

Time, Performance and Notation: Llorenç Barber and Felipe Ehrenberg Reading Out Loud

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Toward Temporal and Spatial Performance of Reading Aloud as an Artistic Act

As Norbert Elias puts it, time is innate to human nature. It is a way of experiencing, which makes us conscious of our being (Elias 1988). By measuring time, we get a sense of orientation and proportion that helps us organize our existence and determine the way we view History. Therefore, it has become crucial in our ways of communication. Time – or rather what we have made of it – rules our lives in so many implicit and explicit forms of discourse, creating norms of conduct as well as boundaries that have become naturalized, to the point where we take them for granted.

Time is a phenomenological matter, which implies the body and its senses, helping us determine recognizable features that appear in a series of events within a certain interval or meter. “Reading” is one of the bodily acts that exemplifies this condition: according to specific norms and structures, we learn to read the world and to place ourselves in it.¹ This is also true for texts that may be read in silence or aloud. Reading as a cognitive and performative act unfolds in a certain time-space dimension, both technically and conceptually implying motion: from the mere eye-movement when reading a text line by line on a page, to the movement of the mouth and the gestures that come with it when reading out loud. But what would happen to our communication and to ourselves if we change one of the self-imposed temporal parameters? What would change in our

1 “Reading” in its broadest sense is not just a mechanical act of decoding a written text. It is also a procedure of interpretation, which explains why we say that we read the stars, the cards, the coffee, the hands, or that we read the eyes, or the bodily gestures, the landscape, etc. Here I will mainly refer to the reading of verbal texts, but this does not exclude the possibility of combining reading strategies, as I will show when discussing the work of Felipe Ehrenberg.

expressions, in our impressions, and consequently, how would our experience of time be modified?

These inquiries represent an interesting challenge for artists who have found provocative ways to evidence and question these mechanized habits, making us conscious of the surprising effects and creative outcomes certain changes may cause. In its most obvious forms of expression, such as in the act of reading, some creators have even induced us to observe more attentively, offering ingenious ways to reflect upon this matter, and making us conscious – once again – of how time has determined and moulded our civilized behaviour. They have achieved this by conceiving suggestive artworks in the form of texts, in which a slight modification of time-space parameters decisively alters the performance as well as our perception and understanding of the texts' intention and content. In the case of hearing it read aloud, we become aware of the ways in which this alteration compromises not only the content, but also its narrative, and the materiality of that text when put in motion, a motion implicated in the very act of reading. Furthermore, these performances can provide entirely different interpretations of (in)scripture and notation.

In this article I will focus on the understanding of text *in* and *through* time. I will address the performative act of reading texts as scores that are meant to be heard. In other words, verbal elements that are assembled and read out loud, creating an artistic impression that is captured and delivered through audio as well as audiovisual documents. The aspects that will guide my reflection are exemplified by two pieces that fit the realm of the “performed word,” borrowing this term from Charles Bernstein (1998). Quite different in their approaches to time and movement, as well as in their outcome, these two pieces can equally be associated with what is called performative-experimental art. Created during the second half of the twentieth century, they are both readings presented by multifaceted artists who conceived the textual content within particular literary genres: one as an essay, the other as a poem. I am referring here respectively to “Breve ensayo sobre la célebre cuestión del tiempo” (“Brief essay on the noted question of time”) by Catalan composer Llorenç Barber (1995), and to the sound poem “Maneje con precaución” (“Drive with caution”) by Mexican visual artist Felipe Ehrenberg. It is my interest, in the case of Barber’s piece, to analyse the act of reading aloud as an articulatory verbal matter, observing how altering the speed influences our attention as well as our interpretation of the speech act. In the second case, Ehrenberg’s piece,

I will illustrate the time-space relationship in the act of reading aloud, in which temporal alterations and velocity depend on the physical situation of the subject who creates a text when moving in space, in this case, when driving through a street in Mexico City. The idea is to show how time becomes a significant cue in the act of reading out loud, beyond the mere mechanical transduction of the written into the phonological, sounding dimension.

Llorenç Barber: Legibility and Velocity

As a composer, Barber is foremost known for his city concerts where he uses chapel bells as his principal instruments. Time, space, – aside from other acoustic and even climatic considerations – become relevant in these types of compositions that activate the urban soundscape for a moving auditory, who perceives its echoes and resonances in the open space of city streets. But Barber is also considered a pioneer within the Spanish scene of experimental vocal performance, concretely as co-founder and member of the trio *Flatus Vocis*, which was active during the late 1980s and the mid 1990s. In this realm, he also developed a repertoire that he has been performing on his own, as is the case of the “Breve ensayo sobre la célebre cuestión del tiempo,” a piece that was originally presented on stage in March 1995 at the Institut Française of Madrid, as part of the presentation of his CD *Linguopharin Campanology*.

The inspiration for this piece dates back to 1992, after witnessing a performance by Esther Ferrer, a fellow artist related to the intermedial movement *Zaj*, whom Barber had invited that year to participate at the festival “Paralelo Madrid. Otras Músicas” hosted by the *Círculo de Bellas Artes* (Circle of Fine Arts) in Madrid. This event is evoked at the beginning of his own “essay,” where he mentions the specific performance, “Tres acciones y el tiempo pasa” (“Three actions and the time passes”), which is one of the various works where Ferrer explores temporality and duration in their most diverse forms and gestures.²

2 According to Margarita Aizpuru, Ferrer incorporated the Cagean concept of music, not as meter, rhythm or sound, but as “duration,” that is, something that ‘occurs in time.’ This is one of the essential contents of her performance, which can also be defined as a music of gestures. Time passes and she counts it, one, two, three, fifteen, forty, sixty seconds.” The use of a real clock was also part of some of her performances, alluding to “the pass of time, not a fictive but a real time” (Aizpuru 2007, my translation).

After its debut in 1995 it became part of Barber's regular repertoire, comprised within his recital "Barberidades," and as part of his "Músicas habladas" ("Spoken musics"), performing it for over two decades.³

The writing of the essay itself, however "brief" (5 to 7 pages, depending on the printing), demanded its own pace: it took him two years to finish it.⁴ Despite being one of his most represented and memorable pieces, and considering that throughout the past decades Barber has published much of his creative work – including essays –, this particular text has surprisingly not been edited to date. The reason might lay in the fact that it was mainly conceived as a performative text. Currently, the only way to access it is through *amateur* recorded videos of two different versions of his own performances.⁵ One dates back to the Paris presentation in 1996, while the other was recorded in Valencia in 2011. Even if the verbal content has remained the same, the duration of its reading varies remarkably: while the first lasts 15.19 minutes, the second required him almost 21 minutes.

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- 3 The same year of its debut, he performed it at the Auditorio Zaragoza (October 1995), followed by a presentation in April 1996 at the Kiron Espace in Paris. After this performance, Jean-Marie Lehec wrote: "Barberidades, deux concerts exceptionnels del l'insolite Llorenç Barber clochiste espagnol: le programme de sa 'prestation,' créative et détonnant, devrait nous mettre la puce à l'oreille, à moins que ce ne soit carrément la cloche toute entière et un canon en prime [...] c'est la première fois que cet artiste créateur sonore spatial et spécial, unique en son genre détonnant, s'est produit en France. Les oreilles curieuses de sons, de vibrations et de créations en ont pris plein les yeux [...]" (Jean-Marie Lehec in the magazine of the Kiron Espace, 1996; quote shared by the artists through e-mail exchanges June 2019). And two years later, in 1998, Barber presented it at the Auditorio Nacional in Madrid, to celebrate his fiftieth anniversary. Among the more recent performances it is worth mentioning the one presented at the "Lem Festival" in Barcelona (2008); at the "Núcleo de Música Nueva de Montevideo" organized by Coriún Aaronian (2010); at the Sporting Club of Valencia (2011) and at the Faculty of Literature and Philosophy of the National University (UNAM) in Mexico City, organized by the Laboratory of Extended Literature and other Materialities (lleom) (2013).
- 4 Triggered by Ferrer's performance, Barber began conceiving his first ideas that same year, which he gradually complemented with quotes and other personal reflections. (Barber, e-mail exchange with the author on July 1, 2019. Most of the information regarding this piece was directly shared by the composer in a series of five e-mail we exchanged from June 1 to July 19, 2019. When quoted directly, the translations are mine).
- 5 To my knowledge, this piece has so far not been performed by any other person excepting the artist himself. Barber confirmed and complemented this by sharing: "It always was a success, but nobody ever wrote anything about this piece, not even myself, nobody asked me to interpret it nor has it been published. For me it is a treasure that demands such an effort that I do not try to show it often, because it fatigues me enormously" (Barber, e-mail exchange June 29, 2019).

This article will primarily focus on the former, since it is the better known, and is included in the official list of videos representing Barber's trajectory.⁶

The resources for this stage performance do not seem to be particularly demanding: they usually consist of a desk, a chair to sit on throughout the reading, a jar of water, a glass, a watch – a lamp, if necessary– and, naturally, the sheets of the essay, which serve the performative purposes of this piece, both thematically and materially, as the basis and score.

With regard to the relation with the text itself, as obvious as it might seem, reading it demands cognitive abilities, performance and time, starting with mechanically decoding and articulating letter by letter, word by word, in a chain of sentences. But there is also what we could call the performed time, the one that is given by open or discrete cues which can be found “within the lines” of the written text: from its punctuation, to the *mise en page* – for instance, regarding the texts' disposition and the *enjambements* when it comes to poetry – , as well as the letter-design and the distance between the letters. Llorenç Barber is known for being quite aware of these resources, having applied them in multiple texts, essays and even in his personal correspondence. However, the printed versions he uses for performing his “Brief essay...” seem quite discrete about the layout, and even so, it is evident from the oral performance that it questions the realization of tempo when it comes to the spoken word (in this case the oral reading of a text). Tempo is regularly something that does not seem to have the same implications when it comes to a verbal text, as if we were to compare it with a musical score, where it explicitly appears to indicate the features of a particular movement. Are we aware of what it

6 This video recording was taken by one of his friends, the musicologist Rubén López Cano (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6POTOF8Mc>). The second version did not include the name of the author (when consulted for this publication, the link was unfortunately no longer active). Only occasionally will I mention some contrasts with the performance presented 17 years later, so that we can have an idea of the spectrum of variations in which the piece has been presented throughout his career. Reflecting on his many performances of the piece, Barber shared that it regularly lasts from 20 to 27 minutes. In reference to the temporal variation, to which I will come later on in this article, it may primarily be explained by the fact that Barber himself considers it one of his most demanding pieces, which requires psychological as well as physiological preparation. Here we can see how much the body is also involved in the reading process, and how much it actually determines its outcome, depending on the variably physical and emotional condition he is in. “The versions [he claims] depend a thousand times on the context (reverberations, reflections...) and on training and concrete energy, the time and hour [...] and this gives rise to measure/meditate the limits and the possibilities, etc., each time anew” (Barber, e-mail exchange July 19, 2019).

would cause to its interpretation if we were to read a verbal text with the indication of “andante”, “prestissimo” or “lentissimo”? This inquiry seems to be at the heart of Barber’s challenging quest, making the content of the text at the same time become the motive for the developing process (*Ablaufprozess*) and the instruction for the performative unravelling (*Bewegungsablauf*), where time is presented as movement of verbal articulation.

The title already provides a wink to the temporal dimension of the reading, that is, to its duration. However, for the listener, the experience of the read text may seem other than brief, even in its 15-minute version, and this due to the extreme tempo manipulation that Barber makes evident throughout the reading.

Regarding its content, this essay represents a personal dissertation in which the artist shares – at times in a serious and at others in a relaxed or even humorous manner – a series of reflections and anecdotes around this complex concept. The mosaic of impressions gathered in this essay includes philosophical quotations and profound phrases conveyed with the solemnity of a maxim, while others are gathered from sayings such as “dar tiempo al tiempo” (give it time), “el tiempo vuela” (time flies), “no hay tiempo que perder” (there is no time to lose), “todo tiempo pasado fue mejor” (better in the old days), “mañana será otro día” (tomorrow is a new day), or formulas that commonly appear in stories, like “érase una vez” (once upon a time). There is also a vast array of lexical references to time, for instance when speaking of hours, days or other time units, and when making allusions such as “pronto” (soon) or “tarde” (late) or other idioms that orbit around the isotopy of time, such as, “estar a destiempo” (to be out of time), “el porvenir” (the coming). Then there is reference to the contrast between “fictional” and “historical time,” the notion of *Zeitgeist*, as well as the classical concept of Chronos, among others. Adopting at times a rather intimate, confessional or reflexive tone, he makes considerations of the past, present and future, making allusions to prominent writers who have addressed the topic of time, as Jorge Luis Borges or Santa Teresa.

The essay also reflects on the movement itself, using as part of the syntactic strategies enumerations, as well as binary contrasts (“andar,” “volar,” “perder,” “recuperar”... / run, fly, lose, recuperate...), which in themselves convey rhythm. Also, structurally, it tends to alliterations, by beginning a series of sentences with the same formula. Finally, the closing stanza in classic Greek, “matayotes matayotetos, kai panta matayotes,” (vanity of

vanities and everything is vanity) is charged, according to Barber, with an extremely “baroque irony.” All this tunes it, as he says, in “a textual discourse which dances between the most scholastic seriousness and a mockery of time that passes between the lung alveoli, the teeth and the breath of its vocalization.”⁷

Through this semantic thread, carefully woven into the text that serves as a pre-text (in terms of a script or score) for the sounding performance that constitutes one of his “músicas habladas,” Barber rehearses *in* and *with* time, which also explains his preference for the genre of the essay, in the etymological sense of the word. Experienced as he is in vocal skills (or “gymnastics,” as he likes to call them), he claims that this piece requires an additional effort, since “everything is about remarking, without pre/dicting [*sic*] this versatility of time which can move from being tiresome long, solemn and even somnolent, passing to *accelerandos* that lead to a total culmination/summit [*sic*]” and then back to a point of exaggerated slow motion in the articulation, “a moment in which the diphonic technique helps exaggerate a *ritardando* which wants to be ‘aereal,’ profound and even dull [...] as if rising to heaven from exhaustion.”⁸

These quotes not only reflect a vocal performance, but also a need to enact and embody the voice, as if adopting different “vocal personae” (Tagg 2012). At the beginning Barber starts his reading in a modulated pace, adopting the role and attitude of an orator (“a somewhat fatigued professor,” as he likes to put it), in a mood of someone who would be seriously reflecting and at the same time intimately recalling his thoughts and sharing them with the audience (even if at times they do not seem to be “transcendent”).

Then, due to the excitement triggered by the text, the reader changes to an effusive and more passionate state, accelerating his reading as if gradually becoming overwhelmed by the flood of ideas, reaching a point where he frenetically wrestles with each word, trying to contract it as much as possible, expressing it rapidly, yet clearly. Once a certain peak or climax is attained, the reading gradually slows down, returning to its normal speed, and beyond, until words reach the subtle limit of de-articulation, as in extreme slow motion. Despite this, he never really comes to a complete

7 Barber in e-mail exchange with the author, July 1, 2019.

8 Barber in e-mail exchange with the author, June 29, 2019.

stop, just to a sort of suspension, in the implacable and tireless becoming of time.⁹

Even if Barber self-demands a precise articulation throughout his reading, arguing that the effect on the listeners gets magnified when they actually feel and know what is being said at all times, in both extremes of the performance, the content becomes blurred and obscured due to the velocity of its articulation: either when accelerating the speed to a point when it gets almost out of control, forcing the listener to skip some of what is said in order to keep up with the text. This overhearing partly occurs from the speed, but is also due to the lack of pauses and modulation, which usually contribute to comprehension. On the other extreme, when excessively expanding and stretching the articulation, it reaches the limit of absurdity and nonsense, and again – only for the opposite reasons – it becomes equally alienating and confusing for the listener to grasp the content, due to the difficulty of identifying the end of a word and the beginning of the next.

In this regard, it seems even more surprising not to find further indications or marks on the written texts, no hints about tempo or to expressive variation. Still, when asked about its oral-aural intentions, Barber confirms that despite a lack of tempo precision, he follows a pre-conceived program, a sort of gestural movement throughout the piece: “starting (during the first page or so) plain and meditatively, and only slowly, but steadily entering an endless *accelerando*,” whereas toward the end (again almost over the last page) he moves toward this gradual somnolent *ritardando*. Generally, with the change of velocity, the pitch frequency also automatically changes: the quicker he gets, the higher the pitch range he reaches and the higher

9 I include the following quote in his own words, as the answer to my inquiry, which vividly expresses his performative aspirations and needs: “the *accelerando* tries to reach maximum speed, which depends on the ability, the resonance of the space-context, and the need to maintain the understanding of the message [...] etc. There is, then, no further indication or ‘instruction’ of time or ‘tempo’ beyond the ceaseless reading flow, which, without being hasty, touches its boundaries since the text is like runaway material that seeks to be heard from head to toe, without ceasing to run [...] there are no marks, only the organicity, and the aim to reach the fastest possible speed [...] and when one comes to the final part of diving into the ocean of dyphonies and harmonics [...] it should be clear that such a rush was only a race against time [...], but its pinnacle or acme will be to float over time – with the mouth ready – like a dead body over infinite waves of ‘dead time’ with no urge to come to rest [...]” (Barber in e-mail exchange with the author, July 1st 2019, my translation).

the tension. Vice versa, the slower he becomes, the lower his voice and the more distended and phlegmatic it is perceived.¹⁰

How different is this reading experience from the one that we would make in silence, letting the eye grasp the words one by one on the mute page in order to make sense of the content? Would the reader's enthusiasm be guided by the same speed, or inversely, could the eye entertain itself in one word or even one vowel, detaining its speed to an equal motion as the one attained by the voice when read aloud? Is the eye faster than the voice's articulatory capacity and will? How is the "voice" compromised and how could it sound in the silent reading?

These are questions that can only invite further speculation, even for Barber himself, who reveals that it has been "a piece which always seemed to me a discovery, because it contains in its manifesting/presenting [*sic*] itself a play with-and-against¹¹ time." A time that could also just be – using Bartolomé Ferrando's expression to define the work of *Flatus Vocis* to which Barber pertained – an "exaltation of discontinuous accumulations" (in Barber and Palacios 2009, 281).

Felipe Ehrenberg: Legibility and Movement

Felipe Ehrenberg offers an entirely different intention and experience of movement in the act of reading aloud in "Maneje con precaución" (Drive with Caution), a sound poem derived from the impressions he orally registered on a tape recorder while looking out of the window of a moving car during a 1:37 minute ride. Despite not having considered himself a writer nor a poet, he declares at the beginning of the recording "Este poema se intitula..." ("This poem is titled..."). As an artist, Ehrenberg was influenced by conceptual and experimental arts, expressing himself mainly through editorial projects, graphic design, painting, photography, collage, sculpture, and installations (including sound installations), but also creating book objects, as well as action-art, video art, performances, and

10 In the video of 2011, even when reaching the slow part, he reads in a more affected manner, forcing his modulation, making the gestures of his performance more theatrical, but in its essence the intention with regard to the performance of 2009 does not vary.

11 Literally he creates a semantic game by writing the word with a part in brackets: "con(tra)" (Barber in e-mail exchange with the author, June 29, 2019).

even sound poetry, with the poem in question here one of his few sound poems.¹²

Concretely, this piece was recorded during a car ride down Calzada Ignacio Zaragoza, one of Mexico City's longest, most active and crowded avenues.¹³ On his journey, Ehrenberg encounters all sorts of posters, advertisements and street signs that he attempts to grasp as if reading the urban landscape through both literal enunciations and occasional descriptions. During the reading one may even perceive the murmur created by traffic and the hustle on the street, a rumbling soundscape that gains presence through what might have been an open window. It not only serves as background to the voice but also contextualizes and explains the spontaneous performance in real time.

Interestingly enough, this poem has become one of his best-known creations, partly because it has been selected and included in different exhibitions, as well as in sound art anthologies.¹⁴ During the short journey he makes while recording this piece, Ehrenberg elaborates a sort of verbal inventory of the visual impressions he gets. Reading, thus, as an audio(-vi-

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- 12 It is interesting to note that there is also, besides this recording, reference to another sound poem by Ehrenberg, "Rota la lógica" ("Broken logic," 1986), composed ten years later, and there is also a similarly-inspired video piece, that he called "La Calzada Ignacio Zaragoza," referring to it as "the longest visual poem of the world" (a fragment of it can be seen in the documentary made for TV UNAM "La experimentación visual poética en México," Daniel Turón producer, 1990, http://micieloediciones.blogspot.com/2015/08/radiopoemario-trance-poetico_27.html, 25 October 2021). Together with another 16 minute video piece made during the 1970s, called "La Poubelle" (Tate collection 2009), these performative recordings thematize, in a situationist manner, the urban landscape as it may be "read" and perceived in its liveliness at a certain moment. In the latter case, as part of the so called "garbage walks" performed by Ehrenberg in London.
- 13 Ignacio Zaragoza Avenue is located in a very crowded, middle-low class area of town. Re-inaugurated in the mid-seventies as an "Eje vial" or a traffic artery around the time when Ehrenberg made this recording, it goes from Mexico City's downtown centre and continues east to Puebla. Built on the ground of the dried lakebed of Texcoco, it extends for over 17 km, having no stoplights in the central lanes. The "Calzada" (roadway) was named in 1962 in honour of Ignacio Zaragoza, a liberal military officer who participated in the battle of Puebla against the French in the mid-nineteenth century.
- 14 Among the most recent exhibitions, it is worth mentioning (*Ready Media*, curated by Gustavo Romano and presented at Laboratorio Arte Alameda in Mexico City in 2014; or *Modos de Oír: Prácticas de sonido y arte en México*, curated by Susana González Aktories, Bárbara Perea, Rossana Lara, Cinthya García Leyva, Tania Aedo, Carlos Prieto, Manuel Rocha Iturbide, Tito Rivas, hosted at the same location and at the Ex Teresa Arte Actual in 2018-2019. Regarding the anthologies, this piece appeared as part of the selection made by Manuel Rocha in the double CD edited by the Spanish RAS. *Revista de Arte Sonoro*, Vol. 7 in 2004 (it can be consulted at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICAoMu4aAEE>, 25 October 2021).

sual) experience of assembling, gathering, and associating the objects of his gaze, in which the eye reads the street ads it encounters, as well as the non-verbal elements, as if they were “found objects,” verbally captured, with the characteristic flavour of this particular urban landscape and its inhabitants. Each element comprises an instant, a scene, and an epiphany, an essence of local features, all different, all gathered in an aleatory way, and yet all composing one logical narrative that turns the heard experience almost into a multifaceted aural postcard.

With witty humour, and at times adopting a more a serious tone that keeps him from falling into the caricaturesque, Ehrenberg successfully portrays the material conditions, habits and beliefs of the average Mexican citizen.

It is unclear in what direction he is heading, nor at what point of the 17 km avenue he starts this poetic journey, or even where it actually ends. We can only assume that he did not take the fast central lanes, and instead drives at a slow but steady speed in the side lane, maybe even gets stuck for a moment in the traffic or detained by stoplights, always close enough to the sidewalk, the bustling establishments and stores, from which he picks up barely a few details. We infer all this, because some verbalizations seem quite precise, enabling him to read and acknowledge the texts and advertisements of the multiple vendors, whereas others are not as detailed and accurate, as if grasped literally *en passant*. There is the sense of curiosity of a *flâneur*, whose eye wanders around, and as part of this activity gathers the impressions. This is also what can be metaphorically understood as the “pace,” the tempo given to the “reading” by this urban wanderer, seated in a car while driving at a moderate speed. The title of the piece offers an interesting cue: it indicates an instruction that may apply both to the driver, to warn him against getting too distracted by this wandering, but also to the audience, which is familiarized with this conventional caution slogan and an experience that also “sounds familiar,” of driving and perceiving the space in a given moment and time. By gathering the various impressions, he creates a composition, condensed in an evocative and stimulating experience that can be visualized as well as heard.

What matters here is to understand the procedure (in the sense of the German word *Vorgang*), which in itself implies pace and movement, while having a casual yet determined encounter with the written/visual stimuli that Ehrenberg takes in, ingeniously presenting them from what appears to be one, but at the same time different points of enunciation. Again, a

“vocal persona,” this time of someone embodying the “voice of the establishment,” eager to promote their merchandise and services. Ehrenberg at times even emulates the rhetoric of street criers (“merolicos”), enacting them as in interpretation of the written texts, while conveying distinct prosodic tones and musicality. Whether therapies, used cars, kitchen accessories, toys, clothes, brands, a succession of objects and promises that appear one after the other, creating a rhythm, a sort of free verse meter.¹⁵ Most of the claims are encapsulated in a phrase or slogan as those of vendors trying to address the consumers’ desires: “Baje de peso queme llantitas” (“Lose weight, burn those love rings”); “Si no estrena auto, es porque no quiere” (“If you don’t buy a new car, it’s ‘cause you don’t wanna”). This claiming voice of a loudmouth is also recognizable in other fragments that include abbreviations as in: “Pantalón para dama, pantalón *pa’* caballero” (“Pants for women, pants for men”).

At certain moments, Ehrenberg also decides to read foreign brand names with a deliberate alienating Spanish pronunciation. In other moments, he repeats them, creating an iteration which in itself constitutes more of a word-game that alludes to the brand, rendering the “other” meaning related to its oral resemblance and sense in Spanish: “converse, converse, converse.” Uniformity and monotony come through in the performance of this part, equally suggesting that the solicitation to actually “converse,” or chat may be an act that dries out in itself. The poem also plays with articulatory contrasts between these foreign brand names and the very local and common Mexican names: “Huaraches, jarochas, fábrica de colchas,” (“sandals, jarochas [objects from Veracruz], quilt factory”), in this case highlighting the homophony of these distinct elements.

As in Barber’s piece, in Ehrenberg’s poem we find a tendency to make lists, some of which may seem almost surrealistic and nonsensical: “Aquí

15 I include an approximative transcription in Spanish that I have made, based on the audio, which gives the complete idea of the created text: “Este poema se intitula ‘Maneje con precaución:’ / Báscula 60 toneladas, a media cuadra. / La zorra, juguetes de importación, en temporada. / Artículos de cocina y regalos / Reebock, Charlie, Sidney, / Converse, converse, converse / Huaraches, jarochas, fábrica de colchas. / Medicina, animales, implementos. / ‘Pantalón para dama, pantalón *pa’* caballero’ / Fábrica de pantalones / Y un juego de medio baño con tocador. / Enfermedades agudas, crónicas. / Herramientas, calentadores, chapas, perfiles, láminas, planta, viga. / Muros silenciados, muros repintados. / ‘Baje de peso queme llantitas, gordura, obesidad. / Tratamientos para subir o bajar de peso.’ / ‘Debilidad sexual, hernias, lombrices, gordura, nervios, arrugas, canas, impotencia’ / de 8 a 18 / ‘Si no estrena auto es porque no quiere’ / Caldo de camarón / ‘Aquí elefantes, futbolistas, hoy niños gratis.’ / En la Ignacio Zaragoza.”

elefantes, futbolistas, hoy niños gratis” (“Here elephants, football players, today children for free”). Sometimes accumulative enumeration contributes to an acceleration which on its part offers a saturated impression of the vastness of simultaneously encountered things: “Herramientas, calentadores, chapas, perfiles, láminas, planta, viga” (“Tools, heaters, locks, corrugated steel and steel pieces, motors, beams”). And even if these enumerations suggest movement, it is interesting to note that there are very few verbs or actions involved in his performance. Rather, the constant use of names and nouns provide a sense of continuous renewal of elements, in a present that constantly actualizes itself.

Whereas intensity is achieved at certain moments through the mentioned verbal means, at others, there is a declared “silence,” or even poetical parenthesis, where the pace decreases, almost as passing from an extreme hustle to a contemplative impression: “Muros silenciados, muros repintados” (“Silenced walls, repainted walls”).

Despite being, as suggested from the beginning, an overall reading at a moderate tempo, the alterations of speed can presumably not always be attributed to the transit of the car, but also to the mentioned visual stimuli, as well as to the characters Ehrenberg enacts. Time is therefore perceived with regard to the intensity and density of the observed, and with respect to the oral capacities of the artist in order to portray this lively avenue.

Why did Ehrenberg not simply choose to work out a poem by recreating or re-enacting his impressions after the car ride instead of while driving? It might have eventually been less complicated and endangering, yet less fascinating in its spontaneity and chance orientation. As for the question of why he did not choose to write it down, probably due to the intention of creating/composing a verbal text in “real time,” a text that should only leave its trace constrained in the magnetic tape, a form of notating by leaving a verbal inscription in audio, reproducible, coming alive every time it is played and showing us that this poem is made of more than just words. Listening to it gives us the experience of a “moving-sound-scape,” ephemeral, both, transitory and *in transit*, with a clearly and verbally announced beginning, but providing the impression that it could go on, without end. The tape that seems to have spontaneously been created in a short drive, was in fact result of an editing process which even concludes with a fade-out, as if the car and his speaking-wandering driver were moving away from us.

Ehrenberg masterfully provides an experience in this sound poem that seems ordinary, but has deep implications when observed in its performative and temporal strategies. A text that is to be taken with the equal caution of driving a car, only with a bit more aural skill: the one that make us re-create and reimagine this ordinary urban chore.

Time for Closure

So far I have shown, through the approach to such distinct verbal performances of artists such as Barber and Ehrenberg, how important it is to question the temporal dimension as part of the oral artistic execution of a piece, and that this temporal dimension may be analysed with regard to movement and speed: not only the ones implied in the visual apprehension of a verbal text, but also in its multiple levels of articulation.

Both acts of reading aloud have suggested interesting conditions and procedures, not only regarding the articulated, but also the perceived, the notated, the registered, the signified. In doing so, each piece conveys a particular sense of time that implies different movements in time.

Even if judging by the coincidental posture of the readers¹⁶ – both bodies are seated, one remaining in one place, during the act of reading to others; the other within a moving car –, the movement in either case does not rely on the body itself. In Barber, the movement is given by the voice, emulating the trajectory of the eyes and the interpretation given to the read signs, line by line, idea by idea, and the self-imposition of modulating the speed. As for Ehrenberg, the movement depends on a different self-imposed condition, the one of spontaneously documenting through verbalization all that can be seen, evoked and experienced during the ride. They both therefore approach the “text” in entirely different ways, evidently due to the context in which each one is situated. One, sticking to the

16 Georges Perec established a sort of typology of reading situations presented in “Lire: Esquisse Socio-physiologique,” according to which the reading posture implies an agency that is related to certain situations and moments. It defines not only something about the reader, but also about the content of what is read, since these are common acts that respond to certain conventions. Among the variations he talks of reading while standing, while walking, or while being seated, on ones’ knees, etc. These also vary according to whether one reads out loud, whispering or in silence. According to this, Ehrenberg’s reading would be closer to the reader as a wanderer or tourist, mostly identifying and mapping his surroundings and in a way talking to himself, while Barber adopts the posture of an orator who addresses the audience (Perec 1985, 116).

actual text and content as captured on the page; the other, orchestrating an improvised text while driving, alternating verbal elements with visual ones that are read (as interpreted) in a less literal way.

Barber's piece problematizes movement by concentrating on the *how* of reading, whereas Ehrenberg's piece privileges the *what*, depicting the "readable" from a perspective in transit, showing that it has to do with more than just an alphabetical decoding of found words. In his case, there are actually multiple readings going on: of space, of sound, of visual images, of former experiences that recall other voices. All this serves to orchestrate a sequence of unexpected *objets trouvés* in the flux of time often giving the impression of overlapping, all of which actually make sense only within the provided context. Furthermore, in Ehrenberg the spatial sequence is not linear as in terms of "left to right, up to down," but as the concatenation of marks on a given route or itinerary, establishing a map that becomes part of the reading practice.

The impression provided to the listener by both artists is the one of creating effects: one by constructing, within the jumping from one idea to the next, a coherent and long prepared thematic argument in form of a literary essay; the other, by managing to create within the arbitrary and spontaneous jumps a cohesive "poetic" discourse. Neither lacks, however, spontaneity in the performance. Both surprise and demand reflection from the listener.

Barber as well as Ehrenberg capture the matter of reading through the production of oral language which may again be "read" – in terms of "heard" – by an audience. Voice being in both cases the embodied gesture of time, a gesture that does not cease to cause surprise and reflection on the part of the listener, who is invited to rethink through these pieces notions of "text" and "time."

Moreover, both "texts" have been conceived as sound-bound. This explains why none of them has circulated or been edited in a printed format. As such, they could both be catalogued in what Barber defined as "ora-scripture," a type of text where the written as well as the non-written become inscribed in the recording (Barber and Palacios 2009, 160). Its value resides in a way in the supralingual level of meaning: one where the lexical content gets affected and altered by the incidence and manipulation of temporal and spatial parameters.

By disrupting and reinventing our reading conditions, Ehrenberg and Barber show us that there are many more ways to experience time and to

understand the world and ourselves in it. Here lays the effective power of human expression in its most basic aural and verbal forms of articulation.

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