

RODRIGO FELICISSIMO

## REPORT ON MUSIC COMPOSITION AND VISUAL ART EXHIBITIONS: ONGOING RESEARCH

We present here four categories of *signifiers*, related to the music composition creation process:

1. Topographical landmark from the Avi Kwa Ame (Spirit Mountain).
2. Symbolic images that infer connection with the spirit of land and nature.
3. Transformation of outlines into music structure themes.
4. The craftswomen and men, the workers of art.

These categories of *signifiers* show us the metaphor of nature and *organicism* in the epistemology of music concerning *musically organic* as posited by Eero Tarasti's (2015, 291) concept.

In her book titled *Modèles Naturels et Scénarios Imaginaires* (2020) [Natural Models and Imaginary Scenarios], Márta Grabócz presents natural models as elements of the language of three contemporary composers: François-Bernard Mâche, Jean Claude Risset, and Peter Eötvös. Grabócz presents a combination of works (along with other scholars) in which nature and electroacoustic music intertwine, creating imaginary scenarios, as a special contribution to the field of music signification. It opens up new possibilities of research studies and produces an approach to natural models and imaginary scenarios. The work translates the state of art in science engaged in the production of the highest levels of development achieved at a particular time, related to the field of music signification, bringing a new approach to the contemporary composition aesthetics.

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François-Bernard Mâche works with sounds of nature, from animals, especially birds, looking into the organization of bird chant that represents a strong musical intention. Jean Claude Risset works with the superposition between the musical signification and a concrete reality of sound. Let us take into consideration his notorious composition *Sud* (1985). He is best known as a pioneer, one-of-a-kind contributor to the development of computer music. Peter Eötvös pursues the relationship between music and science, according to the program written by the composer for a collection to the *Groupe de Recherches Musicales* (GRM). Eötvös awareness converges to an electroacoustic practice that renews the intention of the sound models where an imaginary scenario is a natural inspiration; *Kosmos* (1961–1999), for example, is dedicated to the first flight into space. In this work, a clear narrative is musically transferred to different stages of the life cycle of the Universe, from its original explosion to its slow disintegration (Grabócz 2020, 14).

The present research reports on two ongoing music compositions in sound studies and sound art. The first music composition has been developed from photographs, letter and video themes showing the Mojave Desert and the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument (Spirit Mountain). The other work brings the interaction between the exhibition *Elisa Bracher's: living forms*, held at Estação Pinacoteca, Sao Paulo, Brazil (April–September 2023), and a commissioned music work, specially composed for the occasion. The art exhibition was distributed in three rooms, containing, respectively, (a) various wooden sculptures arranged in a circle and photograph panels on the walls; (b) clothesline of washi paper paintings; (c) several lead sheet sculptures hanging from the ceiling. Music was played back in the three rooms, and once a week there was a musical session, when musicians were invited to perform. Both works are inspired by nature and mankind.

#### THE MOJAVE DESERT AND THE AVI KWA AME MUSIC VIDEO ART

The Mojave Desert and the Avi Kwa Ame Monument project started with an invitation to develop Villa-Lobos<sup>1</sup> “Melody of the Mountains” (Felicissimo 2023) technique as a creative method linking the argument brought by the

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<sup>1</sup> Villa-Lobos (1887–1959) was a composer, cellist, pianist, and maestro. A creative figure with great significance of the twentieth-century classical music. A prolific composer, he wrote numerous orchestral, chamber, instrumental and vocal works, totaling more than 2,000 works.

visual artist Naida Oslie and the curator Tyler Stallings, both based on the Orange County, CA. They were introduced to me by Douglas McCullough, a senior curator at the Museum of Photography in California. A network of artists and friends in Sao Paulo and California made this work possible. My position was a Visiting Scholar under the supervision of composer and Professor Paulo C. Chagas at the University of California, Riverside, between 2022 and 2024.

Next, presented is the first project photograph from the *Avi Kwa Ame*, where Naida Oslie and Tyler Stallings spent two weeks researching and filming the region where the National Monument (established by President Joe Biden in March 2023) is currently located. In the past, Indians from that region left petroglyphs varnish on the rocks. The artwork idea was to use Villa-Lobos composition technique “Melody of the Mountains” on three photographs from this region taken by Naida Oslie. The next photograph (figure 1) illustrates the first photo selected for the transcription of the outline of the rocks into melody.



Figure 1. The *Avi Kwa Ame* (Spirit Mountain) land. The petroglyphs are carved in a rock in the Grapevine Canyon. Photo by Naida Oslie

This study introduces the composition technique known as “Graphic for Plotting the Melody of the Mountains” and the orchestral treatment developed by the Brazilian composer Heitor Villa Lobos, which demonstrates the relationship throughout the aural and the visual arts as it relates inventive thinking to the creative process of composition. The core of this process is the use of

graphics, to establish transpositions from drawings to music (Felicissimo 2023, 926).

This creative process of musical composition requires two axes to convert drawings into music, demonstrating the organization between pitch (frequency) and time (rhythmic duration). The use of photographs and drawings as a matrix for the composition process generates graphics. It also establishes a new ground for the perspective of music *signifiers*, once introduced in the creation process as image, memory, and cultural identity heritage. This process establishes a direct dialogue throughout visual arts and music, bringing musical signifiers to the melodic themes and consequently, to the composition process like a bridge to new discoveries, and associated with the structural outlines to the monumental geographic mountain forms, expressions of nature, here stated as a photograph (Felicissimo 2023, 927)—see figures 2 and 3.

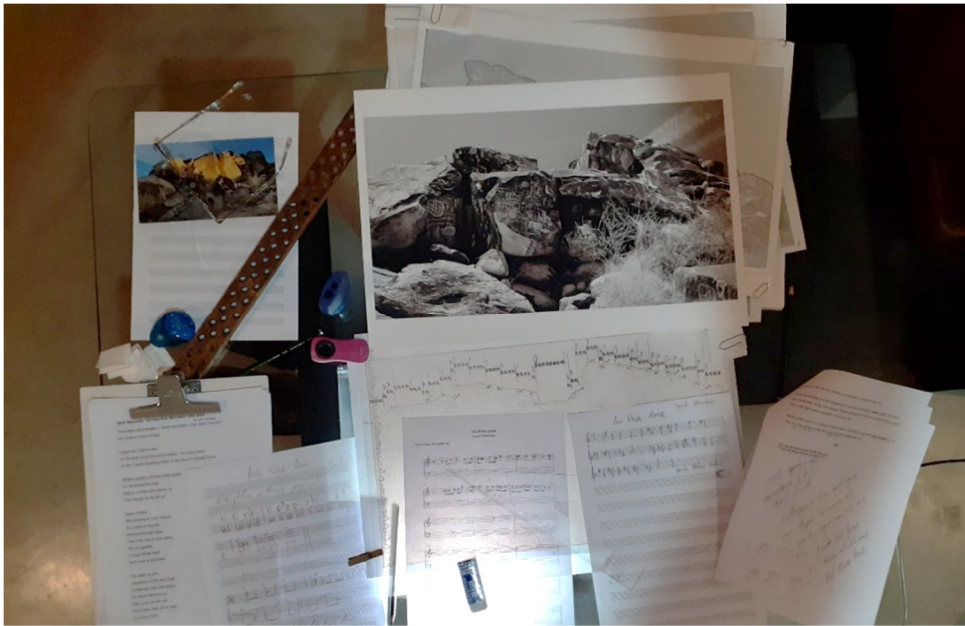


Figure 2. The worktable used in the transformation of the image into melody with millimeter paper under the silk paper, then into music notation

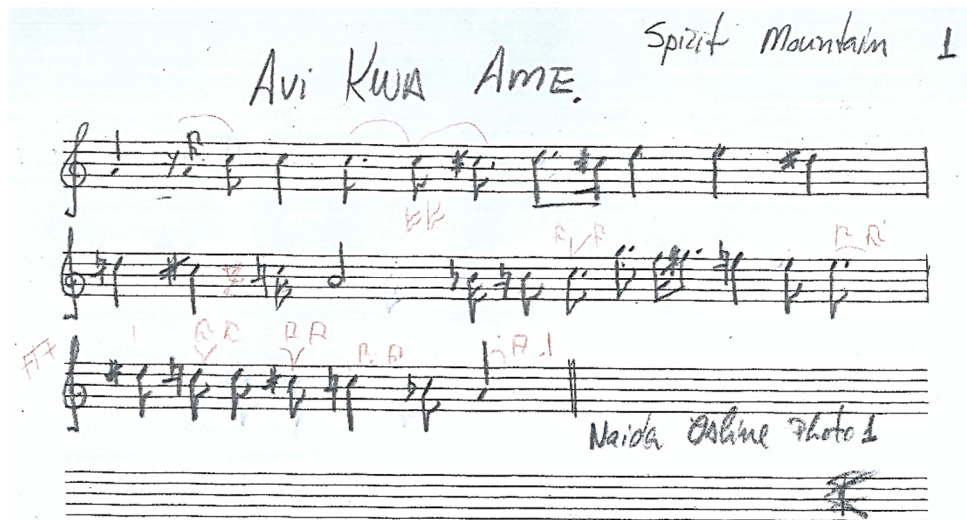


Figure 3. The figure illustrates the accommodation process transforming the outline of the rocks into melody. This is the third stage of the transformation process

It is inspiring to realize that this melody (example 1) has its origins in the combination of the outline of a rock formation from the Avi Kwa Ame National Monument. The conversion process is the key to transform it into melody.

During Paulo C. Chagas' Audiovisual and Multimedia Composition classes, I spent my time producing a composition based on three photographs of the contour of rocks formation that Naida Osline had captured in the park, along with some harmony conceived on the rhythm pattern 3 against 2 that I started composing on the handrail. That idea crossed my mind, while I was waiting Chagas' videoclip creative class. I also got along with Tyler's book *Aridtopia* (Stallings 2014). Furthermore, a song melody was composed, in which I combined some topic argument from the book: "Aridtopia is a state of mind. It is a viewpoint that comes from having thoughts in an arid region. It understands that water is gold. It understands that the desert is a setting for so much that coexists." That was the beginning of our partnership, composing music for the environment of the National Monument Avi Kwa Ame and the Mojave Desert, when Douglas McCullogh, a senior curator, reunites us with the idea that we should "go and make some art."

**Avi Kwa Ame**  
**National Monument in Southern Nevada**  
 Spirit Mountain

Naida Osline Photograph one

Andante Rodrigo Felicissimo

The musical score is written for Flute and Piano. It is in common time (C) and marked 'Andante'. The score is divided into three systems. The first system (bars 1-6) is highlighted with a red box. The Flute part begins with a melody of eighth and sixteenth notes, marked *mf*, then *p*, and *mf*. The Piano part provides a harmonic accompaniment with sustained chords and moving bass lines. The second system (bars 7-12) features a more active Flute melody starting at bar 5, marked *f*. The Piano accompaniment continues with similar textures. The third system (bars 13-18) shows the Flute melody continuing with dynamic markings *p* and *f*. The Piano part concludes with sustained chords and a final bass line.

Example 1. The music score for piano and flute. The first six bars represents the melody extracted from the photograph by Naida Osline, representing the outlines of the rocks containing petroglyphs

## TYLER STALLINGS' LETTER

At the end of my stay at Riverside in 2022, I received a letter from Tyler and three printed photographs from the region of Avi Kwa Ame. The letter, his book *Aridtopia*, and all the input from Naida Oslin brought a certain idea of the combination between time and space and all the attributes that they capture from those sacred places.

Naida Oslin's video is a beautiful and inspiring homage to Avi Kwa Ame Monument and the Mojave Desert: the scenes take us to consider all the aspects within the relation of time and space and the scales of human race, nature, and geology. The video edition is a remarkable artwork that inspires us to attribute a geographical landmark to *Avi Kwa Ame* Monument (Spirit Mountain) and the Mojave Desert. Throughout the video's scenes in time-lapse frames mode, letter, and thoughts, there is an interpretation that invites us to comprehend a beautiful way of observing land and nature over time; to see the space through the lens of a camera in time-lapse mode. An appearance that develops new scaled layers on moving objects like rocks, creosote bushes and flowers bushed with the wind, as well as a spider passing in front of the camera.

The camera in time-lapse mode focuses on the petroglyphs that had been inscribed on the rocks, rescuing the signs from the past, when mankind from that land used to write messages on the rocks. Tyler Stallings asks:

Do they describe the creation of gods, animals, and humans? Do I need to be in a trance to understand their invisible worlds? Is there a chronology to the petroglyphs as I walk through this canyon? Do circles and spirals mean creation? Do snakes mean gods? Do crosses and four dots mean humanoids? Are they just doodles, some humor to infuse into the ancestors of the Mojave who once passed through with a hot sun overhead? Avi Kwa Ame, can you read them, or does it really matter with your sense of a galactic time-lapse? (2022, 2)

These questions move us ahead in time and thoughts about our presence on earth over time. Symbols that today are only an inscription on a rock used to signify signs to the people that passed through that land. Presently, to decode those symbols takes us to interpret what kind of values that community used to have. At the same time, it gives us a notion of how fragile and ephemeral we all are: from different scales and layers, we understand the imperative force of time over mankind.

According to Paulo C. Chagas “the approach to the universe of sound, from the phenomenological point of view, must include both the lived human experience and the possibilities for transforming this experience” (2022, 63). In Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology of time consciousness, sound consciousness is a metaphor for time consciousness. Husserl considered temporality a fundamental substratum of phenomenological research. Time is responsible for the way we experience things in the world and build consciousness. The structures of consciousness are what make it possible to perceive the unity of any object as a manifestation of time consciousness. “According to Husserl’s phenomenology, time consciousness is the constitutive basis of consciousness and subjectivity. Time consciousness is based on time objects that are perceived not as isolated points in time, but as a stream. By listening to a melody, we establish links between the present, the immediate past, and the immediate future in the constitution of time consciousness” (Husserl 1966, quoted in Chagas 2014, 210).

For the time-lapse video we see that time has been modified in our usual structure of consciousness. As Tyler Stallings infers in his letter about the *Avi Kwa Ame Mountain Time-Lapse*, “with time-lapse photography, I shoot one frame every thirty seconds, to speed up what I can’t see because it’s too slow, so that ten-minutes is seen within twenty-seconds” (2022, 1). Thanks to the time-lapse photography technique, time is spread in a different scale in relation to space and objects, changing our perception of the movements of plants and sights. Our perception gains a new consciousness, a way to understand the movement of plants, animals, and objects. This technique plays with our understanding of time and space once we have changed the time scale. Plants that are normally still, acquired motion captured by the camera through time lapse. Sunset, shadows, and clouds gain new forms in a few seconds. The time-lapse technique sharpens our perception and consciousness of objects and spaces.

#### LIVE PERFORMANCES

The idea for this artwork is to present it in a live performance with the students of UCR at the Culver Center of the Arts in Riverside. Given this opportunity, we would show the film made by Naida Oslone, especially for the Riverside audience. We could do a live performance at the Art Center as well as an exhibition at some time fitting the schedule of the Culver Center. We would adjust the music and projection intended for this encounter and place.



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THE EXHIBITION *ELISA BRACHER: LIVING FORMS*,  
ESTAÇÃO PINACOTECA

Paulo Chagas (2014) defines the function of gesture in music as not restricted to the corporeal and immediate aspect of performance; also, as pointed out by Wittgenstein, “gesture plays an important role as an external sign of music understanding” (142). Chagas indicates that the gesture in musical semiotics, not only articulates nuances of perception, cognition, and affection, but also negotiates the understanding of more abstract musical structures through the internal synthesis and integration of elements (142). These observations indicate a variety of gestures that were used to develop the music composition for the *Elisa Bracher living forms* exhibition, held at the Pinacoteca of Sao Paulo. That music composition in perspective was produced for three different galleries as three composition themes, initially manipulating wood, washi paper paintings, and sheets of lead; while working with the sound of those materials and finding the musical instruments that would establish a dialogue with those musical gestures as derived from themes, scales, open chords, etc. The gestures would reflect nuances over those materials and the music would arise from a dialogue with those materials. In this case, music was in service to the fine arts, and gestures were a way to create a collection of music that would communicate the dialogue of the visual forms with the sounds design for the exhibition. According to Robert Hatten (2004, 95), gesture is a significant energetic shaping of sound through time; gestures are used to foreground stages of an expressive genre giving it a dramatic or narrative character. It includes sudden or unpredicted pauses, changes, or shifts. It may highlight tonal reversals or textural undercutting, or it may mark a shift in level of discourse, perhaps fostering a romantic ironic interpretation (Hatten 2004, 136–37). Here in this work, gesture would be adapted to the subjectiveness of the communication between visual, sonic, and musical elements.

CARNIVAL UP THE MOUNTAIN AND AMONG FRIENDS

During the 2023 Carnival in Brazil, Elisa Bracher gathered some friends on a trip up to the mountains of the Mantiqueira Range near Sao Paulo. During daytime, we would stroll along trails into the forest of *Xaxim*. We played music, games, soccer, and enjoyed our precious time together. Elisa Bracher took several pictures of nature as we walked into the forest. At a brook near the

house, Shen Ribeiro and I collected sound data of the stream and other different sounds of nature that we used as backbone to the exhibition audio tracks. The idea was that the stream sound could sustain a dialogue with our collected sound data of wood, washi paper, and lead. These sound materials were gathered into the music composition for *Elisa Bracher: living forms* exhibition combined by Carlos Akamine once we had all these audio data collected.

#### RECORDING AT ELISA BRACHER'S STUDIO

The recordings made for the art exhibition *Elisa Bracher: living forms* were created at the Care Institute, where parts of the washi paintings and the wood sculpture were produced for the Pinacoteca exhibition. Shen Ribeiro and I worked together collecting the sounds of the materials that Elisa Bracher created in her works: wood, paper and lead. First the sound of wood was recorded with the percussionist Henrique Menezes, and in a second encounter, we recorded the sounds of the washi paper paintings by Elisa Bracher. Hands on a microphone and a recorder, we played making the sounds of the washi paintings that were hanged on a clothesline. While touching the paper, an interesting sound was captured by the microphone that accompanied the hands touching the washi. In a third encounter, we captured the sounds of lead by playing with wood pieces, rolling them on the lead. These were the three steps that took us to produce the sounds of the materials utilized at Elisa Bracher's exhibition. After collecting these sound materials, we produced music with our instruments, according to the materials: the wood gallery would be related to the percussion set that we had recorded with Henrique Menezes and among ourselves as well. The washi paper paintings gallery was related to Shen Ribeiro playing flutes and shakuhachi. The lead gallery was associated with the piano recording that I have performed. All the live recording was captured at the Care Institute. That experience was incredible, once we noticed that all the materials of the exhibition were near us, during the entire recording process. The final procedure for this composition was done with Carlos Akamine, Shen Ribeiro and I for the mix and master of the recordings. Another important material was recorded at the *Xaxim* house: a stream with a diversity of sounds related to water and nature. The brook guided all the recordings. It showed us, in the search for the mainstream, that we should aggregate the whole set of sound materials and music recordings. This was an important part of the creative

process that Shen Ribeiro and I have combined to develop the soundtrack for Elisa Bracher's exhibition at the Pinacoteca of Sao Paulo.

#### EXHIBITION OPENING TEAM EFFORT

An interesting passage of the exhibition showed the reunion of crafts-women and man that gathered to produce the premier of Elisa Bracher's opening exhibition. It was an excellent moment for all the crew from Elisa Bracher's assistants and Pinacoteca staff trying to put all the montage together in the three galleries. Lead, wood, and paper, music, and the technique to build in place those ideas created by the artist. It was a great moment for all of us. In the opening of the exhibition, Elisa Bracher, during the opening speech for her *living forms* exhibition, at Pinacoteca (Sao Paulo, April 1, 2023), said: "To work with art you always have to adapt to the circumstances of the place and the people. It is always about dealing with the unexpected and finding a way through." The speech reflects the environment that this work expects us to be, prepared for everything. At the opening, Shen Ribeiro and I prepared a solo participation in the washi and lead galleries, as well as a duo for closing our first participation at the exhibition.

#### LIVE CONCERTS

One incredible idea was to reunite musicians from Sao Paulo and abroad to share our experience. Elisa Bracher told us that in the lead gallery there would be a piano. Her idea was put into practice, and we were able to achieve an enormous success in terms of meeting and dialogue, between musicians and artists from different places. After three years of the COVID-19 pandemic, we realize how the music segment was on hold, and that idea genuinely promoted the meeting of different musicians along with music performances, repeated every Saturday (from April to September 2023). Also, a partnership was established with the State Music School of Sao Paulo (EMESP) for the young musicians and tutors, so that young musicians and teachers could be introduced to the exhibition and in the final stage of their participation they could perform live music at the three galleries of the museum.

## CONCLUSION

The report on this ongoing research is related to two previous works recently published as part of this project. The two works are (a) the essay “In the Quest of Compositional Matrices for Music Themes Concerning Landscape: Exploring Senses as Means for Creative Processes. Villa-Lobos and His Existential Signs” and (b) “Uirapuru: The Legendary Enchanted Bird by Heitor Villa-Lobos. An Aesthetic Confrontation Along Stravinsky’s Firebird and Sibelius’s Tapiola.” These two works are progressive stages to the current discussion and a consequence of the compositional technique developed on the landscape and its derivative motive themes. In another part of this open conclusion the related music works are part of the practical resolution of the ongoing research. These music compositions are as follows: the Avi Kwa Ame (parts 1, 2 and 3), the Flute Duet, the Mojave Desert Duo, and Gestures on sheets of Lead (piano solo) for the exhibition *Elisa Bracher: living forms*.

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ONGOING RESEARCH

## Summary

The present work is related to the epistemology of music signification, and the correlation with the compositions that brings in a narrative process: nature as its resemblance. In the structural narrative process music acquires signifiers that infer to a segment of the representative work related to the area of research in sonic naturalism (*naturalism sonore*). This essay will present separated works in non-hierarchy sequence. The idea is to communicate the chain of sign systems and its processes concerning the epistemology of music signification on the fine arts. The music creative process will guide us through this promenade by having music in service to the fine arts.

**Keywords:** Melody of the Mountain; time-lapse images; music composition; natural models; transformation process