

about **white, white, white...**

This piece comes on the occasion of the commemoration of José Saramago's centenary, a commission from Síntese – Grupo de Música Contemporânea. It is based on phrases from Saramago's Essay on blindness, used as small instants retained by me reading the book, for their symbolic value that, more than dealing with the theme of blindness, make us think about what we are and about what we are capable to do in a crisis situation.

The piece is structured by a set of 15 small movements without development, exposed as miniatures or photographic instants that capture several key ideas in the course of Saramago's book. Some instants also appear as fragments, where musical elements appear dispersed by different movements, such as between the 4th and 7th, the 1st and 15th, the 2nd and 11th and even between the 7th and 15th.

The 8th is the central movement where, accepting the condition in which Saramago's characters live, the musical discourse rests a little after the tension created in the previous movements, reflecting on fear, where he says «The fear make us blind... We were already blind at the moment we became blind, the fear blinded us, the fear will keep us blind”.

From the point of view of texture and harmony, Saramago's main influence is the fact that the blindness, imagined by him, is white and not dark as we traditionally think. This idea was decisive in musical writing, as my main chords that inhabit the texture during musical discourse are “white”, spectral chords with their components with equal amplitude, saturating the ear just as the intense white light also saturates us, and can block our eyes. Sometimes these chords appear with nuances of white whenever they are associated with blind characters, or with other more defined colors when associated with the character who has not blinded, as in the 5th movement, where the voice sings in pianissimo in the low register over a sparse texture and with characteristic colors.

In the 13th movement, when the blind people see everything dark, the color of the chords is “black”, opening suddenly to white, but already filtered when they see again, allowing us to see/hear other colors as the white decreases its saturation. There is also an exacerbated exploitation of the enlargement of the timbral qualities of the strings, which goes through the harmonic distortion of white chords when they let higher harmonics sound to the detriment of the fundamentals, and by the introduction of aperiodic components, where the noise increases the blurs the harmonic image and texture, contrasting with the purity of the soprano sax and the accordion. Both the 1st and the last movement are moments where the tone color of the strings is presented without distortion, corresponding to the moments when blindness is not present and it is possible to hear the characteristic colors of the harmonic fields in counterpoint and with tremulous chords.

In the piece there are two types of harmonic-melodic procedures that share the texture, a non-octave scale that repeats its intervals of 15 in 15 semitones and a set of spectral chords, such as white chords that muddy the texture and the chords of different colors that acoustically reinforce the interval structure.

The voice is called upon to use both speech and singing, sometimes in a lyrical way in the high middle register, but also sometimes in a simple, intimate way in the middle-low and low registers, almost spoken.

Saramago said that he wanted the reader to suffer as much as he suffered writing the book. In this context, the play is sometimes bitter, and also emerged in the context of that suffering, presented between a certain lyricism and anguish, affliction, fear, pain, death, violence, sadness for the interrupted life, by something that cannot be controlled, the awareness of what we can do to survive. At the same time, this piece presents the possibility of finding beauty in the midst of chaos, and to find in overcoming moments the hope of finding happiness.

Carlos Marecos