urgently needed to go through an overall process of renovation, that it needed to shift away from the Italian operatic style and the salon piano music that had become common after Independence. Such styles had been

\textsuperscript{19} Bart L. Lewis, “Modernism,” 165. 
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{Ibid}, 160.
abused to the point of losing the expressive qualities that had originally attracted several generations of Mexican composers. Already by the early 1900s, composers such as Gustavo Campa, Julián Carrillo and Ricardo Castro (1864-1907) had followed in the footsteps of Gutiérrez Nájera by resignifying French and German musical traditions into transculturated musical styles of modernista spirit. Manuel M. Ponce’s adoption of organicist compositional techniques from the German tradition—such as developing variation and thematic transformation—in his Piano Concerto (1912), seems a late musical response to the modernista infatuation with German culture and Richard Wagner. Nevertheless, the incorporation of these techniques into his personal style obeys an early desire to enlarge the musical language he had inherited. Ponce’s interest in Mexican folk music, which appeared soon after, was an extended response to the same question of language renewal.

In 1913, as part of the activities of El Ateneo de la Juventud, Ponce offered a conference entitled “La música y la canción mexicana” [Music and Mexican song], where he emphasized the necessity to take popular music as the foundation of a national music style. Besides the undeniable political motivation behind this proclamation—the success of the popular revolt against Porfirio Díaz and the change of regime—, Ponce’s move was not a rejection of the modernista aesthetic I have discussed, but rather a continuation of it.

21 For an in-depth discussion challenging the notion of these styles as mere copies of imported European models, see Alejandro L. Madrid, “Transculturación, performatividad e identidad en la Sinfonía No. 1 de Julián Carrillo,” Resonancias (No. 12, 2003).
23 See Esperanza Figueroa-Amaral, “El cisne modernista,” in Estudios críticos sobre el modernismo, 302-304, and Víctor Pérez Petit, De Weimar a Bayreuth (Montevideo: Claudia García y Cía., 1942). In México, Julián Carrillo had already articulated this interest in German culture, especially in his first two symphonies (1901-1905).
Under the light of current literary criticism, which has rewritten the boundaries of *modernismo*, it would be appropriate to understand Ponce’s nationalist essay as a desire to revitalize the language of Mexican composers through the incorporation of fresh, vernacular elements, which were new and “exotic” for the Mexican art music tradition – just as *modernistas* had also introduced “exotic” imagery to reinvigorate their poetry. Ponce’s summons to revalorize Mexican folk music is the attempt of a modernist – or *modernista* – artist to overcome a crisis of language. Ponce never tried to reject the European tradition; he was not interested in discontinuity, but rather in pursuing a refurbishment of that tradition through the incorporation of Mexican folk elements. Like González Martínez’s poetry, Ponce’s music aesthetic remained, to the last day of his life, immersed in the “perfection of form and precision of expression” of the European tradition. Ponce’s position becomes evident in the apparent contradictions exposed in his article “El folk-lore [sic] musical mexicano. Lo que se ha hecho. Lo que puede hacerse” [Mexican Music Folklore. What Has Been Done. What Needs to be Done] (1919):

“[…] *the mandatory element to construct a national music* is dormant in vernacular songs. Now, let us see what could, or rather, what should be done to accomplish the nationalist idea previously enunciated. Above all, we should study a way *to give form* to the people’s melodies. At the beginning of the important evolution that has entered our artistic mainstream, simple harmonies were implemented on popular melodies, with the purpose of making them accessible to the majority of non-professionals. Today, if we want to avoid a fossilization of the people’s songs, we should start a true dignifying effort, an effort to artistically stylize and elevate them to the category of works of art.”

Music historians find it difficult to reconcile Ponce’s ambivalent position toward folk music. On the one hand, he claimed it was necessary to use folk melodies as a source of “true” Mexican music, while on the other, he argued that it was imperative to “dignify” them according to the canons of European musical language. This seemingly contradictory statement is a problem only when one tries to explain Ponce’s opinions within the hegemonic paradigm of nationalism – one that privileges the local over the foreign–; once we consider the issue of transculturating modernismo, Ponce’s statement no longer appears inconsistent. Ponce’s folklorism is in fact an outcome of his modernismo, it is a sort of Americanismo in the tradition of modernista poets like Martí and Rodó. Since Ponce was an artist who tried to revitalize a musical language in crisis through the incorporation of folk elements, his utterance is no different from Gutiérrez Nájera’s modernista admonition to the Spanish poets: “to invigorate their poetry with cross-fertilization.”

Under these circumstances, it is not a surprise to learn that Ponce’s most influential friendships during the 1910s were both nationalists and modernistas: the painter Saturnino Herrán and the poets Ramón López Velarde and Luis G. Urbina.25 Ponce’s relationship with El Ateneo de la Juventud and their common interest in “an art free but aware of European processes”26 is not a shocker either, nor is his association with Enrique González Martínez – they all collaborated in Revista Musical de México, a magazine directed by Ponce whose editorial board included Antonio Caso, Pedro

26 Yolanda Moreno Rivas, Rostros del nacionalismo en la música mexicana. Un ensayo de interpretación (México: UNAM, 1989), 94.
Henríquez Ureña, Alfonso Pruneda, Luis G. Urbina, and José Vasconcelos—since they were the intellectual elite—a mixture of ateneístas and modernistas—that kept the artistic life of Mexico City well and alive during the armed struggle (1910-1920).27

On April 1920, a coup d’état headed by Alvaro Obregón marked the end of the long armed struggle, and the rise to power of a government that would challenge the rules of the political and cultural game in Mexico. A government that would implement a rejection of the immediate past in an attempt to fabricate a myth of origin that would validate it as a legitimate regime: Mexico as a nation was to begin in 1920, and its history and past would have to be written accordingly.

For Ponce, this new situation translated into the uncertainty of finding himself in a crumbling world. Although Ponce remained a teacher at the National Conservatory, the years between 1920 and 1924 became one of the most difficult artistic periods of his life. The last issue of Revista Musical Mexicana appeared in 1920; in 1921, José Vasconcelos accepted Ponce’s letter of resignation as conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra—Ponce had actually sent the letter in 1919, but the resignation had not been accepted—, and the public appearances of the composer diminished. 1922 was a better year for him; he had several presentations, although the core of his activities remained in the countryside, far from Mexico City. The slowing trend in Ponce’s professional life culminated in 1924, a year when he did not write a single work—something quite rare for an otherwise prolific composer—nor did he write any newspaper articles. It was at the end of this period that Ponce took the important decision to move to Paris—in order to further develop his compositional craft, according to traditional interpretations of the events. An

27 For an interpretation of the early activities of the ateneístas as part of the Modernista movement see Max Henríquez Ureña, Breve historia del modernismo (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1954), 500-501.
interview published in 1920 proves insightful in understanding the modernist frame of mind of Ponce when he made this decision: “For the future I have no other projects than to keep writing music, trying to follow modern orientations.”

Ponce was not able to reposition himself and to find a place for his art in the structure of the new society. He had been unable to do what other pre-revolutionary intellectuals were successful at: integrating themselves into the new myth of origin promoted by the new government. When José Vasconcelos took his post as Dean of the University of Mexico in 1920, he offered the following words: “I arrive, full of sadness, at the bunch of rubble of what used to be the ministry that started to distribute public education through the channels of modern culture.” Vasconcelos stated these words as criticism against Venustiano Carranza’s regime, which, had been replaced by Obregón’s; however, such strong words could also be interpreted as an attempt of Vasconcelos to separate himself from the older cultural scene –of which he had been, ironically, a key figure– and to reposition himself as the “architect” of the education system in the new regime. This strategy meant that Vasconcelos had to repudiate the work that had been done before 1920. By stating that he arrived at a “bunch of rubble,” Vasconcelos symbolically nullified every pre-revolutionary attempt to establish educational projects in Mexico –including the ateneístas’ effort to create a People’s University– and allowed himself to occupy a central role in the construction of the

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30 Although Adolfo de la Huerta’s short presidency worked as a transition between the regimes of Carranza and Obregón.
educational project of the new regime. The myth of origin became so strong that even today it is widely believed that before Vasconcelos there was no structure of education in Mexico.³¹

It is evident that Ponce was not able to adjust to the changing society as well as some of his colleagues. The modernist ideas he had defended since the early 1910s were not enough for the Mexico of the early 1920s, a younger generation had entered the artistic scene of the country with ever more extreme aesthetic and social demands. In 1921, Manuel Maples Arce founded *Estridentismo*, a radical futuristic trend that shook Mexican arts to the core. In 1924, Julián Carrillo offered a recital of microtonal music, and reconsidered his own modernist position through the development of a more drastic and personal music style, his Sonido 13. In addition, in 1924, Carlos Chávez entered the musical scene of Mexico City with an aura of the *enfant terrible*, and introduced avant-garde styles through his own song cycle *Exágonos* and the premieres of works by Hindemith, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Varèse. To complete the picture, two heated public debates, one between Carrillo and Chávez, the other between Carrillo and the detractors of his microtonal system, monopolized the media and pushed Ponce out of the public light.

Clearly, a changing society, one that sought to assimilate the cultural policies of the new regime, was no place for the pre-revolutionary, *modernista* style of Ponce’s music. Not even the nationalist rhetoric of 1913 could save him at that moment, since his

mestizo program seemed to contradict the indigenist discourse favored by the new
government, one that took pre-Columbian cultures as the new myth of origin for a
Mexican, national identity.

The political environment and Ponce’s particular circumstances in the early
1920s, forced him to acknowledge that, if he wanted a place within this new
establishment, he needed to reinvent himself. Taking into consideration Ponce’s place in
the Mexican music scene –Miranda describes 1924 as “undoubtedly the grayest year in
[Ponce’s] professional life”32– and his frustration with a society he could no longer
comprehend, the determination to move to Paris seems more understandable. I am not
alone in suggesting that Ponce felt ostracized in this new society. Yolanda Moreno Rivas
has also acknowledged Ponce’s marginal status in 1920s Mexico,33 and his decision to
return to Europe is better understood if we accept these circumstances. It makes more
sense to picture a confused and disenchanted middle-aged composer, who decides to
leave his homeland because he sees no clear future for himself in his country’s music
scene, than to imagine a successful middle-aged composer abandoning a comfortable life
after experiencing a sudden urge to modernize his musical language, as the “official”
interpretation presents it.

32 Miranda, Manuel M. Ponce, 53.
33 Moreno Rivas states that “a new generation of musicians, who reclaimed for themselves the merits of
II

It has been a traditional argument that Ponce’s modernism is the result of his trip to Paris in 1925. However, I wish to identify Ponce’s modernist style as a continuation of the *modernista* spirit that had nurtured his music up to that moment. In doing so, I propose we appreciate Ponce as a consumer of culture – both European and American, modernist and *modernista* – who, to adopt Michel de Certeau’s description of consumption, was able to produce meaning through his practices of consumption of European culture.\(^{34}\) My analysis focuses on Ponce’s ways of constructing individual styles, within the confines of the established syntax of a traditional language enriched with a new modernist vocabulary, by adopting strategies of cultural consumption that are hidden in the style of the music. I am interested in this theoretical framework since it accepts instances of transculturation as the result of performative exercises of productive consumption. In Ponce’s case, consumption, production, and transculturation are manifest in the act of composition. It is the act of composition, as a performative enunciation, that enables Ponce to negotiate and synthesize his *modernista* and modernist attitudes, and his marginal status as a consumer of European culture in transculturated musical styles.

In trying to understand Ponce’s continuities and discontinuities in compositional style while in Paris, I first examine the relationship of the Mexican composer with his French teachers, Paul Dukas and Nadia Boulanger, as well as his professional acquaintances and the judgments Ponce might have passed on their music. Boulanger and

Dukas paid special attention to the study of tradition: form, harmony, and especially in Boulanger’s case, analysis; Ponce himself stated that Dukas was a champion of Bach, Beethoven and Mozart, while the names of Saint-Säens and Cesar Franck were often mentioned in his class. According to Ponce, Dukas’ main interest was the mastery of counterpoint and harmony, and he felt nothing for some of the Stravinskian exercises of some of his pupils –curiously, Ponce labeled these exercises “ultraísta music,” after *Ultrasismo*, the avant-garde literary movement founded and headed in 1910 by the Chilean poet Vicente Hudiobro, and echoing Alba Herrera y Ogazón’s review of the premiere of his own Sonata for cello and piano. On the other hand, Boulanger’s workshop covered the music of several contemporary composers: Schmitt, Igor Stravinsky, Prokofiev, Hindemith, Debussy, Auric, Poulenc, Honegger, Roussel, and even Dukas. Léonie Rosenstiel notes that Boulanger was a particular admirer of Stravinsky, although her analysis of his music was not based on her own findings, but on articles written by other people.

Ponce’s admiration for Stravinsky is well documented. In an interview published in Havana in 1928, he said the following when a journalist asked his opinion on contemporary music: “Above all Stravinsky. He is a genius, a kind of mysterious god that shows us the secrets of his Slavic soul.” Ricardo Miranda offers the names of Manuel de Falla, Heitor Villa-lobos, Florent Schmitt, Nicolai Medtner, Leo Ornstein, and Francesco Malipiero among Ponce’s friends, and informs us of a group visit to Varèse’s

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apartment that ended in an analysis of Amériques (1921). Ponce’s awareness of modernist and even avant-garde manifestations is clear. What we need to discuss is how this rich cultural environment is reflected in his music and how he was able to appropriate the ideas that surrounded him into a personal style. We need to understand how these notions and concepts became signifying practices that would allow Ponce to represent and redefine himself, and how those practices represent continuity or discontinuity with Ponce’s practices as a modernista artist before the 1920s.

Much has been written about the development of Ponce’s style after he moved to Paris in 1925. Moreno Rivas itemized the elements in Ponce’s new style as “harmonically colorful,” “deliberately dissonant,” with conscious “use of certain archaisms.” Miranda describes the harmonic practices in Ponce’s Lent for piano (1928) as “an example of the type of modulations (or better, wanderings) so often studied in Nadia Boulanger’s class.” Peter S. Poulos does a more detailed job of handling the harmonic and motivic intricacies of works such as the Variations and Fugue on “La folia” (1929) and Sonata III, both for guitar. Elliott Antokoletz briefly discusses the octatonic scales, whole-tone collections, and instances of polymodality in Ponce’s Chapultepec (1929, revised 1934) and Concierto del sur (1941). However, neither Poulos nor Antokoletz offer an explanation of the link between Ponce’s harmonic and intervalllic vocabulary and the practices of some of his European contemporaries, and most importantly, to his own aesthetic concerns as manifest in some of the works that predate this trip to Paris.

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39 Yolanda Moreno Rivas, La composición en México en el siglo XX (México: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1994), 22.
40 Miranda, “D’un cahier d’esquisses,” 70.
The first step in my comparative analysis of Ponce’s modernist styles is an examination of the first movement of his Sonata III, a piece composed in 1927, after two years of studying with Paul Dukas at the École Normale de Musique in Paris. My analysis locates the modernist rhetorical elements that this work shares with the music composed by European composers of the time. By considering the historical evidence behind the composition of the sonata, I show that Ponce’s style was developed as a pragmatic negotiation between compositional and extra-compositional aesthetic interests, between his modernist ideal and the necessity to write a conservative work upon request from a traditionalist performer. The second step is a study of the last movement of his Four Miniatures, a polytonal exercise that is one of Ponce’s most extreme modernist stances. Once again, my analysis focuses on identifying those modernist elements mentioned by Moreno Rivas and Miranda, and tracking them down to compositional practices already in evidence in earlier works, in an attempt to show Ponce’s most radical musical style as a continuation of traditional tonal languages. Finally, I examine Ponce’s Sonata for cello and piano, a work that even though it predates his trip to France, already shows aesthetic and stylistic features further developed in his later works. My intention is to show that the spirit that informs the composition of his early works is the same modernist character that distinguishes his later style, and is indeed a continuation of the modernista aesthetic that infused his nationalist ideas. Such a project would inform the different mechanisms of cultural dispossession necessary to validate larger discourses of homogeneous identity.

Ponce wrote his Sonata III, as he did most of his guitar music, for the Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia. Segovia was a performer of unadventurous taste, who, in 1928,
at the height of Ponce’s Parisian modernist search, would advise him to “be modern, but not in the Poulenc nor Milhaud style.” Segovia was so worried about Ponce’s most radically modern inclinations that he would later try to discourage the Mexican composer in the following terms:

“[…] divest yourself of the sacred respect that the extra-modern costume of your Muse inspires you… She is young and lusty, and you commit a grave mistake veiling her enchantments with the cosmetics and make up needed by other [Muses] less fresh than yours. Moreover, virtuosos like Cassadó and Heiffets [sic] want works that not only can be played for audiences of experts, but to the Public –including in this not very sophisticated musicians, critics without part pris, and true music lovers.”

Ponce’s style in the sonata necessarily becomes a site for the negotiation of the differences between his own modernist desire and Segovia’s conservative preferences. The result is an ingenious exercise where modernism and tradition harmoniously coexist, a piece that performs Ponce’s place as a liminal subject between modernismo and modernism, and between Europe and Mexico.

Tonal ambiguity is the rule throughout the first movement of Sonata III. The formal framework is a sonata-allegro design, and the tonal areas emphasized agree with a schematic rendition of that form. However, the piece begins in d minor and finishes on an ambiguous d major chord with an added sixth, which brings a small amount of tonal imprecision, although certainly not rare to the romantic tradition. In example 1, I offer an

44 Andrés Segovia, letter to Manuel M. Ponce written on February, 1937. Ibid, 175-176. I have revised the translation of this letter to better convey the meaning of the original.
overview of the tonal motion in the movement. I have chosen to indicate certain elements of foreground activity, specifically the essentially non-tonal sonority types that appear in the music of modernist composers such as Stravinsky, Bartók, and Debussy: octatonic collections (mm. 14, 19-25, 31-34, etc.), whole-tone collections (mm. 11, 17-18, 72, etc.), pentatonic collections (mm. 23, 78, 81-82, etc.), and Z-cells (mm. 29-30). However, the presence of these elements by themselves would not say much about Ponce; it is in the Mexican composer’s use of these elements, and their difficult relationship to the structural background of his music, where we can map the conflict of transculturation.

Ex. 3.1. Manuel M. Ponce, Sonata III, movement I. Analytical reduction, background level.
A closer look into the behavior of the non-tonal elements found in the foreground proves essential in understanding Ponce’s modernist style as continuity with tradition. A clearly octatonic sequence from the end of measure 31 to measure 34 brings the otherwise typical harmonic motion from the tonic to the dominant up to date (Ex. 3.2).

![Ex. 3.2. Ponce, Sonata III, movement I, mm. 31-34.](image)

A closer examination shows that Ponce’s use of the octatonic collection works in much the same way as in Chopin’s Opp. 15, No.3 and 27, No.1, where a primary diminished seventh chord is combined with a complementary diminished seventh chord, filling out an octatonic collection. In Ponce’s case, the octatonic sonorities could be interpreted as passing tones that prolong a subdominant harmonic window in a modulatory sequence toward the dominant area (Ex. 3.3).

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45 Gregory Proctor has analyzed the octatonic sonorities in these works in his unpublished paper “Octatonic is No Explanation” (1990).
Melodic octatonic and pentatonic inflections on local contexts appear also as prolongations of larger diminished sonorities (as in Ex. 3.4), or minor sonorities (as in Ex. 3.5). In every case, Ponce’s non-tonal sonorities are subjected to a larger tonal framework, remaining purely foreground elements.
When comparing the relationship between foreground and background elements in Ponce’s music and that of European modernist composers such as Stravinsky, we witness an altogether different musical conception; one that informs of individual notions of continuity or discontinuity with fundamental, structural aspects of the tonal tradition, and an overall different understanding of the role of artificial scales or modes within the larger musical discourse. Robert Morgan suggests that for a modernist composition to be coherent the composer must find a balance between the foreground and background levels of the work with the more characteristic features from the foreground projected.
into the background of the composition;\textsuperscript{46} in “Dissonant Prolongation: Theoretical and Compositional Precedents,” Morgan, based on Schenker’s attempt to analyze Stravinsky’s Piano Concerto (1923-1924), offers an example of such projection.\textsuperscript{47}

Ponce’s modernism, however, anchored in the expansion of language proposed by \textit{modernistas}, presented a style that contradicts European modernist coherence. In Ponce’s Sonata III, the foreground activity with its new elements supports a traditionally Schenkerian structure and informs us of the composer’s commitment to continuity. The question of balance between traditional forms and non-functionally tonal elements is a fundamental feature in Ponce’s sonata, and it remained central to his compositional practice until the end of his life. On the other hand, as the work of Edward T. Cone has shown, in Stravinsky’s music it is through processes of block construction based on juxtaposition of modal and artificial collections that musical tension and release is created and structural coherence is achieved.\textsuperscript{48} Stravinsky’s music resists a Schenkerian dissection because it fundamentally rejects the structural principles of that tradition and proposes its own set of technical regulations, one where the octatonic collections play a fundamental, structural role. While these artificial modes occupy central stage in Stravinsky’s structural organization, in Ponce they remain elements to be synthesized within larger functionally tonal structures. Such differences point toward fundamentally dissimilar experiences regarding modernity and the Western music canon; while Stravinsky was a composer who moved from the margins of Western culture to the center


becoming a paradigm of music modernism, Ponce was a composer who remained on the margins and articulated in his idea of modernism—which reflects his complex relation with the Western music canon—the contradictions of the postcolonial experience.

Even in Ponce’s most uncompromising examples of modernism, the issue of coexistence of a traditional background and a modernist foreground remains alive. In the fourth movement of Four Miniatures for string quartet, Ponce, free from the conservative requests of Segovia, is at liberty to test his interest in more sophisticated modernist techniques. The result is a polytonal work whose shocking harmonic relations and intervallic derivations, although reminiscent of Stravinsky’s own intervallic practices, still struggles to fit inside a traditional binary form and to fulfill Schenkerian notions of tonal prolongation.

In the fourth movement of Four Miniatures, Allegro giocoso, each of the instruments is written in a different key signature. The first violin in A major, the second violin in Bb major, the viola in F major, and the cello in Db major. Ricardo Miranda and Jorge Barrón have already pointed out certain tonal characteristics of the work,⁴⁹ which could be diagrammed as follows in a graph of the background level (Ex. 3.6).

The graphic reduction shows the larger, typical harmonic structure of a tonal work. However, the support of the descending line is more problematic and seems to foreshadow the non-functional quality of the voice leading in the foreground of the piece. Indeed, when a more detailed examination is performed, one discovers that the foreground activity of the composition lacks the basic criteria to consider this a tonal work: there is no functional harmony, the aural coherence of the chordal progression is

maintained only through the presence of pivot pitches (indicated with black note-heads in example 3.7) and brief instances of traditional voice leading (shown in examples 3.7 and 3.8).

Ex. 3.6. Manuel M. Ponce, Four Miniatures, movement IV. Analytical reduction, background level.

Ex. 3.7. Ponce, Four Miniatures, movement IV, mm. 20-23. Idealized voice leading at the end of the first section.
Nonetheless, none of the harmonic areas that provide the *Ursatz* with its basic pitches (A major and E major) is ever tonicized in any centric fashion, certainly not through the traditional V-I cadence (Ex. 3.7 and 3.8).

Ex. 3.8. Ponce, Four Miniatures, movement IV, mm. 46-52. Idealized voice leading at the end of the piece.

Another puzzling aspect of the piece is its ending on an A major chord supported by the outer fifth of an Ab major chord played by the cello. A polytonal explanation would offer a quick and plausible answer; nevertheless, a comparison with Ponce’s understanding of the octatonic collection as a synchronic presentation of two different diminished seventh chords one semitone apart shows theoretical similarities between the octatonicism in Sonata III and the polytonalism in some sections of the last of the Four
Miniatures. In both cases, Ponce seems to be constructing the collections in a similar way, in the sonata it is the octatonic collection made out of two diminished seventh chords, in the miniature it is the A major-Ab major sonority that, although lacking the c natural, points toward a similar constructive approach (Ex. 3.9).

Ex. 3.9. Octatonic collection and Amajor-Ab major collection.

However, the similarities between Ponce’s, Stravinsky’s and Bartók’s approaches to artificial-collection derivation end when the comparison considers larger musical and historical contexts. While Stravinsky’s interest in “counting intervals” was inherited from Rimsky-Korsakov’s use of colorful “chromatic” figurations based on symmetrical
partitions of the octave. Ponce’s derivation of bi-tonal chords came from his intellectual interest in some of the polytonal practices he witnessed as a student of Dukas and Boulanger, those he labeled “ultraista music.” While Bartók’s symmetrical pitch constructions were derivations of diatonic modes subjected to the intervallic practices of old Hungarian folk melodies, Ponce’s interest in such collections and scales developed out of his appropriation of specific intellectual ideas and is, therefore, evidence of the material at hand that allowed him to imagine modernity and himself as a modern composer. Ponce’s music style and the desire behind his technical interest, when tested vis à vis the style of European modernists, show a composer for whom the intersection of tradition, modernity, center and periphery is fundamental in understanding his music as the modernist exercise of self-representation of a liminal individual who did not imitate the Europeans’ styles, but appropriated their music grammar and used it according to his own contingent necessities.

An analytic comparison between Sonata III and the Allegro giocoso from Four Miniatures shows Ponce as a composer preoccupied with producing a musical language based on tradition. Even in the least traditional of his works, he is interested in keeping a tonal framework as the foundation for his non-functional harmonic explorations. I have addressed in “De México, Concierto para Andrés Segovia: Una visita al Concierto del sur de Manuel M. Ponce,” that this practice accompanied Ponce until the end of his life, sometimes translating into the local use of modal scales, sometimes into the use of

artificial scales. An analysis of Ponce’s Sonata for cello and piano, a work that predates his trip to Paris, confirms the composer’s late modernist style as a continuation of the modernista music he wrote before 1925.

Alba Herrera y Ogazón’s review of Ponce’s Sonata for cello and piano shows that for the ears of 1920s Mexican audiences, his music was that of a modernist artist:

“[The sonata for cello and piano] is a very modern work, shaped in the molds of up to date composition; this is why I believe this work has merely gained for the author the affection of the public (excluding the group of musicians able to appreciate what this composition is worth in study, erudition and advanced structure). The work does not lack transparency or energetic and sustained inspiration, but its novel style constitutes an obstacle that keeps most listeners from reaching a true knowledge of its merits, which are, nevertheless, solid and genuine […] The only problem one can find with [the sonata] is the usual problem with decidedly modern works: an impossible-to-hide laboriousness, something emphatic, complicated and overworked, in a few words, an absence of simplicity […] For Ponce I foresee a secure and bright future, his talent is so strong that it will intuitively reject whatever dares to blemish the clean source of his musicality. Nationalist, ingenious, romantic, modernist (maybe one day even an Ultraista?… chi lo sa!), he will always be the musician of natural and consubstantial melody.”

The first movement of the Sonata for cello and piano is a sonata-allegro form in G that, like Sonata III, starts in the minor and finishes in the major mode. The overall harmonic motion of the movement can be observed in the analytical reduction in example 3.10. It is


not a surprise to find that the tonal framework of the composition once again fits the traditional tonal model. However, already in this middle ground graph it is possible to observe some of the stylistic traces that made this composer a modernist for Herrera y Ogazón. The harmonic motion before the interruption presents a minor dominant as harmonic support for the second degree in the descending line. The B theme is presented on Eb major (VI) instead of the regular Bb major (III) tonality.

Ex. 3.10. Manuel M. Ponce, Sonata for cello and piano, movement I. Analytical reduction.
Other features that may have sounded modernist for the reviewer are easy to spot on the surface of the composition: for instance, the constant use of harmonic sequences with unresolved 9ths and 7ths (Ex. 3.11).

Ex. 3.11. Ponce. Sonata for cello and piano, movement I. Harmonic reduction, mm. 48-62.

Ponce’s use of an almost Wagnerian harmonic vocabulary whose motion is based on pivot pitches is also exemplified in measure 21 and measures 104-105 (Ex. 3.12).
Ex. 3.12. Ponce, Sonata for cello and piano, movement I, m. 21 and mm. 104-105.

Ponce’s “tristanisms” from examples 3.11 and 3.12 remind us of the modernistas’ admiration for Wagner, as exposed in Víctor Pérez Petit’s *De Weimar a Bayreuth* (1942).
The third part of this book is a lengthy and detailed text where the Uruguayan *modernista* writer presents an ample portrait of Wagner, his music, and his philosophy. Although the piquant dissonances in Ponce’s Sonata for cello and piano are miles apart from the harmonic and intervallic practices of some of his European contemporaries, it is within the Mexican music context that we should understand this language as a modernist expression. It is in comparison with the music previously written in Ponce’s country that we can appreciate the renovations of language it proposes.

Undeniably, the stylistic features in the Sonata for cello and piano seem to point toward the less-tonal style that Ponce developed later in Paris, the style exemplified in works such as Sonata III and Four Miniatures. However, the *modernista* features in the Sonata for cello and piano indicate a different consumption of modernist values by the composer. While the early work shows an access to Wagnerian harmonic practices as a catalyst for Ponce’s modernist imagination, the latter works reveal a new set of elements and notions that renewed the composers’ desire for modernity. In fact, both styles represent Ponce’s attempt to enlarge the vocabulary of his musical language, and such is the case with one of the most salient features in the Sonata for cello and piano, the presence of the typical Cuban *cinquillo*, a basic rhythmic pattern in the traditional Cuban *son montuno* (Ex. 3.13).

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54 See Pérez Petit, *De Weimar a Bayreuth*. 

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Ricardo Miranda explains that Ponce’s use of the Cuban *cinquillo* in pieces such as the *Elegía de la ausencia* (ca. 1917), the second movement of *Chapultepec* (1921), and later in *Rumba* (1932) is not a specific reference to Cuban music, but rather a synthesis of the Cuban elements within a personal style.⁵⁵ Ponce was directly exposed to Cuban music between 1915 and 1917, when he lived in Havana. His trip to Cuba took place at the peak of his interest in Mexican folklore as an element in the production of a more expressive and personal music language. Ponce’s interest in Cuban folklore follows the same *modernista* desire for renewal that made Gutiérrez Nájera write his 1894 admonition to the Spanish poets, and could also be thought a parallel with Debussy’s modernist interest in Spanish and Balinese music: they were excuses to incorporate new elements into their music vocabulary.

The analyses of Sonata III, Four Miniatures, and Sonata for cello and piano show musical styles developed as answers to Ponce’s place within a complex web of ideologies that include not only his position as an artist experiencing a changing political climate in his own country, but also his relationship with active members of the music scene in Europe, modernist composers and conservative performers alike. As such, Ponce’s development of style becomes a performative act that writes him as a member of specific identity groups. In fact, Ponce’s eclectic catalog –where pieces in baroque and classical styles such as the *Suite al estilo antiguo* (1931) and the *Sonata clásica* (1928) coexist with neoclassical and modernist works such as Sonata III and Four Miniatures– signals the development of multiple identity as a strategy to negotiate his place within the contradictory cultural and ideological web that surrounded him. Nevertheless, Ponce’s assorted output is unified by the *modernista* spirit of language renovation that emanates from most of his compositions, in such a manner that his turns out to be a transculturated multiple identity.

According to Michel de Certeau, subjects who are marginalized as consumers and do not get a chance to be actively involved in a chain of production are able to turn their consumption into production of cultural meaning; consumption is an act of *poiesis* that provides the basis for identity construction and cultural regulation.56 If we understand Ponce’s appropriation of modernist compositional features as cultural consumption, then

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we will have to acknowledge that such consumption implies a production of meaning hidden in the use of those compositional features. As is apparent in my analyses, Ponce reinterpreted modernist European features through his own *modernista* character and stylistically articulated them taking into account the specific personal and social circumstances surrounding each composition. Therefore, as a consumer of European culture, Ponce became a catalyst of transculturation, and the stylistic variety of his musical production a testimony of the multiple negotiations that nurtured that transculturation.

Representation plays a key role in the struggle for hegemony because it allows individuals to enter a process of negotiation between them and the dominant social, political, and ideological forces. Ponce’s process of self-representation permits him to position himself within the multi-ideologic web developed in his country after the revolution, but also as part of the center-periphery dialectic that places him as marginal to the Western European music tradition by virtue of his nationality. Through a process of self-representation Ponce identifies himself as a modernist composer whose style exemplifies continuity with his own pre-revolution *modernista* spirit. At the same time, Ponce’s modernist style is a site of negotiation with European discourses of modernism, since it turns his expected cultural consumption of European techniques into a productive activity that challenges notions of passive marginality. Ponce’s is a complex process of negotiation that both locates him within a local context and contests his marginal place in a center-periphery struggle.

Ponce becomes a troubling figure because he enacts the incoherence and contradictions of nationalist and modernist discourses. I spend the last chapter of my
dissertation discussing the processes of representation implemented by dominant
discourses and how such discourses are the result of strategies of cultural negotiation
where individual agency plays a key role in the development of hegemony. In that
chapter, I explore Ponce’s seemingly failed performative exercise and discuss how the
writing of his figure as a nationalist is indeed the result of similar acts of negotiation.
On September 1926, the First National Congress of Music was celebrated at the Palacio de Minería in Mexico City. This was an unprecedented event in the history of culture in Mexico, one that brought together musicians from a wide variety of fields—composers, music educators, performers, impresarios, musicologists, music theorists, et. al.—and aesthetic tendencies, to discuss the state of music in the country after the revolution. More than 90 persons registered for the congress, and approximately 36 papers—on issues ranging from the curricular problems at the National Conservatory of Music to the role of folk music in the development of a “true” national music, from the lack of regular concert seasons to the necessity to completely reform the foundations of the Western music system—were discussed and evaluated during the 8 days of the meeting. This was the first time a forum of this kind was organized in Mexico, one that allowed musicians from different generations to publicly voice their opinions about the future of music in their country. As such an event, the congress is a mirror that reflects the struggles over representation of Mexican music in the mid-1920s; studying it opens a window to broaden our understanding of the larger political struggle over the
representation of the nation that took place in Mexico at the end of that decade. This is, unquestionably, an important aspect in understanding the production of a Mexican post-revolutionary hegemony since, as Neil Larsen proposes, “the power to represent the nation is already the power to dominate it.”¹

An anonymous document kept in the archives of the Centro de Estudios sobre la Universidad (CESU), describes in the following terms the debate over the issues of national music and folklore that took place during the First National Congress of Music:

“Two tendencies were clear throughout the discussions, one in favor of Mexican nationalist music and its immediate antecedent, folklore; the other against them. […] [The discussion of Professor Michaca’s paper] was postponed in order not to disturb the anti-nationalists, since many of them were intransigent and powerful in governmental circles. […] The disagreements at the interior of the First Music Congress reflected the sad situation of our folklore at the time. […] There was passionate intransigence from the anti-nationalists, who, taking the situation as a personal matter, did not stop pushing their ideas, even though deep in their hearts they agreed [sic], as was the case with most participants.”²

Although ambiguous and partisan in several instances, this review (written at least 20 years after the congress took place) reveals the congress as a site of hegemonic struggles, a place for an intense ideological exchange that illustrated the cultural and social crises in 1920s Mexico.

In this chapter, I take the First National Congress of Music as a map of the intricate interrelations between nationalism and modernism, two fundamental ideas in

² “Primer Congreso Nacional de Música.” Unpublished document. Fondo Escuela Nacional de Música, CESU Archive, UNAM.

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post-revolution Mexico, and the use of music to perform specific understandings of these concepts. The different practices of music making, music research, music education, and the sources for national music presented at the congress reveal the different perceptions of modernity and the nation-state held by contrasting ideological groups at the time. As such an institution, the congress reflected the variety of discourses on modern identity and nationality imagined by its members, and echoed the attempts to construct symbolic representations of those notions.

According to Jaques Lacan, the meaning of a discourse is found in the cultural (symbolic) function of that discourse;\(^3\) therefore, it is essential to understand the passage from imaginary concepts to symbolic systems. In Lacan, the Real represents reality as a brute object of desire that moves us to try to apprehend it but always remains out of reach, unattainable. The Real is the reality out there that we try to grasp and represent but keep describing only partially and therefore unfaithfully. The Symbolic is the culturally mediated construction of that reality, it allows us to have a common ground and understanding of it; the Symbolic structures our perception of reality. The Imaginary is an illusory construction of reality, an unrealized Symbolic, an individual practice that has not been assimilated into a culturally mediated system.\(^4\)

The articulation of the nation-state as the object of desire of the First National Congress of Music presents an opportunity to explore the variety of imaginary discourses on nationality and modernity presented by its members as efforts to perform that nation-state because it is the desire between the Real and the Symbolic that lays at the core of the construction of meaning.


Since both music and nationhood are unclear experiences that can only make social sense through discursive systems, applying Lacan’s interpretative frame proves useful because it focuses on the negotiation of these symbolic systems.

I

The edifice of the nation-state as a modern institution is built upon numerous smaller institutions that operate on a local level. The role of these institutions is to work as lecture machines that, as Jon McKenzie argues, separate “the ones presumed to know and thus empowered to speak the truth from those presumed not to know and thus empowered to seek the truth.” These institutions inculcate the ideology of the nation-state in its citizens; they are organizations of social supervision that control the flow of information and guide the citizen’s processes of identification in an effort to make the nation-state into their object of desire, their object of identification and security. Anthony Giddens suggests, however, that “modernity is constituted in and through reflexively applied knowledge.” “Reflexively applied knowledge” implies the active participation of individuals in recognizing the specific historical circumstances that determine their social context, and in the production and consumption of cultural and social meaning under those specific conditions. Individual agency is an essential instrument in the negotiation of hegemonic discourses that takes place at the interior of modern institutions. It is through a reflexive critique of the imagined qualities of the nation-state, their place

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within it, and their resistance to an imposed ideology, that individuals gain a say in the institutional negotiation of hegemonies. Therefore, modern institutions are mechanisms of surveillance, control, and security, but also a source for individual empowerment through reflexivity.

Although the efforts to develop a sense of national identity—nationalist ideas or nationalism as these efforts have been called by earlier historians—were fundamental in attempting to establish a cohesive nation-state by pre-revolutionary regimes in Mexico, a new understanding of national identity was negotiated after the revolution. The pervasiveness of the post-revolutionary discourse of identity—with its emphasis on pre-Columbian cultures as the source of a “true” Mexicanity—makes it impossible to deny its importance in shaping the sense of nation in 20th-century Mexico. However, the importance of the National Music Congress rests with the fact that as an institution of reflexivity it helps us comprehend the collision of old and new understandings of the relationship between modernity and nationality. The ideologies that resulted from the self-reflexive exercises of its members are each a partial reflection of the larger object of desire, the nation-state. The decision to organize a national congress, the establishment of advisory boards, the redaction of the call for papers, the acceptance, rejection and classification of those papers, and the content of the papers themselves reflect specific preoccupations regarding the future of the nation-state. All of these elements offer us clues as to the ideologies behind the organization and participation in the congress, and in turn, each of these ideologies should be understood as a partial vision of what the members of the congress believed the nation-state should be. Therefore, the congress was
a site where musicians and intellectuals attempted a symbolization of those imaginary concepts, a site where the negotiation of collective cultural discourses took place.

I approach the First National Congress as an institution of power that intended to exercise control through the implementation of specific ideological discourses but in the end had to negotiate the construction of those symbolic systems of representation. Michel de Certeau proposes that representations mask the praxis that makes them possible, that it is in name of the Real that the present organizes the past and produces a common frame of reference, an identity.\(^7\) It was in the name of Mexico as a modern nation-state and the fabrication of a Mexican musical identity that the First National Congress of Music came about, and as such, it provides a window into the contingencies that shaped and guided the desires of modernity and nationality in 1920s Mexico. When the author of the anonymous review that opens this chapter writes of the “nationalist” and “anti-nationalist” postures in the congress, we should be aware that such labels are the result of ideologies dependent upon specific constructions of hegemony, i.e., they are political tools. The notion of a “true” national music is a discursive representation that performs nationality according to the specific historical circumstances that surround that construction. The focus of my study is to explore the plurality of manifestations and the negotiation of positions among congress participants, a goal that demands an understanding of notions of nationality and identity as the discursive outcome of these processes and not as essential cultural, ethnic, or racial features.

The political and social uncertainty at the end of the armed phase of the Mexican revolution caused Mexican musicians to experience an ambiguous cultural climate. As part of the intellectual elite of the country, they had witnessed the crisis and collapse of many pre-revolutionary musical institutions, organizations that had nurtured them and were fundamental in the development of an active music life (especially in Mexico City). The need to re-define their role within a renewed nation-state was clear as early as 1919, when Manuel M. Ponce urged Mexican musicians to organize a music congress in order to discuss “the causes of our [Mexican] music’s backwardness and the best ways to fight that decadence.” Ponce’s initiative was not immediately followed up on, but six years later the idea rekindled when Carlos Chávez published an ironic article titled “Un congreso sin rigor” (A Congress without Rigor) (1925), calling for a meeting to acknowledge the problems of Latin American music—he used the term “Indo-Spanish music”—and not necessarily to look for solutions for them. A year later, Carlos del Castillo (1882-1957), Dean of the National Conservatory, publicly called for a meeting of “serious” Mexican composers to “put an end to the despicability [encanallamiento] of that music pompously called Mexican.”

Ricardo Miranda rightly points out that del Castillo’s attacks targeted both Julián Carrillo’s Sonido 13 group—proponents of microtonal music, which, they teleologically

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argued, was a more “evolved” system of music, since it made use of more overtones than
the dominant Western music system—, and the composers of popular music who arranged
folk songs, in an attempt to ban them from the proposed meeting. The polemic, however,
provoked a climate that weakened del Castillo’s candidacy as organizer of the congress. Nevertheless, the situation created by his comments forced the music community to acknowledge the necessity of a discussion on the condition of Mexican music. In June 1926, a small organizing committee constituted by Francisco Domínguez, Manuel Barajas (1886-?), and Daniel Castañeda (1899-1957) invited “all the Mexican musicians, composers, and musicologists, to attend the second organizing meeting for the National Music Congress.” The first draft of the letter of convocation was prepared at the meeting and signed by Estanislao Mejía (1882-1967), Jesús C. Romero (1893-1958), and Ignacio Montiel y López, besides the three original members of the organizing committee. This draft contains the same information later published in the official convocation bulletin, including the purpose of the congress, the topics of the sessions, and the congress regulations, with only a few minor but revealing differences. When the bulletin and call for papers were published in July 1926, a committee composed of the aforementioned musicians as well as Alba Herrera y Ogazón (1885-1931) and Juan León Mariscal (1899-1972) signed it. Mejía, Romero, Barajas, Herrera y Ogazón, and Castañeda were all members of the “Grupo Nosotros,” and in turn former members of the

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12 Unpublished document, Fondo Escuela Nacional de Música, CESU Archive, UNAM.
13 For example, a correction in pencil, clearly added post facto, established that only Mexican citizens could be active members in the congress. This regulation marginalized any foreigner to an observer position.
“Grupo de los 9,” a group of intellectuals and musicians that had publicly and vocally criticized Carrillo’s microtonal theories in a series of newspaper articles published two years before.

A comparison between the goals of the congress proposed by Ponce in 1919 and the goals of the First National Congress of Music, as expressed in the 1926 call for papers, illustrates the adjustment of priorities that took place in the early 1920s among the Mexican music community. Ponce’s call emphasized the necessity to attack the “alarming decadence of Mexican musical art” through an understanding of the ‘laws’ of pedagogy,” and listed the following as the major problems:

“Teachers teach just to make a living. Students study without knowing what for or why do they do it. There is an absolute estrangement among musicians. There is no unity, identification of goals, collective effort, nor enthusiasm. Everything is discouragement and pessimism.”

The convocation to the First National Congress of Music recounts Ponce’s claims against the music education system but focuses on the “inability of the people to appreciate the work of art and its beauties due to a lack of musical culture.” The shift in priorities is especially evident in the emphasis the call places on the necessity to dignify a national musical art that “was nothing but a reflection of Europe, and the urgency to organize a systematic study of Mexican folklore.” Although the rhetoric employed in preparing the

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14 Ponce, “Iniciativa de un congreso musical,” 5.
16 Ibid.
call for the 1926 congress reflects the spirit of earlier writings by Ponce,\textsuperscript{17} it is significant that Ponce’s 1919 call remains free from that nationalist rhetoric, while those issues occupy center stage in the 1926 call.

On May 15, 1926, as a response to del Castillo’s idea of a congress that would “put an end to the despicability of that music pompously called Mexican,” Carlos Chávez republished “Un congreso sin rigor,” adding an introduction that openly criticized del Castillo:

“If [the congress I proposed] had taken place, it would have produced a catalog of good and bad ideas that would have reached everyone who, like those seditious musicians and music critics, do not know that national Mexican music exists as long as a Mexican nationality exists. What else can we wish for, a congress that dictates a sentence? A sentence that determines and imposes the ‘aesthetic’ of a Mexican music so that it comes out of the congress as Minerva from Zeus’ head?”\textsuperscript{18}

Chávez’s description of the congress brings to mind John McKenzie’s idea of the lecture machine as “a system that processes discourses and practices, […] and that binds together words and acts.”\textsuperscript{19} In a few words, Chávez recognized and criticized the congress as a performative institution –with the understanding that its performative power resulted in the imposition of a univocal ‘aesthetic’ of Mexican music—. However, what Chávez failed to recognize was that the performativity of the congress, as that of any performative act,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{17} See Manuel M. Ponce, “El folk-lore musical mexicano. Lo que se ha hecho. Lo que puede hacerse,” Revista Musical de México (Vol. I, No. 5, 1919).
\item \textsuperscript{19} McKenzie, \textit{Op. cit.}, 21.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
need not be expressed in “dictated sentences,” since its mere existence writes those who experience it in one way or another, and most important, that the consumers of those discourses play an active role in the production of that hegemony.

The First National Congress of Music was indeed a lecture machine, but its effect was ambiguous. On the one hand, a faction of the organizing committee intended to use the congress to keep pushing the positivist intellectual projects they had defended for more than ten years. On the other hand, a more progressive faction of the organizing committee decided there must be an ideological separation from the old regime, and they were willing to perform it through an emphasis on Mexican folklore as the factor that would bring “personality to the nationalist music project.”20 It is, undeniably, the centrality of nationality, nation-building, and national identity that differentiates Ponce’s 1919 request from the 1926 congress call. The political and social events that took place in the country in the seven years that separate one call from the other—the fall of a government that ignored the new role of workers and peasants in the national political scene (Venustiano Carranza), local uprisings (Chihuahua, Morelos, Chiapas) and the beginning of the Cristero rebellion—made it clear that Mexican intellectuals needed to bring together their criteria and artistic goals within a larger national agenda of unification and modernization.

The establishment of specific thematic categories—music acoustics, organology, music theory and composition (itself divided into technical or artistic perspectives), music pedagogy, folklore, and free subjects—was also a performative surveillance device that specifically controlled not only the flow of information, but in many cases also the

20 Convocatoria, bases y reglamento del Primer Congreso Nacional de Música, 3.
actual production of knowledge. By carefully planning the thematic categories, the organizing committee presented a vision of authorized fields of study for Mexican music scholars, while aiming to guide and generate new projects that in turn would further legitimize and empower their ideas. The fragmentation of the subject of study into specific fields was a tacit attempt to coerce scholars into becoming allies of the lecture machine, since the generation of ideas would necessarily follow the implicit logic at play in the organizer’s categorization.

The members of the organizing committee that prepared the call for papers were important figures in the Mexican music scene, powerful enough to validate a call that produced an important number of entries—about 36 papers—and a very good response from the music community. With the exception of the influential Carrillo and Ponce, who were out of the country,21 the congress attracted 93 participants that included some of the most important musicians of Mexico; among others, Carlos del Castillo, Luis G. Saloma (1866-1956), Rafael J. Tello (1872-1946), José Rocabruna (1879-1957), Antonio Gomezanda (1894-1961), José F. Vásquez (1896-1961); even the polemical enfant terrible, Carlos Chávez, appears on the list.22 The successful response to the call let us know the important validating status of the organizing committee as well as the general consensus regarding the criteria for categorizing the problems of Mexican music. Nevertheless, regardless of the status of these musicians, the creation of alliances among them would allow them the power to implement policies that could transform the reality

21 By the time the congress took place Carrillo lived in New York and Ponce in Paris.
22 “Lista de los miembros del congreso.” Unpublished document. Fondo Escuela Nacional de Música, CESU Archive, UNAM. Chávez might have registered for the congress before he moved to New York in September 1926.
of the Mexican music scene in the direction they envisioned. The call for papers of the First National Congress of Music is therefore, a guideline for the creation of such alliances and the perpetration of the organizers’ prominent status.

As seen in their regulations, the organizers imagined that the Permanent Commission (which would be elected during the congress) had the capacity to approve and recommend the implementation of educational policies and changes to the curriculum in every music institution in the country. Lewis A. Coser suggests that institutions not only mediate between intellectuals and their audiences but also perform these audiences as such, protecting the intellectuals from undesirable interferences.23 The organizing committee indeed imagined the congress as this type of institution, a reading machine with the power to perform musical knowledge in the country, counting on an ample consensus of its members. However, the problem for this performative to be effective surfaced when some of the papers could not fit the categories described in the call. Those papers illustrated that hegemonic discourses, such as a nationalist ideology, have to be negotiated with those “undesirable interferences,” and that the congress should therefore be read as a creative practice that would produce not only certain ideas about music, but also the discursive space in which ideas about music and nation would be constituted to begin with.

The call for papers of the First National Congress of Music shows the imaginary vision the organizers had of the Mexican music scene. A collective acceptance of the terms of the call was necessary in order to transform this imaginary vision into a

symbolic system. However, the papers submitted reflected not only the difficulty in achieving an all-embracing consensus within the Mexican music community, but also the important differences of opinion among the members of the organizing committee.

III

Sponsored by the National University of Mexico and the newspaper *El Universal*, the First National Congress of Music met for 8 days beginning on September 5, 1926 – after a preliminary meeting on September 2, when the members of the Evaluation Committees for each category were sworn in. Each of the Evaluation Committees consisted of three members, their job was to review the papers registered for their particular category, and approve or reject their proposals. In turn, each committee had to submit their evaluations to the General Board, which would ratify or overturn the decision of the Evaluation Committees.

The documents preserved at CESU show that the Evaluation Committees approved approximately 79% of the papers presented. The content and the authors of the papers included in this figure are a strong index of the dominant ideological tendencies of the organizing committee. All of the papers presented by members of the organizing committee were approved, including those by Ignacio Montiel y López, Estanislao Mejía, Manuel Barajas, and Alba Herrera y Ogazón. The majority of these papers occupied themselves with exposing the obvious, most superficial problems in music education – such as the necessity to modernize the curriculum of the National Conservatory – without truly tackling the more complex problems of the Mexican music system – such as actually
questioning the validity of the system itself in the specific socio-historic context of the country. Many presenters preferred to point out the people’s lack of musical education, and the absence of organizations and institutions that would guarantee their exposure to “high art,” instead of questioning whether the expectations of the intellectual elite had any resonance with the musical interests of the people. In short, the papers approved by the Evaluation Committees show that the dominant ideology was still that of the civilizing project preferred by Mexican intellectuals since the late 19th century and early 20th century. These papers represented an attempt to re-validate, with minor superficial adjustments, a crumbling status quo.

Alba Herrera y Ogazón’s “La cultura del músico mexicano” (The Culture of Mexican Musicians), a paper on the necessity of a well-rounded education for Mexican musicians, is a good example of how the kind of problems that troubled the organizing committee of the congress were the same that occupied them in the earlier part of the century. The ideas that Herrera y Ogazón offered in this paper had already been presented at a conference given at the Universidad Popular Mexicana in 1913. There, under the title “Las condiciones de la música en México” (Music and its Conditions in Mexico), Herrera y Ogazón accused Mexican audiences of thinking music a social ornament and an insignificant pleasure, and blamed the audiences’ misunderstandings on the musicians’ own educative shortcomings. Herrera y Ogazón based her discussion on an idealist understanding of music borrowed from Schopenhauer in order to present music –I should say European art music– as an indispensable part of every civilized person’s life: “[…]
we do not know what we are; nobody knows his/her origin, his/her fate, his/her abilities and possibilities… But music reveals all these, and this revelation stimulates us to undergo heroic efforts to live our lives.”

The ideas expressed by Herrera y Ogazón in 1913 came back in her 1926 essay, a paper that insisted on “the great civilizing program that it is urgent to establish, [since] the supreme mission of our official art schools is to make the nation more refined, intelligent and cultivated.” Herrera y Ogazón’s paper shows that for these intellectuals music meant art music from the European tradition, and that the goal of music education should be to bring Mexican musicians to the level of their European colleagues under the European criteria of artistic quality. For them, culture was not something people created on a daily basis but a status one should aim for; and therefore, by emphasizing European culture, they undermined the value of local cultural manifestations outside the European criteria of “high art.”

It seems clear that the faction identified with the ideas of Herrera y Ogazón imagined the congress as a site for the post-revolutionary hegemonic re-legitimization of their pre-revolutionary aesthetic agenda. The great number of papers presented in the congress that shared these notions apparently led the congress in that direction. These papers were immediately and systematically approved by the Evaluation Committees and certified by the General Board. Even those that contradicted each other on minor theoretical notions were approved as long as they did not represent an ideological deviation from their larger Enlightenment project. For example, even though Ignacio


Montiel y López and Flavio Carlos proposed contrastingly different, mutually exclusive ideas on the teaching of rhythm, both their essays were approved and their implementation at the National Conservatory recommended. However, since the differences were only on a superficial, pedagogical level, and did not attempt to challenge traditional European understandings of rhythm, they did not represent a threat to the ideology of those in charge of the congress. Such was not the case when dealing with more defiant theses, since these had to go through many obstacles before being reluctantly accepted or plainly rejected. The study of these papers shows that the re-legitimization attempted by the organizers of the committee was far from taking place during the congress; in fact, their hegemony was being seriously challenged.

The case of Jesús C. Romero is important because it demonstrates that even within the organizing group there were differences that could give rise to heated ideological arguments. Romero submitted a paper titled “La cátedra de la historia crítica de la música en México como base de la justificación de nuestro arte nacional” (A Course on the Critical History of Music in Mexico as the Basis to Justify Our National Art) that boldly challenged unquestioned assumptions about music and nationality. Romero’s thesis proposed that a survey of Mexican composers should be undertaken before anyone could speak of nationalism, requesting that a course on the history of music in Mexico be made part of the curriculum of the National Conservatory. In a motion that questions the European tradition as the only focus of music studies in Mexico, Romero asked:
“Would it be possible that students could learn to love and be solidary with their
tradition when the program [of studies] nullifies and hides their heroes instead of
commending them, a program that instead praises foreigners as the best and
teaches to venerate them as unique?"26

The controversy concerning Romero’s essay was not ignited by his comments against the
mystification of the European tradition –which was not Romero’s intention, since
throughout the paper he praised Mexican composers according to their stylistic
relationship with their European counterparts–, but by a personal quarrel with one of the
members of the Evaluation Committee. Their argument had its roots in personal
differences as well as in the implications Romero’s thesis had for fundamental notions of
nationality and tradition.

Before passing judgment on Romero’s paper, the Evaluation Committee had
already approved a paper by Ernesto Enríquez that also requested the teaching of the
history of music in Mexico at the National Conservatory. Enríquez’s paper proposed,
however, that such material be incorporated into the music history surveys already taught
in the school. Romero, on the other hand, asked for the creation of a class on the history
of music in Mexico independent from the class on European music history. The response
of the Evaluation Committee was the following: “[Mexican] music history does not even
cover eighty years, therefore it is enough to include an ample section on that [subject]
within the general history class, as it has already been approved by this congress.”27

26 Jesús C. Romero, “La cátedra de la historia crítica de la música en México como base de la justificación
de nuestro arte nacional.” Unpublished document. Fondo Escuela Nacional de Música, CESU Archive,
UNAM.
27 “Dictamen que la comisión dictaminadora respectiva formula y presenta a la asamblea para su
Música, CESU Archive, UNAM. The judgment was signed by Rafael J. Tello, Estanislao Mejia, and
Ignacio Montiel y López.
According to Romero, the committee had perpetrated several errors that nullified their judgment. The most important of them was that his paper had been given to Ernesto Enríquez, and that it had been he who, in order to support his own, previously accepted proposal, had written the text of the committee judgment. In the end, the General Board overruled the judgment of the Evaluation Committee; nevertheless, a close reading of the Evaluation Committee’s judgment raises important questions concerning the concepts of nation and national music. Which criteria allowed them to conclude that Mexican music did not have more than eighty years of existence? How were those concepts of national music created and how did they support specific ideological discourses? While Romero’s essay seems to echo Chávez’s notion that “national Mexican music exists as long as a Mexican nationality exists,” the committee’s resolution points toward an understanding of Mexican music as a very specific corpus that might feature very particular aesthetic characteristics—probably showing an assimilation of European techniques and genres. The problem gets more complicated when we question the notion of “Mexican nationality” since that conceptual construction is always contingent upon the historical circumstances that produce it. The controversy and discussions around Romero’s paper show that the hegemonic construction of a Mexican nationality linked to the European Enlightenment project, as proposed by a large faction of the congress members, was indeed being challenged. For Romero, the notion of a Mexican nation was intimately connected to the particular historical-cultural experiences of the people that inhabit the land of the nation-state, and as such, music was Mexican if it was made by those peoples, notwithstanding its relationship with any particular aesthetic.
Romero and Chávez’s ideas ignited a discussion on the particularities of the nation-state and its membership, and as such, they embody the definition of modern institutions as organizations of reflexivity. This characteristic of the congress is in sharp evidence in the arguments and discussions that the papers of Gerónimo Baqueiro Foster (1896-1967), Daniel Castañeda, and Vicente T. Mendoza (1894-1964) triggered, since they implied new and provocative understandings and intersections between ideas of modernity, ethnicity and nation building.

Strongly rooted in the essentialist, teleological, and positivistic premises that permeated Mexican intellectual thought since the last part of the 19th century, Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda presented five papers at the First National Congress of Music: “Doctrina de la no-tonalidad” (Doctrine of Non-Tonality), “Nuevo sistema de harmonía [sic] para cualquier sistema musical” (New Harmonic System for Any Musical System), “Principios técnicos para el folk-lore en general y en particular para el folk-lore mexicano” (Technical Principles for Folklore in General and in Particular for Mexican Folklore), “Doctrina de la subdivision del tono” (Doctrine of the Subdivision of the Whole-Tone), and “Nuevas ideas sobre los instrumentos musicales y nueva técnica para su construcción, estudio y enseñanza” (New Ideas on Music Instruments and New Techniques for Their Construction, Study, and Teaching). The five papers are interrelated, arguing that the Western system of tonality is both the result of a historically systematic process of distorting the overtone series –the interval adjustments that, in order to achieve a well-tempered system, sacrifice the “natural” acoustic perfection of the overtones–, and also that it impoverishes the scalar possibilities of the twelve-tone gamut by reducing it to the major and minor modes. In a statement that resembles the ideas of
their teacher, Julián Carrillo, Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda proposed to “establish a new [musical] doctrine, opposite to the current one, [one that] is in better agreement with [our] times and historic necessities.”

Based on the idea that the overtone series represents the “natural” state of sounds, Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda concluded that it was human nature to gravitate toward a music system based on the overtone series. Therefore, and in order to optimize the possibilities of the twelve-tone gamut, they proposed to re-adjust the twelve pitches of the chromatic scale –and indeed any scale– to a system based on intervals of 1/32 of a tone (a 96-pitch, tempered scale). According to them, in such a system, “being infinite the amount of modes, […] truly there should be no tonality beside the tonality in use at the precise moment of playing a chord, either simultaneously or melodically, for one or two measures, or throughout several measures in a given composition.”

In order to fully develop a non-tonal system, Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda also revised the basic rules of classic harmonic motion, and proposed that a given pitch could be freely harmonized with any chord that included that pitch, be it minor, major, diminished or augmented, as long as the remaining voices of the chord moved in contrary motion. Another particularity of their harmonic system was that according to the different intervalllic relation between their pitches, chords in root position were not considered the same as their inversions. Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda argued that not

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29 Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda, “Doctrina de la no-tonalidad.”
30 Gerónimo Baqueiro Foster and Daniel Castañeda, “Nuevo sistema de armonía para cualquier sistema musical.” Unpublished document. Fondo Escuela Nacional de Música, CESU Archive, UNAM. After a lengthy discussion of classic harmonic practice, Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda concluded that all different rules of harmonic motion could be reduced to the principle of contrary motion. Nevertheless, their conception of contrary motion actually allowed the presence of parallel motion in harmonic sequences where the leap in the bass line was larger than the one in the upper voice or vice versa.
only were the intervallic relations among these chords different, but each of them left a
different psychological impression on the listener, which made the root position and its
inversions into clearly different entities.\footnote{This assertion implies a fundamental denial of Jean-Philippe Rameau’s harmonic notions as exposed in his \textit{Traité de l’harmonie} (1722).}

Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda believed that Western music was in a state of
anarchy and that their system would lead it into its future: in their Comtian rhetoric, the
positive period.\footnote{The references to Comte appear in the manuscripts. According to their teleological vision of history, the theological period was that of plainchant and the metaphysic period was that of Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven. See Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda “Nuevo sistema de armonía para cualquier sistema musical.”} Furthermore, the future implementation of their music system would re-
shape the study of folkloric music.

In “Principios técnicos para el folk-lore en general y en particular para el folk-lore
mexicano,” Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda returned to the idea of the overtone series as
the harmonic principle at the root of human music instinct. They restated their
teleological notion of the history of music as a systematic addition of new overtones in
different periods of history, from the octave and the fifth in plainchant and early
organum, to the chordal use of the chromatic scale in late Romantic German music.
Based on this evolutionist paradigm, they approached the music of non-Western cultures,
defining their degree of evolution according to the number of overtones present in their
scalar systems.

At the core of Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda’s work remained the alterations to
the overtone series found in most non-Western music systems, alterations that make them
impossible to transcribe into the well-tempered system of twelve pitches. According to
them, musicologists faced two problems:
“First, we do not have a gamut that allows us to translate, with sufficient precision, the variety of scales that characterize the music of each people, that mark the phase of their musical evolution and their culture. Second, we lack a doctrine, or better, a principle that could and would work to harmonize any imaginable or possible scale.”

According to Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda, the musicologist that faces this problem has only one option: to translate the folkloric gamut into the well-tempered, 12-pitch scale, and harmonize the folkloric gamut according to the rules of the major and minor tonal system. Such procedure would bring them “success in terms of novelty but failure in terms of folklore.” Once again, Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda proposed the use of a scale based on intervals of 1/32 of a tone, a system that would allow the transcriber to, “more or less, approximately translate the aboriginal melodies, of course, with undeniably better approximations [than with the 12-pitch, well tempered system].” Once the melody is transcribed, the authors proposed that the musicologist should go ahead and harmonize it, although using the elements proper to that scale and following the non-tonal principles exposed in “Nuevo sistema de harmonía para cualquier sistema musical,” instead of using the major or minor scale and traditional classic harmony. The authors suggested these procedures would guarantee that the musicologist reach into the idiosyncrasy, the essence of the culture that produced the music they study. According to

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34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda, by establishing these ideas as education principles at the National Conservatory, Mexico would be “the first country in the world to do true folklore.”  

Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda articulated the Real in the overtone series and the acoustic phenomena they called “natural.” Musical systems are therefore, the result of human imagination, products that mirror the attitude of their creators. They argued that the musical system they proposed is closer to “nature” than any other music system, and not only that, but also that it embraces them all. By stating that their harmonic system would “establish the foundations for the ideal architecture of music,” Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda presented themselves as the modern mediators between the Real and the Imaginary: people who not only intended to guide musicians into the “true” future of music, at least of “true Mexican music,” but also to retroactively rewrite its past. This was probably the most radical implication of their proposal. Since their system was all-embracing, it meant that the music of pre-Columbian civilizations, which, according to them, had been mistakenly Europeanized through transcriptions into the 12-pitch, well-tempered gamut, could only be fully appreciated if their true scales were rewritten and re-harmonized in the new non-tonal system. A new relationship between modernism –non-tonality– and nationalism –folklore– is clear: their modernist system offered the possibility to reflectively rewrite previous discourses of the past. For Baqueiro Foster and

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36 Ibid.
37 Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda, “Nuevo sistema de harmonía para cualquier sistema musical.”
Castañeda, their modernist method was a tool to find the “essence” of Mexicanidad and perform new notions of it in relation to indigenous cultures; as they stated, it was a doctrine in “better agreement with [their] time and historic necessities.”

The provocative notions of modernity and nationality exposed by Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda found no echo in the Evaluation Committee. They rejected the ideas of “Nuevo sistema de harmonía” and “Doctrina de la no-tonalidad” on the grounds that “in order to approach a system of music pedagogy with modern procedures, it is indispensable to deeply know everything related to the teaching procedures of classicism, and the authors have not satisfied the [Evaluation] Committee in this regard.” The Evaluation Committee also rejected the ideas of Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda’s paper on folklore, criticizing the authors for “lacking a solid foundation to establish their proposal, since they not only show their ignorance of the classic principles but also try to hypothetically solve the problem of universal folklore, whose realization they deny.”

However, Daniel Castañeda, as the General Secretary of the congress, was able to revoke the judgment of the Evaluation Committee. The following sentence appears, in pencil, on the lower part of the Evaluation Committee’s reprobatory statement: “The judgment [of the Evaluation Committee] was rejected and the following was approved: That a special class on folklore, based on the principles of the new doctrine, should be created at the National Conservatory.” In a curious move that shows the loopholes in

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38 Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda, “Doctrina de la no-tonalidad.”
39 “Dictamen que rinde la comisión de teoría y composición musicales.” Unpublished document. Fondo Escuela Nacional de Música, CESU Archive, UNAM.
40 “Dictamen sobre la tesis ‘Principios técnicos para el folk-lore en general y en particular para el folk-lore mexicano.’” Unpublished document. Fondo Escuela Nacional de Música, CESU Archive, UNAM.
41 Ibid.
the congress’ system, Castañeda was able to overturn the Evaluation Committee’s judgment on his own work, and in a single act, he revoked the rejection of his folklore and the non-tonality papers.

A close friend and collaborator of Baqueiro Foster, Vicente T. Mendoza was also a student of Carrillo and member of the Sonido Trece group. Following also on the ideas of Carrillo, Mendoza submitted a paper titled “Reformas a la técnica de la composición y nuevas orientaciones estéticas” (Reforms to the Technique of Composition and New Aesthetic Orientations) that proposed similar conclusions to those presented by Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda. According to Mendoza, the overtone series should provide the basis for the study of harmony and the rejection of the major and minor modes, and musical forms should develop out of the study of Mexican folklore. As Ricardo Miranda suggests, Mendoza’s reflection shows him longing for a musical identity, the necessity of an originally Mexican music discourse. Mendoza’s paper, like those of Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda, articulated a new understanding of identity, one that departed from the traditional beliefs of folklore as antithetical to modernism. These musicians proposed a music system that, as an intersection of modernism and tradition, negotiated their differences, a system that not only reflected on the future of the nation, but also looked back and tried to incorporate its past –an imaginary past as mirrored in contemporary folkloric musical practices.

Not surprisingly, the Evaluation Committee, threatened by these ideas, rejected Mendoza’s paper as well, and not satisfied with that, attempted to attack the credibility of

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43 Miranda, Ecos, alientos y sonidos, 177.
Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda based on a technicality. As it turned out, Mendoza did not present the paper at the congress, he requested Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda to present it. On September 13, because Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda had revised the original manuscript, the Evaluation Committee resolved not to pass judgment on Mendoza’s essay. Instead, they requested a special commission to investigate the honorability of Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda, ignoring a letter written by Mendoza that transferred to them the authority to revise and change his work. One day later, without waiting for Mendoza’s reply, the Evaluation Committee prepared a document informing the reader that Mendoza’s paper was unacceptable since he “did not justify his proposition to annul the major and minor modes that work as the foundation of the current music system.”

Only on November 3 did Mendoza reply to the special commission, confirming that Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda were fully authorized by him to perform changes on his paper. The only reason for Mendoza to reply was to clear the name of his friends, since once his paper had been rejected he did not owe anything to the members of the congress. At any rate, the circumstances of this affair show that the radical ideas of these musicians made them \textit{persone non grata} for the dominant academic establishment behind the congress.

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44 “Dictamen que presenta a la consideración del Primer Congreso Nacional de Música la comisión de teoría y composición musicales.” Unpublished document. Fondo Escuela Nacional de Música, CESU Archive, UNAM.
One of the final resolutions of the First National Congress of Music was the creation of a Permanent Commission that would try to put into practice the ideas approved by the Evaluation Committees and the General Board, and organize a second congress. The members elected to be part of the commission were Estanislao Mejía, Daniel Castañeda, Jesús N. Escobar, Luis Sandi, Manuel Bauche Alcalde (later replaced by Mauricio Muñoz, a former student of Mejía), Ernesto Enríquez, Juan León Mariscal and Ignacio Montiel y López; Mejía, as the General Secretary, was the visible head of the group. These members met regularly every Monday and the commission remained active until September 1928.

During the last session of the congress, José Rolón, Mauricio Muñoz, Carlos Samaniego, Julio Escobedo and Jacobo Dale Vuelta proposed the organization of a National Music Competition to be sponsored again by the National University and El Universal. The proposal was approved, and organizing the competition was the first task of the newly established Permanent Commission. By the end of 1926, the National University published a bulletin, announcing a competition opened for performers (pianists, violinists, cellists, and singers), chamber ensembles, military bands, and composers. A quick overview of the compulsory pieces for each category exemplifies the musical ideology that permeated the Permanent Commission, and therefore, the official ideological position of the congress. The names of European composers such as Beethoven, Brahms, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, and Schumann recur over the eleven pages of the bulletin, and it is only in the call for the cello and vocal competitions that Mexican
composers appear. The Sonata for cello and piano by Manuel M. Ponce was the compulsory piece for the cello competition, and works by Gustavo Campa (1863-1934), Rafael J. Tello, Felipe Villanueva (1862-1893), Ernesto Elorduy (1854-1913), Ricardo Castro (1864-1907), and Ponce were required for the vocal competition. For the military bands, competition pieces by Velino M. Preza (1873-1946), and Gabriel Parés were the required compositions. With the exception of Ponce’s, the aesthetic of the Mexican composers represented in the Permanent Commission’s call is rather conservative for 1920s Mexico. Beside Ponce, only Campa and Tello were alive at the time, but their musical tastes could not be more distant from the modernist manifestations of Carrillo and his pupils (Baqueiro Foster and Mendoza), the avant-garde music of Chávez, or even the modernist but “correct” musical practices of Ponce; not to mention that Campa and Tello were among the most vocal opponents of folk music.

The call for scores was designed to show an interest in Mexican folklore that, besides Baqueiro Foster, Castañeda, and Mendoza’s papers, was rather absent from the discussions of the congress as I have shown. Nevertheless, the populist atmosphere that reigned in the country since the early 1920s, first encouraged by private enterprises, and later appropriated by the populist governments of Álvaro Obregón and Plutarco Elías Calles, made the inclusion of the folklorist rhetoric in the call a necessary and mostly pragmatic decision. Therefore, the composition competition was announced as follows:

“[…] the goal of this competition is to guide our production toward the following goals: I. – To know and take full advantage of our folkloric songs, and to ignite the production of music with their character. II. – To make Mexican music of national character that, by the choice of rhythms, timbres, expression, realizations [sic], et.
al., is different and with [its own] personality. III – To strongly support such national music as well as a complete compositional technique in order to create a Mexican music school.

The composition competition had two categories, one for folkloric symphonic poems – which were not actual examples of folk music, but rather folk-inspired works still anchored in the Western European music tradition—, and the other for polyphonic works of at least three instruments. The criteria for the selection of the winning symphonic poem were “originality and folk character.” The goal of the second category was to stimulate “the combination of ‘high-art’ polyphonic forms and songs, dances, musical fragments, etc, that are customarily considered of national treatment or character.”

The jury of the composition competition met on October 1927 at the National Conservatory of Music. The jurors were Eduardo Gabrielli, Pedro Valdés Fraga (1860-1938), Aurelio Barrios y Morales (1882-1943), Alberto Flachebba (1883-?), and Jesús M. Acuña (1879-?), with Estanislao Mejía and Ignacio Montiel y López representing the Permanent Commission. For the first category of the competition, José Rolón (1876-1945) received the first prize for *El festín de los enanos*, the second prize was not awarded and the third prize was for Candelario Huízar’s (1883-1970) *Imágenes*. In the second category, the first and second prizes were not awarded and the third prize went to Alfonso de Elías (1902-1984) for Variations on a Mexican Theme; José F. Vázquez and Rafael Adame (1905-ca. 1963) received mentions for their Suite for string instruments and *Sinfonía folklórica* for military band respectively.

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45 Convocatoria para el concurso de composición, piano, violín, violonchelo, canto, conjunto de cámara y música militar, que la Comisión Permanente del Primer Congreso Nacional de Música, bajo el auspicio de la Universidad Nacional y el diario “El Universal” hace a los músicos mexicanos (México: Publicaciones de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1926), 4.

46 Ibid.
Rolón’s *El festín de los enanos* was a symphonic poem inspired by Paul Dukas’ *L’Apprenti Sorcier* (1897). Ricardo Miranda has already pointed out that Rolón’s work cannot be identified with the efforts for an indigenous nationalism stressed by muralist artists such as Diego Rivera or José Clemente Orozco and stereotypically exemplified with Chávez’s *El fuego nuevo*, nor with the modernist-folkloric ideas of Carrillo’s students, and not even with the folklorist ideas developed by Ponce before the 1920s. Miranda suggests that Rolón’s triumph was a victory for a different imaginary vision of the nation-state, the vision of those considered reactionary, the artists from the Cristero regions of Mexico, who “looked for a very different image of Mexico and *lo mexicano* [Mexican things] to the one conceived in the center of the country.”

I find Rolón’s to be the most interesting case among the winners of the competition. Since his work clearly offered yet another, different notion of the nation-state, its character and that of its members –one that came from the margins of the country, since Rolón was a composer from Guadalajara and not from Mexico City, the political and cultural center of the country–, it reinforces my claim that the dominant discourse on nationality was the result of practices of hegemonic negotiation among a variety of imaginary notions of the nation.

On September 3, 1928, the Permanent Commission presented a document detailing the work done during their term. The document includes information pertaining to the attempts to put into practice the proposals approved at the First National Congress of Music. Although Mejía and Sandi claimed that they pushed for the inclusion of the microtonal ideas of Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda as part of the acoustics course in the new curriculum of the National Conservatory, they were never accepted. The class on the

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history of music in Mexico that Romero and Enríquez proposed was not created at the National Conservatory, at least not up until 1928, when the term of the commission ended. Regarding Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda’s ideas on folklore, the study of folk music was incorporated into the curriculum of the composition degree, although not following the modernist perspective proposed by Baqueiro Foster and Castañeda.

V

A complete identification with the Real is never possible. This failure of the subject to completely identify himself or herself with the Real, the negativity of identity, translates into an inability to acquire a complete knowledge of himself or herself. For Judith Butler, this failure of identification motivates subjects to revise the covert collaborative relations with power that create hegemony.48 The discussions and arguments that took place in the congress present it as a site of hegemonic contestation in Butler’s sense: each of the different ideological positions behind the papers is each an incomplete account of the nation-state, the object of desire of the congress, the Real. The impossibility of fully representing this object of desire forces the competing ideologies to enter a process of hegemonic negotiation. Those who, from a position of power, attempted to make the congress into a re-validation of their aesthetic credo—to make their imaginary versions of the Real into symbolic representations—had to negotiate their hegemony with the groups that used the congress to contest those agendas. The result was

a redefinition of power positions, a re-structuring of the Mexican music scene that had immediate consequences on the activities organized by the Permanent Commission of the First National Congress of Music.

Against the inherited rhetoric that narrates a nationalistic-indigenous musical rhetoric as a direct and univocal result of the revolution, the First National Music Congress shows that such discourse was far from being a representation symbolically shared by Mexican artists and intellectuals in the 1920s. Indeed, Mexico was inundated with a large variety of imagined versions of the nation-state, nationality and modernity, and in fact, if there was a hegemonic discourse to be contested it was that of the group of musicians who had been in power since the early 20th century. However, this contestation did not take place as an imposition from above, it was not a political discourse dictated by the new government but a process of negotiation performed by intellectuals of many different paths.

The First National Congress of Music was born as an institution that would perform the symbolization of a specific imaginary discourse of the Real, the nation-state. The failure of that discourse to fully identify the Real made the congress a failed performative in those terms. However, the congress could not be considered a failed performative in as much as its existence performed the failure of identification of that hegemonic discourse, and allowed for its contestation. In other words, the existence of the congress facilitated the contestation of the hegemonic discourse that the organizers of the congress attempted to revalidate. The reflexivity inherent in the congress as a modern
institution made it a multi-lecture machine, a site where multiple discourses about the nation’s embodiment of tradition and modernity clashed, and eventually led to the post-revolutionary re-writing of those same notions.
On February 5, 1933, Rafael Adame, a prize-winner in the composition competition organized by the First National Congress of Music, presented a recital of his music at the Anfiteatro de la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria in Mexico City. Adame performed his Guitar Concerto (1930), a piece that according to him was an example of the kind of work required from a modern nationalist composer, one that “assimilate[s] Mexican mestizo folklore] and produce[s] original works by applying higher polyphonic and symphonic techniques.”\(^1\) The next day, Gerónimo Baqueiro Foster published a harsh review of Adame’s nationalist ideal:

> “Is it possible to understand a process of mestizaje by ignoring the indigenous materials that served as foundation to the foreign material, and that [such mestizaje] owes its existence to that mixture? If we answer positively, Adame’s nationalism is just a weak essay. Following his criteria, on a different level, we would have to ignore our native cultures with all their extraordinary racial strength, to build a country based on the mestizo.”\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Rafael Adame, Program notes for the recital of February 5, 1933, at the Anfiteatro de la Escuela Nacional Preparatoria.

\(^2\) Gerónimo Baqueiro Foster, “La despedida de Rafael Adame, guitarrista, chelista y compositor,” *Excélsior*, February 6, 1933.
Baqueiro Foster’s review is a good measure of the new idea of nationalism that dominated by the early 1930s. Contrary to the different approaches to folklore proposed at the First National Congress of Music six years earlier, Baqueiro’s emphasis on indigenous culture reveals the ideological changes operating in early 1930s Mexico: namely, the strengthening of the idea of indigenism.

Indigenism was not a new notion in Mexican intellectual life. We have not only Manuel Orozco y Berra’s research during the 1860’s as evidence of an early interest in the indigenous cultures of Mexico, but also the recreation of Aztec architecture and the statue of Cuahutemoc, the last Aztec Emperor, used by Porfirio Díaz’s regime to represent Mexico at the Paris Universal Fair in 1889. However, these early manifestations were only isolated examples of an intellectual interest in Mexico’s pre-Columbian past within a dominantly Europeanized cultural life. It was only at the end of the 1920s that the Mexican government adopted indigenism as a rhetoric to validate its claims to legitimacy, and initiated official efforts to mystify it as a discourse of identity cohesion.

The indigenist ideology for which the Mexican revolution is known was not only not a product of the revolution, but was in fact adopted as a state official discourse more than ten years after the armed struggle had ended. Indeed, as Rick López states, the earlier efforts towards recognizing the indigenous Mexico came from private enterprises. Mauricio Tenorio suggests that in the early 1920s the concepts of nationalism and national culture had no fixed meaning, and corroborates that the earlier indigenist

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propaganda came from independent entrepreneurs and not the Mexican government.\textsuperscript{5} Evidence of this early private support for the idea of indigenism is found in the advertisement of companies such as El Buen Tono (cigars) and El Águila (oil), the magazines *Ethnos* (founded by the anthropologist Manuel Gamio) and *Mexican Folkways* (a bilingual magazine founded and published in Mexico City by the American anthropologist Frances Toor), or the India Bonita pageant (organized by *El Universal* in 1921). All of the aforementioned activities took place outside of the governmental ideological framework that favored a Hispanic view of Mexican culture, as seen in the policies of Education Minister José Vasconcelos. Indeed, as I have shown in the previous chapters, achieving a modern, cosmopolitan nation-state was the goal that dominated cultural and intellectual life in the early 1920s; the modernist and avant-garde searches of Mexican artists and musicians reflected these interests.

In fact, the early 1920s were a period of hegemonic definition. On the one hand, the government supported a pro-Hispanic ideology, while on the other, a group of intellectuals and the media pushed an incipient indigenism. Representing the nation became an important aspect of this hegemonic struggle, it is as part of this endeavor for representation that the ideas of modernity, modernism, avant-gardism, and indigenism intersected, provoking a process of negotiation that, at the end of the 1920s, resulted in the hegemony of Mexico’s particular discourse of modernism-indigenism. In his study of the representation of the Mexican nation at the Seville Worlds Fair of 1929, Mauricio Tenorio shows that by the end of the decade the Mexican government supported the glorification of Mexico’s indigenous past. According to Tenorio, Mexico was presented

at the Seville Fair as “experimentally indigenist,” and the history of the nation was written as a long preparation, as a teleological harbinger of the revolution. The nationalist propaganda reached a new peak in 1930, when the newly founded National Revolutionary Party published the official guidelines for its weekly program *Domingos Culturales* (Cultural Sundays), making the declaration that:

> “foreign music whose morbid character depresses the spirit of our people must be eliminated absolutely. We do not find sufficient reason to prefer foreign genres when we possess a unique richness in national arts, songs that have no equal and that are the direct expression of popular soul.”

The rhetorical rejection of foreign culture of this statement stood for more than a simple emphasis on the national, it was actually a call for a reevaluation of the pre-revolutionary regime and its affairs with European culture.

I have mentioned that the nation-state needed to create a myth of origin that validated its claims as the “teleologically authentic Mexican state.” The creation of the hegemonic myth of indigenism as the origin of the Mexican nation was the result of a reflexive exercise that involved the state, independent intellectual elites (some working under the auspices of the government, although not identified with their ideological standpoint), and the capitalist entrepreneurs that controlled the media. Hegemony was

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achieved, as Gramsci would put it, as a “universality contaminated by particularity,”⁸ a consensus and negotiation among a variety of particular discourses and imaginaries of the nation, as opposed to a single, univocal discourse dictated by the state.

As is the case with most myths of origin, the ideologies and discourses of intellectuals and artists of the early post-revolution period were re-written in order to make them fit the indigenist model. Therefore, the retroactive establishment of the indigenist discourse homogenized the wide variety of artistic and intellectual manifestations that took place during the 1920s in Mexico. A good example of this performative action is the way José Vasconcelos’ intellectual efforts and educational crusade were transformed into the foundation of an indigenism that could not stand further from his own vision of a hybrid, although primarily Hispanic country.⁹ The same is true for the modernist and avant-garde musical activities of composers like Julián Carrillo, Manuel M. Ponce, and Carlos Chávez.

I have argued that Carrillo’s, Ponce’s, and Chávez’s styles are the result of performative acts of self-definition. I have taken their styles as prime examples of performative composition, and maintained that such exercises negotiated an identity for each of these composers within the historical contingencies of their time. I have insisted that as individual artists, these composers developed musical styles that contested mainstream discourses of identity while constructing their own stance in a struggle for hegemony. Neil Larsen states that “individuals, as social forms, mediate narration

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I suggest that a musical language—a result of the process of composition—is a representation of such individual mediation. In this context, style is the consequence of a subject’s understanding of the contingencies that shape the nation at a specific socio-historical moment; as such, the creation of a musical style allows composers not only to make sense of the ideological web that surrounds them, but also to politically position themselves in relation to those contingencies. As Judith Butler proposes, performativity and hegemony “emphasize the way in which the social world is made—and new social possibilities emerge—at various levels of social action through a collaborative relation with power.”

If a national hegemony has to always be negotiated from a variety of imaginary discourses of the nation, taking into account individual discourses of identity, how do we explain the hegemonic representation of Ponce and Chávez as nationalist composers, and Carrillo’s absence from the Mexican music canon? Are we to consider their exercises in performativity as failed performatives? Did their particular imaginary visions of modernity fail to enter symbolically mediated discourses of the nation? I propose that each case needs to be studied in relation to the broader process of hegemonic construction of musical national identity. Such exploration shows that their individual aesthetic discourses played an important role not only as tools of self-definition and identification in the 1920s, but also as positive and negative

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counterweights in the definition of the national hegemonic discourse. As Mauricio
Tenorio claims, the place of different individual identities within a national image is
continuously negotiated in the framework of modern nationalism.12

I

Based on the revolutionary regime’s rhetorical and aesthetic continuities with pre-
revolutionary Mexico, some scholars downplay the importance of the Mexican revolution
in the development of Mexican nationalism. Ricardo Miranda, for instance, has stated
that “since the setting up of the concept of nation reflects an order of idealist ideas,
nationalism [in Mexico] can only be understood as the last reduct of romanticism,
therefore, and against what is usually thought, the Mexican revolution had no major
impact on that nationalism.”13 Indeed, the revolutionary rhetoric did not develop Mexican
nationalism; as I have shown, there were many actors involved in shaping and
implementing a nationalist discourse in Mexico, and many of them played key roles in
the country’s intellectual life before the revolution. As I have shown in the introduction,
identifiable forms of nationalism in Mexico can be traced back to the early liberal
attempts to establish a modern nation in the mid 19th century. Therefore, the importance
of studying the revolution’s role in the creation of a Mexican discourse of identity—a
Mexican nationalism if you will—does not lay in the truthfulness or falseness of the myth
of it as the origin of a “true” Mexican identity, but rather in the fact that the revolution is

a fundamental contingency in shaping our current understanding of Mexican identity. As Stuart Hall states, “identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historic and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies.”\(^{14}\) In other words, taking into account the Mexican revolution helps us understand Mexican nationalism as a specific discourse and even as myth, fundamental in the \textit{a posteriori} performance of pre-revolutionary traditions, and not merely as a teleological goal as those performed traditions would argue.

According to Roland Barthes, myth is a system of communication, a symbolic construct—culturally mediated—that naturalizes history by abolishing the complexity of human acts and organizing a “world which is without contradictions [because] it does away with all dialectics.”\(^{15}\) Myth gives things a natural and eternal justification, “it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but of a statement of fact.”\(^{16}\) The myth of origin of the Mexican revolution works in just such a way, it does not explain but rather simplifies the complex process of hegemonic struggle that took place in Mexico at the end of the armed phase of the revolution. Miranda disregards the revolution because he believes nationalism would have developed in Mexico with or without it. Nevertheless, nationalism is an ideology, and as such, it is characterized as a false universalization of particular imagined versions of a nation; it is in the definition of nationalism as one such discourse that the revolution played a decisive role because it hegemonically rewrote particular understandings of the nation in order to make itself into

\(^{15}\) Roland Barthes, Mythologies (London: Vintage, 1972), 143.
\(^{16}\) \textit{Ibid.}
a nationally universal ideology. Thus, to understand the validity of Carrillo, Ponce and Chavez’s works as performative acts we should study the hegemonic performative discourse –the myth– that overruled the particularities and rhetorical power of their self-determining actions, a hegemony that was, undeniably, the result of the contingencies created by the Mexican revolution. Summarizing, the importance of the Mexican revolution as mediation of the nation lays in the fact that the revolutionary discourse shapes our current understanding of pre-revolutionary events; the Mexican revolution performed Mexican history and the Mexican nation for us –and in that sense, it functions as a myth.

I have studied the First National Congress of Music of 1926 as a reflection of the struggle to define and hegemonize ideas of nation, tradition, and modernity. The study shows that a process of hegemonic negotiation took place towards the end of the 1920s, and that such process had to be channeled through new or renewed institutions that would in turn legitimize the produced discourses. In 1928, as a result of a conflict among “classic” and “jazz” musicians, the Orquesta Sinfónica de México (OSM) was restructured, and Carlos Chávez, who had recently returned from New York, was named conductor of the orchestra by the Mexico City union of musicians.\textsuperscript{17} The same year, Chávez was appointed dean of the National Conservatory of Music. The composer remained Dean of the Conservatory until 1933, and conductor of the OSM until 1949; during that period he was also Head of the Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Education (1934), and was a fundamental figure in the creation of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Institute of Fine Arts), of which he became its first director in

1947. The extraordinary abilities of Chávez as an organizer and politician were fundamental in establishing a new form of relationship between the state and the intellectual elite of the country; as such, Chávez became a key figure in the negotiation of the hegemonic nationalist discourse of the Mexican state.

I have discussed Chávez in terms of multiple identity, and claimed that it was this condition that enabled him to establish political alliances that made possible his access to different circles of power. I propose that Chávez’s multiple identity was a strategy that allowed him to become a key negotiator in the process of hegemonic construction that took place in Mexico in the late 1920s and early 1930s. We must not forget that Chávez was appointed dean of the Conservatory and conductor of the OSM upon his return to Mexico, after living in New York for almost two years. In a way, he returned to a music scene that was quite different from the one he had left in 1926. The National Congress of Music had triggered a number of discussions on the identity and modernity of national music in general, and on the condition of the Mexican music mainstreams in particular – education, musical organizations and institutions, etc. Chávez had not been able to take part in these discussions; however, through his appointments at the National Conservatory and the OSM, he was able to articulate the anxieties expressed by both the modernist and traditionalist factions of the congress, as well as the increasing interest in indigenism by intellectuals and civil society alike. As dean of the Conservatory, Chávez addressed the necessity to reform and modernize the curriculum of the school. As conductor and artistic director of the OSM, he was able to establish regular concert
seasons, perform music by Mexican composers,\textsuperscript{18} and give Mexican premieres of works by some of the most important international modernist composers, among others Copland, Hindemith, Honegger, Kódaly, Milhaud, Schoenberg, Shostakovich, Stravinsky, and Varèse. As both dean of the Conservatory and Head of the Fine Arts Department of the Ministry of Education, Chávez also addressed the necessity to conduct serious musicological research on the indigenous and mestizo cultures of Mexico. Whether, he was aware of it or not, Chávez’s policies at the Conservatory, the OSM, and the Fine Arts Department provided solutions to many of the problems formulated during the congress of 1926. At the same time, the indigenist rhetoric slowly but surely made its way into Chávez’s course of action, as can be observed in his call to collect and preserve indigenous music and musical instruments of all parts of the country.\textsuperscript{19} Chávez’s work as politician was indeed a construction of hegemony, a performance of the nation-state that took into account –consciously or unconsciously– many of the different imaginary visions of that nation alive in the late 1920s and negotiated a complex hegemonic discourse that brought together diverse accounts of modernity, indigenism and nationality. Nevertheless, Chávez’s performance of the nation was also a performance of himself. As Vicente T. Mendoza stated, “Mexico’s musical development during the

\textsuperscript{18} According to García Morillo, Chávez conducted works by several of his contemporary Mexican composers, among others Rafael Adame, Daniel Ayala, Miguel Bernal Jiménez, Salvador Contreras, Alfonso de Elías, Blas Galindo, Rodolfo Halffter, Eduardo Hernández Moncada, Candelario Huízar, Carlos Jiménez Mabarak, Juan León Mariscal, Juan Pablo Moncayo, José Pomar, Manuel M. Ponce, Silvestre Revueltas, José Rolón, Luis Sandi, and Rafael J. Tello. See García Morillo, \textit{Op. cit.}, 142. The list shows a wide variety of aesthetic, intellectual, and even political tendencies; from pre-Revolutionary masters such as Tello and Ponce, to winners of the National Congress of Music Competition (de Elías, Huízar, Rolón), from members of his own inner circle (Ayala, Contreras, Galindo, Moncayo), to militant communist artists (Pomar and Revueltas), and even composers close to Carrillo and his microtonal crusade (Adame).

\textsuperscript{19} These incipient indigenist activities were publicized by Chávez himself in an article titled “La música indígena” [Indigenous Music] published on August 26, 1934 in \textit{El Universal}. 200
second quarter of the [20th] century owes a lot to Chávez, and he, at the same time, owes much of his own work to Mexico; in building a Mexican music scene, Chávez greatly developed his own musical personality.²⁰

To understand the reasons behind our current view of Chávez as a nationalist composer we must revisit the idea of multiple identity and Chávez’s cosmopolitan desire to navigate among different music cultures. As I have shown in my study of his avant-garde music, Chávez was interested in establishing musical alliances that would gain him access to the American music mainstream. In the early 1920s, it was his identification as an avant-garde composer that gained him the respect of the New York modernist scene. However, in the 1930s his identification with the Mexican revolutionary regime and its indigenist ideology allowed him to redefine his artistic identity in that market. As Leonora Saavedra points out, Chávez performed his own identity as an indigenist-nationalist artist and constructed himself as the Other for the imagination of American audiences, in order to enter that market.²¹ Chávez’s performance of himself as an indigenist was an exercise in strategic essentialism that attempted to fulfill the American audiences’ imagination of Mexicans as the Other. By fulfilling their imaginary construction, Chávez was not only gaining access to that market, but also reinforcing their centered notions of self-identity. Therefore, as Mendoza asserted, Chávez’s construction of hegemony in Mexico translated into his own identification as the exotic Other in the United States.

The reflexive power of the Mexican and American identity discourses is undeniable, and Chávez’s key role in both of them positively overturned his previous identification with the avant-garde while preventing his later modernist aesthetic from becoming part of either the Mexican or the American canon. In Mexico, he became the perfect figure to retroactively symbolize the revolution’s indigenist myth of origin; in the US he became an example of the Other, that against which American identity is negatively defined—hence the emphasis Mexican and American historians have placed on works such as El fuego nuevo (1921), Los cuatro soles (1926), Sinfonía india (1936) and Xochipilli-Macuilxóchitl (1940), compositions that highlight both the American and Mexican stereotypes.

Nevertheless, Chávez’s later performance of himself as a nationalist does not mean that his earlier self-construction as an avant-gardist was a failed performative. It was that early identity which allowed him to be recognized as an artist, and eventually led him to the power positions he occupied in his country. When analyzed in a historically localized context, Chávez’s early performative exercises appear as fundamental strategies that successfully allowed the composer to survive and navigate the highly complex and contested web of ideologies that permeated Mexican cultural and intellectual life in the 1920s.

In 1926, Julián Carrillo made what would be his most injurious political mistake, one that had consequences for the future reception of his works and legacy by the Mexican public. He decided to quit his post as conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO), a position that up to that moment had kept him as one of the most important figures of the country’s music scene, and move to New York to further his
“microtonal revolution.” We must remember that although he was in the middle of defending his *Sonido Trece* from a highly publicized, Carrillo’s post at the NSO gave him a privileged status that enabled him to respond to his enemies. By leaving the country and disappearing from a cultural life that was rapidly changing Carrillo lost his political influence in Mexico. We could argue that, since he was an influential character, he thought he could eventually return to his country and reclaim his place. This was his most important miscalculation: Carrillo was not able to see the political changes that were already taking place in Mexico, and when he returned three years later, he found a radically different music scene.

Unfortunately for Carrillo, when he returned to Mexico, Carlos Chávez was the figure that had come to dominate the most important musical institutions of the country. Carrillo and Chávez were separated not only by a large generational gap—the former was 24 years older than the latter—but also by a series of personal disagreements, the most visible being the heated public discussion of 1924 that I have discussed in chapter one. In fact, the first public confrontation between Carrillo and Chávez took place around 1920, when Carrillo was conductor of the NSO. According to Carrillo’s recollection, the problem started when José Vasconcelos requested his permission for Chávez to rehearse one of his new compositions with the orchestra. Carrillo wrote the following:

“Chávez had more than twenty rehearsals and was still unable to conduct the orchestra. His lack of ability was evident; a boy with mediocre knowledge could have done it in two rehearsals.”
I was disturbed by the waste of time and told him: ‘look young man, I believe it would be practical if you first take some conducting lessons, then you can go on with your work.’

The relationship between Carrillo and Chávez was problematic from its very beginning, but it reached its most tense moments in the early 1930s, when Chávez, excused and sheltered by the project of national hegemonic construction, viciously attacked Carrillo and the rest of the pre-revolutionary composers, questioning their musical representation of national identity.

In 1930, embracing the nationalist spirit of the official party’s *Domingos Culturales* guidelines, Carlos Chávez published an article that at the same time publicly established the ideological basis of the new nationalist Mexican music and rejected the aesthetic credo of the older generation of composers:

> “Today, after living the new phases of the 1910 Mexican revolution that have been decisive in establishing our own criteria and culture, musical nationalism in Mexico could be determinedly channeled. [Mexican nationalism] should be considered the fruit of a balanced *mestizaje* in which the personal expression of the artist is not absorbed by Europeism or by Mexican regionalism. We should recognize our own, temporally eclipsed tradition. We should get soaked in it, having personal contact with the indigenous and *mestizo* expressions of our soil, without forgetting European music –which is universal human culture–, but not through the perception of German and French conservatories as it has been done up to this day, but through its multiple manifestations, since antiquity. We deny the professionalist [sic] music composed in Mexico before us because it is not the fruit of a true Mexican tradition.”

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Chávez’s rejection of pre-revolutionary music was even more specific in an article published in 1932. The target of Chávez’s attack could not be more specific considering that Carrillo was the only composer educated in Leipzig:

“It is not true that we are trying to destroy the academicians. What destroys them is the indifference of our times towards them. In Mexico, we no longer buy that; outside of Mexico, who in Germany would be interested in the music of a Mexican who imitates the German masters? Our eminent academicians have spent the best years of their lives studying in Leipzig, learning to write suites and symphonies in the German style; here and in Germany we prefer Bach, we prefer the genuinely German; that is all.”24

In these two articles, Chávez reproduced the essence of Melesio Morales’ 1905 criticism of Carrillo’s early music (which I have reproduced in Chapter 1), repeating the idea that Carrillo’s music was nothing but an imitation of foreign models and adding a few new elements that allowed him to support a political agenda based on an essentialist understanding of identity. This essentialist perspective was adopted by government, artists, and intellectuals alike in order to support the idea that Mexico’s indigenous heritage was the “true,” “authentic” source of Mexican identity. The new foundational argument attempted to discursively sever the obvious links and continuities between the past and the revolutionary regime, and perform a new discourse of nationality. Carrillo’s

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music was systematically excluded from concerts and academic discussions based on the idea that it was openly European and could not have a place within the new state ideology.\textsuperscript{25}

In 1941, the Spanish musicologist Otto Mayer-Serra published \textit{Panorama de la música mexicana}, the most important and comprehensive text on the history of music in independent Mexico presented up to that moment. The text effects a teleological understanding of the nationalist movement as the result of the maturity attained by Mexican music by virtue of its link to the new state ideology. Therefore, the book is an apology for the hegemonic, indigenist discourse of the 1930s and 1940s; and as such, it reproduces Chávez’s criticism of Carrillo, excluding him \textit{de facto} from the official canon of Mexican music. In his book, Mayer-Serra only mentions Carrillo to say that:

“[it was] in [Ricardo Castro that] the process to introduce foreign ways in Mexican musical art should have culminated. The composers who followed that path, such as Julián Carrillo, Rafael J. Tello and others, could only introduce new European elements –the style of Wagner and Strauss, or French Impressionism–; but they did not achieve a genuine or representative art.”\textsuperscript{26}

We should know three important details to understand Mayer-Serra’s position in this text. First, he had arrived in Mexico as a Republican refugee in 1939, only three years before writing his book, and might not have had a clear vision of the power struggles surrounding him. Second, most of his informants were composers that, in one way or another, were related to the “official” culture of the revolution (Manuel M. Ponce, Carrillo believed that Chávez lacked the qualifications to be Dean of the National Conservatory and considered him an inefficient educator and poor administrator. See Ernesto Solís Winkler, “La revolución del Sonido 13. Un ensayo de explicación social” Master of History Thesis, Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México (1996), 150-151.

\textsuperscript{26} Otto Mayer-Serra, \textit{Panorama de la música mexicana. Desde la Independencia hasta la actualidad} (México: El Colegio de México, 1941), 93.
Silvestre Revueltas, Gerónimo Baqueiro Foster, Luis Sandi, and Blas Galindo, among others). Third, the book was written under the auspices of Alfonso Reyes and El Colegio Nacional –previously known as Casa de España–, an institution founded by Spanish Republican refugees, whose ideology resonated with the revolutionary discourse of the Mexican government. Taking into account these circumstances, Mayer-Serra’s non-critical support of the dominant ideology in his adoptive country is not unexpected.

Mayer-Serra’s interpretation excludes Carrillo from the history of Mexican music following the same criteria established by Chávez ten years earlier: Carrillo’s music was not Mexican because it did not fulfill the expectations of what “authentic” Mexican art should be like. Carrillo’s music did not follow the indigenist-nationalist model proposed by the hegemonic discourse nor did it occupy a position of Otherness in relation to the European musical paradigm. The nationalist-indigenist discourse suggested an essentialist understanding of identity and intended to invoke a common past, a “true” and univocal shared origin. Under this paradigm, identity is understood as a natural and fixed category; but since identity is defined by difference, it also writes those who do not belong to the central group. Following this negative logic, the music and activities of Julián Carrillo were cataloged as examples of what was “not to be Mexican.”

Nevertheless, Carrillo’s self-performative actions were successful on a transnational level. It is true that after his return to Mexico in 1929 he lost his political power and could no longer influence the musical scene of the country. However, his practice of self-definition, fundamental in creating a radically new place for him in Mexico after the revolution, successfully performed him on the international music scene
as a cosmopolitan modernist composer. During the early 1930s, Carrillo still tried to further his modernist cause in Mexico. In 1930, he organized the Sonido 13 Symphony Orchestra and attempted to convince the Mexican government to fund an international tour for the ensemble. Nevertheless, the increasing lack of interest in his microtonal crusade and a decidedly nationalist music scene in Mexico forced him to shift his strategy and focus on international instead of local recognition of his work. While in New York, Carrillo had met Leopold Stokowski, who became genuinely interested in his music, establishing an important relationship that resulted in the premiere of Carrillo’s Concertino (1927), conducted by Stokowski in Philadelphia, and further collaborations between the two of them when the conductor visited Mexico in 1931. The support of the famous conductor meant to Carrillo a considerable amount of international exposure of his music and ideas.

By the 1940s, Carrillo centered his attention on the design and construction of a series of microtonal pianos, which in the early 1950s gained him the acknowledgment of the European mainstream and access to their musical institutions. Carrillo’s music, neglected in his native country, was performed, printed, and recorded in Europe and he was awarded a medal by the Belgian government at the Brussels World’s Fair in 1958 for

27 José Antonio Alcaraz, the Mexican composer and music critic, exemplified Carrillo’s important status among European avant-garde composers by stating that he had to go to France to learn of Carrillo and his music. See José Antonio Alcaraz, Reflexiones sobre el nacionalismo musical mexicano (México: Editorial Patria, 1991), 41.
28 See Julián Carrillo, Julián Carrillo. Testimonio de una vida, 253-254
his microtonal pianos—the same Fair where Varèse presented his *Poème électronique* at the Philips Pavilion designed by Le Corbusier. Furthermore, Carrillo’s shift of interest from the local to the international is clear in the following quotation:

> “Jean Etienne Marie, the musicographer, suggests to me something transcendental: to suppress from my books, due to the polemics, everything that could lead to the belief that they were written solely for Mexico, which is not true, since the universal character of my postulates give them the right to embrace the mentality of the whole world. When I get back to Mexico I will proceed to clean my books in such a way, eliminating what undeservedly honors those who are mentioned there.”

Carrillo’s self-representation as a cosmopolitan modernist composer was certainly successful outside of Mexico; if anything, the failed aspect of his performative exercise of self-identification is connected to his attempt to write himself as a cosmopolitan nationalist in his own country. In this case, Carrillo’s idea that uniquely Mexican cultural artifacts—such as his *Sonido 13*—had to be produced and negotiated within the dominant European culture underlies the notion that identity is the result of complex processes of transculturation. The reason for the local failure of Carrillo’s performative is that such a fluid understanding of identity strongly conflicted with the essentialist conception of a fixed, “authentic” source of Mexican identity that rested at the core of the indigenist-nationalist discourse. Carrillo’s inability to compromise in the construction of a hegemonic pact made his exercise in performative composition a failure at the local level.

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30 Tellingly, the pianos were not exhibited at the Mexican Pavilion but rather at the Belgian Royal Palace, although within the perimeter of the Fair.
national level. However, the same transculturating qualities that alienated him from the Mexican canon gained him the respect of the 1950s and 1960s community of microtonal-oriented composers, who found in him a precursor of their avant-garde searches.

The case of Ponce’s performance as a nationalist at the expense of his modernist aesthetic is even more complex than Carrillo’s exclusion from the Mexican canon, although it follows a similar path. Manuel M. Ponce had been Chávez’s piano teacher between 1910 and 1914; this early association sealed the long-term fate of their relationship, for Chávez continuously wandered between embracing and rejecting Ponce as a metaphorical father figure—as one of the most important representatives of the pre-revolutionary music scene—and as a personal artistic father figure.

During Chávez’s nationalist campaign of the early 1930s, he was careful not to attack Ponce, who was still living in Paris and would not return to Mexico until 1933. Among the series of articles that Chávez wrote between 1929 and 1932 to criticize what he considered to be the remains of the old regime—institutions and individuals alike—, Ponce was mentioned only once. In “La música propia de México” [Mexico’s own music], the same article that rejected pre-revolutionary music as non-Mexican, Chávez defined Ponce as the instigator of what he considered the “third phase” of Mexican music, a period that, according to him reflected the nationalist desire of the Mexican revolution.32 Chávez was careful not to mention any of the modernist aesthetic ideas that had concerned Ponce for more than twenty years and avoided mentioning the aesthetic interests developed by his former teacher in the 1920s.

The relationship between Chávez and Ponce began to deteriorate with the increase of Chávez’s political power in Mexico by the mid-1930s. A letter from Andrés Segovia to Ponce, written in 1933, suggests the changing mood of the rapport between the two composers:

“Give me news of your activities in Mexico and do not forget to tell me which individuals of those who at first toasted you with so much affection, go about designing or joining in jealousies and opposition. I am curious to know what new system of cunning your ‘superior’ Sr. Chávez has employed to harass you and exalt himself.”

Although Ponce’s opinion does not appear in the text, we may infer it from Segovia’s remarks since it is unlikely he would have made such comments knowing that Ponce would not agree with them or at least share them at some basic level. In November 1936, Cultura Musical, a magazine published under the supervision of Ponce, published an interview with Silvestre Revueltas (1899-1940) where the interviewer, Juan León Mariscal called “semi-man” a former collaborator of Revueltas at the OSM. Chávez felt this comment was aimed at him –Chávez had invited Revueltas to collaborate with him at the OSM and ended their relationship after a series of professional and personal differences that were public knowledge by this time– and requested Ponce make a public apology in the magazine for the comment. Ponce politely refused, arguing that no harm had been done since Chávez’s name had not actually been mentioned in the article. A

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few months after this incident, at the end of 1936 and the beginning of 1937, Chávez published a series of articles that were an attempt to distance himself from his former teacher. In them, Chávez presented Ponce again as the harbinger of Mexican nationalism but this time, in a case that seems to be a copy of Baqueiro Foster’s 1933 criticism against Rafael Adame’s nationalist ideal, he argued that Ponce’s was not a “true” nationalism because it ignored indigenous music. Furthermore, Chávez affirmed that indeed, Ponce and his generation –which Chávez exemplified with Saturnino Herrán and Ramón López Velarde, the modernista friends of Ponce– were strongly rooted in porfirista culture, and therefore could not produce a new society with a new conception of the world.37

Chavez’s articles performed an action of kenosis in Harold Bloom’s sense: the texts were a breaking device, a movement towards discontinuity with his predecessor.38 Chavez’s articles not only rejected Ponce as a “true” nationalist composer, performing him as merely a “harbinger” –a proto-nationalist if you will– according to the new hegemonic discourse of indigenism, but also showed his estrangement from the notion of modernism represented by the Modernista movement. In one action, Chávez established himself as the true representative of the “authentic” Mexican identity, and erased the traces of continuity between pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary modernism and modernity. Segovia’s opinion of Chávez as expressed to Ponce in February 1937, just a few weeks after Chávez’s article appeared in El Universal, perfectly captures the state of affairs:

“What confirms my suspicion more [that communism is invading the USA] is that Chávez comes from a fraternal political ideology, thereby, the same group of Supreme Justices that has judged Furtwängler, Mengelberg, and so many others with such cruel severity, takes delight in and is entranced by the epileptic gestures of Chávez, and practically declare him the rival of Toscanini… (!)

Anyway, that unmerited exaltation, does not make him generous. He has carefully eliminated your works from the proposed programs, if I am not mistaken. However, for the few of us who truly admire and love you, this absence is a disguised presence. Wherever he goes, your shadow follows. And it will always rise behind his tiny stature, with greater reality than that which he attributes to himself… Leave it to me: I will take charge that he passes into History, with the nickname Carlos Chávez the Traitor…”

Segovia’s letter, although it should be read in light of the specific political climate surrounding the American reception of his pro-fascist position in the Spanish Civil War – which was not well received among intellectual circles and was affecting his concert career– still encapsulates, if not Ponce’s feelings, at least the thoughts of those very close to him and their reaction to Chávez’s attempts to distance himself from his former teacher.

The narrative that established the importance of Ponce’s production as an antecedent of the nationalist discourse developed after the revolution was reinforced by Otto Mayer-Serra’s Panorama de la música mexicana, which dealt only with the music of Ponce that presented traces of the nationalist character needed to support the proto-nationalist interpretation of the indigenist discourse. In his book, Mayer-Serra occupied himself with Ponce’s Rapsodias mexicanas (1911, 1914, 1919), Idilio mexicano (1939),

Chapultepec (1921), Ferial (1940), and Veinte temas de canciones mexicanas (1939), failing to account for the overall modernist aesthetic that prevails throughout his production. Indeed, Mayer-Serra did not even mention the word modernism in relation to Ponce’s output, not even regarding the music written after 1925. He is content stating that after 1925, Ponce “dedicated himself to compose in an altogether European style, cultivating the musical language of Mexican inspiration, for which he is universally hailed, only occasionally.”

Guillermo Orta Velásquez wrote the following appreciation of Ponce in his Breve historia de la música en México (1970):

“the influence of Maestro Ponce has been manifested in the following aspects: as a piano teacher, crowning his work with students like Carlos Chávez, Joaquin Amparán, Esperanza Cruz, Antonio Gomezanda, Salvador Ordóñez Ochoa, etc.; as a divulger of ideas, in publications like Revista musical mexicana (1919-20), Gaceta musical (1928-29), Cultura musical (1936-37), writings, essays, and criticism. As a composer (with more than one hundred and fifty works, including arrangements) he shows a fine sensitivity in Chapultepec, Ferial, his Concerto for piano, Concierto del sur, Trio, etc., etc. And, finally, as Paladin of Mexican Musical Nationalism.”

Orta Velázquez’s book was written almost thirty years after Mayer-Serra’s and clearly shows that the writing of Ponce as a forerunner of the revolutionary generation and its musical nationalism had been successful. Nevertheless, Ponce’s is a case that shows how individual identities are constantly negotiated within hegemonic discourses. The writing of Ponce as the “Father of Mexican musical nationalism” takes as point of departure

Ponce’s own modernista crusade to “rescue” Mexican folk songs, although in his case a compromise was reached: Ponce could maintain a place in the new canon of Mexican music as long as he remained interpreted as a precursor of the Revolution’s “authentic” nationalism. Hegemony, as Judith Butler suggests, is constructed through a collaborative relation with Power,\textsuperscript{42} and Ponce’s case is one such example. In this part of the construction of the Mexican hegemonic pact all parts gained, Ponce remained an honored member of the “official” cultural elite of the country, and the revolutionary elite used him to validate its position of power as the goal of a teleological Mexican history by making him a “missing link” in that process.

II

Tradition is a notion that refers to a cultural heritage by implying a source of Truth and authenticity. Tradition is the transmission of beliefs and techniques from one generation to another in such a way as to create the sense of an essential, shared identity throughout generations. As such, the distinction between past and present is lost in tradition since tradition always has recourse to the past in order to build systems of identity in the present. Modernity, however, has a complicated relationship with the idea of tradition. Modernity values the new over the old, and therefore, appreciates the old

only when it is re-configured in relation to the new. As Anthony Giddens suggests, many of the traditional features of modern social life are actually fictions of modernity;\(^{43}\) the permanent re-invention of tradition is modernity’s way to validate itself.

Néstor García Canclini proposes that all heritages are metaphors of specific social alliances, that every hegemonic pact is the result of selective, combinatory processes that perform tradition.\(^{44}\) It is with this understanding of tradition and hegemony that I have approached the supposedly failed performatives of Carrillo, Ponce and Chávez in the 1920s. As part of a larger process of hegemonic negotiation, the musical languages and styles developed by these composers to write themselves as modernist and avant-garde artists in the 1920s, were re-written according to the nationalist necessities of the new hegemonic pact. For the new hegemony, the reality to be represented was a very specific articulation of the nation-state –an indigenist one– and tradition had to be retuned in order for it to be a useful tool to produce citizens that would respond to that hegemonic understanding of nationality. The historical narrative created by the hegemonic pact attempted to tell the story of the Real –their version of the reality of the nation-state–, but in a performative action, it actually fabricated it. It was in such a fashion that Chávez’s articles from the 1930s against Carrillo and Ponce become prime examples of the performative. Not only did they define the outline of a new musical nationalism and Chávez’s leading role in it, but also performed Carrillo and Ponce’s place in the new tradition that validated that hegemonic discourse. The reproduction of Chávez’s discourse by historians like Mayer-Serra first and Orta Velázquez later, meant a process of


discourse re-signification or re-representation, bringing into a level further removed from the original events, the domain of unlimited semiosis or metalanguage, the terrain of myth.\textsuperscript{45}

Approaching the study of Mexican music in the 1920s in terms of modernity instead of just nationalism allows us to contest the hegemonic construction of tradition and appreciate the continuities between the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} century, between romanticism and modernism, between pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Mexico. At the same time, it permits us to appreciate the importance of the Mexican revolution as a fundamental historical contingency that wrote tradition in a very distinct way as it performed its hegemonic pact. My study of Mexican culture in the 1920s takes musical representations of modernity and the nation as points of departure, and explores them. I have paid special attention to issues of construction of identity within representation – both individual and discursive, self-reflexive and hegemonic– because they let us appreciate that identities are intimately related to the invention of narratives of tradition and myth. As Stuart Hall elegantly puts it, identity obliges us to read tradition “not [as] the so-called return to the roots but [as] a coming-to-terms-with our ‘routes.’”\textsuperscript{46} By focusing on the intersections between modernity, the nation, and identity, between modernism, \textit{modernismo}, avant-gardism and tradition, between music as artistic manifestation and music as political discourse, I hope I have been faithful to Hall’s evocative aphorism.

\textsuperscript{45} For a theoretical explanation of myth as unlimited semiosis or metalanguage, see Barthes, \textit{Op. cit.}, 115.
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