

Interview with György Ligeti in Mexico (1972)

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Introduction

At the end of November 1971, Christian Schmidt, then director of the Goethe-Institut, included me in his initiative to invite György Ligeti to Mexico to give three lectures on his music. The visit was possible because he had been invited as a visiting professor of composition at Stanford University, California, and the Computer Music Project, later the Center for Coordinating Research on Music and Acoustics (CCRMA), founded and directed by composer-researcher John Chowning. Through the latter I was able to contact Lukas Ligeti, also a musician, who told me the date of his parents' arrival in the United States and the month of their visit to Mexico –which I assumed to be at the end of 1971–:

Julio, if the interview with my father was in December 1971, it had to be by phone or mail. He visited Mexico for the first, and I think also for the last time, in early 1972, maybe in March (I'm not sure either). My mother and I came with him, I remember that trip very well (I was 6 [years old]). We loved Mexico, a place of incredible interest! I only went back once, unfortunately – in 2006, not long after my father died, to play at the Visiones Sonoras festival at UNAM.¹ It is a country I would like to get to know better. When we arrived in the USA on January 31, 1972, it was for all of us the first time we set foot on the American Continent.²

In a later mail Lukas specifies:

...I checked the date with my mother, who confirms that it was March 1972. None of us remember the exact dates of our visit, but it seems to me that it was

¹ Lukas Ligeti participated with a lecture in the *Encuentro de Composición*, September 20, 2026 – “Working with electronics in Africa”–, and in the concert “Human Electroacoustics” with the solo percussion piece “Solo”, September 21, 2006.

<https://rodrigossilgal.com/visionessonoras2006/programa2006.html>

² Lukas Ligeti, email, July 8, 2024.

more like the beginning of March. I clearly remember that we were at the Hotel Luna near the Insurgentes subway station.³

Once Ligeti agreed to give the talks, I proposed that they be held in the auditorium of the recently inaugurated and now non-existent Technological Museum of the Federal Electricity Commission, located in the new section of the Chapultepec Forest, since it was interested in integrating technology to contemporary manifestations of visual arts and music. This initiative came from Antonio Rodríguez, journalist and art critic, who as director of the Museum was preparing a book about the site and asked photographer Juan Francisco Ríos to make a record of the lectures to include several images in the publication. Those attending the seminar were my composition students at the National School of Music, UNAM, professors and students of the National Conservatory, as well as artists and the public attracted by the subject.⁴



Photography by Juan F. Ríos, 1972.

³ Lukas Ligeti, email, August 5, 2024.

⁴ *Museo Tecnológico C. F. E.*, Introduction by Antonio Rodríguez, photos by Juan Francisco Ríos, Mexico City, 1972, 53 pp. Several Ríos images appear in a recent documentary film on Ligeti realized by ARTE, French and German channel.

The first presentation of Ligeti, whom I knew only for his music in concerts or in score, showed such clarity and simplicity in exposing his ideas that I proposed him to record an interview for Radio Universidad with my modest cassette player. The following morning, we began the conversation, which lasted a little more than an hour, adopting French for mutual ease. We were in the cafeteria of his hotel,⁵ where we could hear the voices inside and the trucks and bells outside, in addition to our reactions during the talk, all of which are heard and noted in this transcript. Ligeti created such a frank atmosphere that it facilitated my novice work, so I started according to chronological order, which revealed to me his difficult artistic experience due to the political dictatorship in Hungary from 1945 to 1956. During the interview, he discusses his evolution from his youth to the most recent period, highlighting the initial influence of Bartók – above all – and Stravinsky, that of folklore and, in parallel, the communist censorship and his own resistance and rejection to the imposition of any aesthetics, such as the nationalist one, his critical and even self-critical tone. In such a hostile environment and control of artistic subjectivity, an intimate image will persist, an announcement of Ligeti’s future work, the “imagination of great sonorous masses...”

When he left Hungary in December 1956, he encountered the creations and resources of the European musical world, he received Stockhausen’s support to settle in Cologne, the influence exerted on his music by the openness to novelty, his resistance to the dodecaphonic current still in vogue. The consequent break with the style he had developed until then leads him to synthesize the character of his own creative process: “I have an intuitive imagination and then, when I create the piece, I have a given syntax; I use very simple mathematics, just arithmetic.”

Among his methods emerges that of micropolyphony, “polyphony of many voices [...], so dense that it is impossible to discern the individual voices [...]: a new timbral result that is not timbre.” The evolution of that idea leads him to contrast the massive with the individual, as in *Melodien*, which he explains by evoking his experience before the churrigueresque of Tepotzotlán. It’s like that in my piece: [...] hearing the details [and] hearing the totality.” Such an image prompted me to mention Terry Riley’s minimalism, whose work Ligeti knows in detail and can refer to his own *Symphonic Poem for 100 Metronomes* (1962) [...], “very ‘Terry Rileyan’ music, but before Riley...”. Today, the *Poem* might relate more thoroughly to the multi-tempi of Conlon

⁵ As remembered by Lukas Ligeti, it was the today’s inexistent Hotel Luna, at that time localized in Orizaba Avenue, between the streets Puebla and Chapultepec Avenue, Roma Norte, close to the Goethe Institute.

Nancarrow, about whom he would express himself with respect and admiration a decade later.⁶

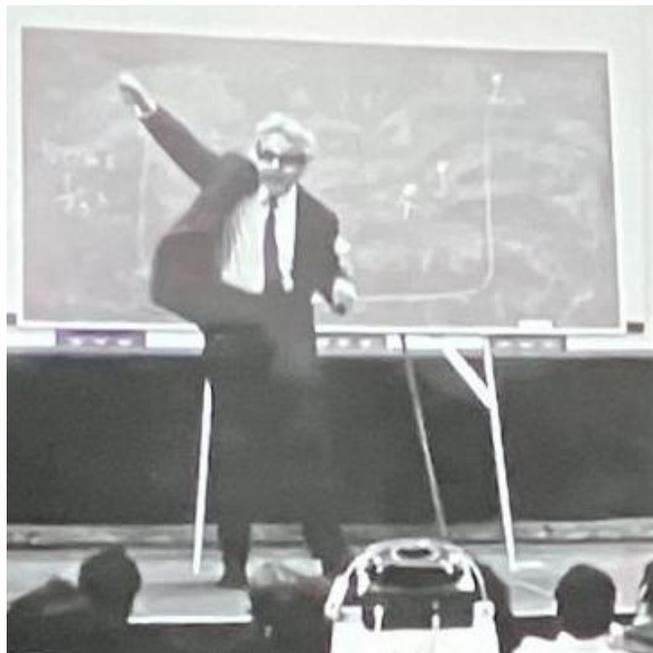
Ligeti discusses *Melodien*, whose harmonies are not at all static since his “melodies have contours that always result in extremely well-defined [...] harmonies [...]: I control the result. [...] Harmonies are like a ‘magnetic field’, [...] harmony existing in my sketches, not in the music. [...] There are always the melodies or the voices that lead. And [...] one can concentrate on the melodies or listen to it harmonically. It’s always like that. [...] so [...] I must write very exactly.” There he amplifies repetition by employing acceleration in his *Continuum* for harpsichord (1968): “...they are ever-changing models [...] they are destroyed and new models come.” I digress to *Memorias* for a keyboard (1971), influenced by *Continuum*, causing the conversation to drift for a moment to my music, the starting point for a large, generous and magnificent private lesson following his lecture the next day.

After the parenthesis, Ligeti takes up the idea of rhythmic models and the influence on them of speed: “always with this polyphony [...], so dense that the [...] ‘rhythmic models’, are all erased; the music is erased and the pitches erased, very typical of *Atmospheres* or *Volumina*.” He exemplifies it with the stroboscope, which “with speed does not [...] let perceive static things. [...] *Continuum* is so prestissimo that after a while one forgets that it is a repetition.” Later he refers to his present work by “using [...] this micropolyphony [...] which is no longer micro, but you can hear [...] the combinations of these melodies fading away to come back [...] always...”. The issue of the blurring of melodies and harmonies leads to associate it with another way of obtaining it, the microtones, and I allude to Bartók’s quartets, which gives rise to Ligetian erudition. He refers to works by him or by other authors who, instead of quarter tones, have resorted to *scordatura*, such as *Ramifications*, which divides the intonation of the strings into two groups, in addition to the enharmonic contrast or the differences in the pitch of the harmonics, so that the dissimilarity within the same tone or between two close tones is not necessarily “a quarter tone [...] and the result is like [...] a noise that is clearer”. In other words, a blurred tuning that I immediately link to the beats – when a hawk is heard that concludes the first part of the interview and frees him from my incisive need to know him better: “Mr. Ligeti...!”

⁶ Thirty years after our conversation I meet Ligeti in a concert, Paris 2001, and he asked me if when he visited Mexico, I knew Conlon, because getting in touch with him would be a transcendent thing. In fact, I have encountered Nancarrow near the end of 1969 or start of 1970. We have had a good meeting, but since I had not yet returned him a couple of books, he claimed me so furiously that I did not dare to visit him again until a decade after.

The second part of the interview, rather shorter, revolves around his pedagogical experiences, from the first rehearsals, his experience in Stockholm – “not for long” – or the opening of a position for him in September of that 1972 as a teacher in Hamburg. Added to this is a review of trends in current music as well as his perception of different productions. After Ligeti asked me during the interview if we were concluding, I finally concluded that I already have enough material. Until today I found out from Lukas that mother and son had come, so I assume they must be detesting me with righteous patience.

An additional aspect to understand Ligeti’s continuum is his drawings on the blackboard to illustrate the lectures, which revealed a way of representing the melodic turns characteristic of some works with curves linked to knots or braids. These images simplified his ideas and contributed to understand his new music writing, far from the severe rules of voice conduction typical of traditional harmony and counterpoint.



Photography by Juan F. Ríos, 1972, ed J. E., 2024.

The conversation highlights my inaccuracy in getting the titles of some of his works right, or even regarding themes that he mastered and on which he reveals an accurate auditory perception. Even though the dialogue in French was not so usual for him then, the recording highlights the tone of voice, emotional, agitated and nervous, an energy that leads him to unintentionally repeat words or ideas, a vivacity that the

transcription also preserves with the intention of reflecting throughout the text the uniqueness of Ligeti's character.

In his discourse, a plain language stands out, without fuss or pretension; it is surprising if compared to the usual one among the composers of the time, almost all of whom tended to subject music to science and technology, as if that goal could influence perception and emotion, central senses in art. The discreet and accessible Ligeti, besides being enthusiastic, frank and creative, had a knowledge of physics and an interest in scientific subjects, although these were unnecessary to address in public, since it was enough for him to focus on the music and his hearing, a pair of traits that can be appreciated from beginning to end in the lectures and in the talk. Sometimes, within the same idea, he created a collection of parentheses that he always or almost always closed, or went from French to English or German, or even jumped from one idea to another during the talk, although the discourse was still about his music, musical aesthetics and pedagogical experiences, which makes this conversation an attractive testimony for musical readers and lovers of Ligeti's work.

I made the recording with a modest cassette player and a tape whose stability is admirable after more than half a century of remaining almost intact in my archive. The direct transcription from the French, made by Lucas Barroso Rouwet, was finally reviewed and edited by me, from which I only edited a few rare phrases that Ligeti asked to remove, due to his barely critical comments on the music of others, asking me instead to add this idea: "I like everything that is experimental, and I don't like what is official." This and the other versions honor that agreement; also, the almost complete broadcast on the program I oversaw on Radio UNAM the following week, with my simultaneous translation into Spanish.⁷ A few days later I proposed to publish it in the magazine *Plural*, directed and founded in 1971 by Octavio Paz at a critical time for the newspaper *Excelsior*, but also for music; hence the writer Jose Emilio Pacheco, a good connoisseur of the medium, suggested me to insist in the same newspaper and talk to Hero Rodriguez Toro, director of the cultural supplement *Diorama*, who agreed to publish the interview although in a brief and illustrated version.⁸ At 52 years of distance and to celebrate with the delay of a year the Ligeti Centenary, *Pilacremus* finally publishes this talk.

⁷ "Nuevas audiciones en México" (New auditions in Mexico), weekly 100 minutes broadcasted program, Radio Universidad Nacional, UNAM, Mexico City, March or April 1972.

⁸ Estrada, Julio, "Gyorgy [sic] Ligeti, hacedor de música" (György Ligeti, music maker, editor's tittle), interview, *Excelsior*, *Diorama de la cultura*, April 1972, pp. 4-6, illustrated with photos of the lectures by Juan Francisco Ríos.

Interview with György Ligeti in Mexico (1972) CASSETTE side A

JE: How was your music like before 1956?

GL: Well, you know I lived in Budapest, Hungary, and Hungary was after the war and is until now practically a communist country in the Russian way, you know? And not idealistic communist, you know? It is a Russian imperialism. In those times, when Stalin lived, Hungary was absolutely isolated from all information from the East, so when Hungary was a normal country, I was very small and then came the war. You know, during the [Second] War there was no possibility to get any information and after the war there was a very severe censorship, so there was no information. For example, around the 1950s, when Stockhausen and Boulez were making new music, serial music, I, and not only I, but nobody had any idea, because it was impossible to have recordings, records or even scores. So, the newest music I knew was Bartók and Stravinsky, a little bit of Schonberg, but very little, none of Webern [and] a little bit of Berg. Naturally, I studied during and after the war. The [Ferenc Liszt] Academy in Budapest was [a] very good school for traditional music practice; for example, traditional harmony and counterpoint were very good, there was a very high level, but of new music, nothing at all. So, I studied Bartók's and Stravinsky's scores a lot, and naturally my music when I was young was influenced by Bartók and Stravinsky, but from the year 1950, when I was exactly [...] 27 years old ... (the conversation is interrupted by a waiter and continues shortly after). It was 1950 when I had the idea that it was impossible [...]. I had no knowledge of the Viennese school at all, and knowing only Bartók and Stravinsky it's impossible to make music that doesn't resemble theirs. I said: —Stop, stop, I'm going to do something that is... something else. And at that moment I had [for] the first time an imagination of music without melody, without intervals, without exact tempi, but with great masses of sound. [...] I realized this idea much later, in 1960, in the piece...

JE: *Apparitions*...?⁹

GL: ... no, it was *Atmospheres*.¹⁰ *Apparitions* is not so much without rhythm, it's without..., but *Apparitions* was after 1956, you know? It's just the idea of an absolutely static music but being absolutely isolated [...] I was thinking only about rhythm and pitch, about pitches. So how do you write down pitches that are not exact? At that time these were very difficult questions for me, so in that 1950 I started some very simple piano pieces, trying to forget [...]. They were little piano pieces, one

⁹ Ligeti, György. *Apparitions*. 1958-59. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCS8DJJnxOE>

¹⁰ Ligeti, György. *Atmosphères* in French. 1961. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-bemE-bCXQ>

only with one tone and rhythmic variations; it was one tone, just an A, nothing at all, with rhythmic variations.

JE: Without octaves...?

GL: ...yes, with octaves. And in the second piece with 3 different sounds... Exactly in the first piece, one sound, an A in different registers, and at the end the second sound, a D. It's very simple, I wanted to forget about Bartók and Stravinsky and do very simple things like a Cartesian thought: 1, 0 and, you know, in French...?

JE: ...the coordinates...?

GL: ...yes, the new possibilities..., the coordinates, yes.... So, a piece: that. The piece exists – there is a new record that is not known because it is just about to be published, it is not published yet, with recent things of mine –, [then] a piece with 3 sounds [...] different, rhythmically very differentiated, 4 sounds and so on, 11 pieces: from 2 sounds to 12 sounds, but it is not dodecaphony, you know? But after writing this piece – the title is *Musica Ricercata* –, ¹¹ which is a dedication to Frescobaldi – there is a small allusion in piece number 11 in a theme. [In] the piece with 12 sounds – but not dodecaphonic – there is a theme, it is thematic music, nothing to do with serial music or anything like that. And the eleventh piece, this one I wrote in a period of two years, from 1950 to 1952, maybe 1953, that's when I finished it. And the last piece was a quote from a Frescobaldi theme, from a Frescobaldi chromatic ricercare which has only, I think, 6 or 7 tones, and I completed it with 12 tones. And that's all. That's why all these pieces are titled *Musica ricercata*, but it has nothing to do with the form of the ricercare, they are very different. But after finishing this – the first piece or the first cycle of pieces, which were not Stravinsky and not Bartók – it's interesting, I have the feeling or the impression [that] the tones and the harmonies were very different from Bartók and Stravinsky, although the rhythmic was Stravinsky. So, even wanting to do something very different, without wanting to... (we laugh). So, for a long time I didn't want this piece to be played and until now, last year, a pianist played this piece. And after this piece, for me it was nothing but bad music, and at that time I had this imagination of big sound masses, sound layers, exactly that which I did later in *Atmospheres* and in *Apparitions* and a first ... maybe you know *Apparitions*?

JE: Yes, the whole set.

GL: Ah, yes, because *Apparitions* doesn't exist on the record, it just....

¹¹ Ligeti, György. *Musica Ricercata*. 1951-53. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NkKV0Ze1Z6M>

JE: ...yes, yes.

GL: Yes. But have you heard it?

JE: Yes, I have the score.

GL: Ah, you have the score, you know [...] There are two movements, the first movement already has this static sonority. The first version of this piece I composed before – not the version that you have now in the score but a version that was much more primitive – I composed it in 1956 before I left Hungary [...]. It was just this static sonority but very naive, very simple, much simpler than [in] the score. [...] Exactly in 1956 I had no idea that I could leave Hungary because the borders were absolutely closed and [there were] no passports, I was absolutely isolated. So [...] until after the 1956 revolution it was possible to leave, and I composed this piece. The title was very different in Hungarian, *Víziók* – in French, *Les visions* – it's the same as *Apparitions*. It was only the first part of *Apparitions*, and I composed it.... The score exists, but it's not exactly the same. And then when I came...

JE: Did you leave the second part as it was [in the] original?

GL: Yes, but it's not played.

JE: It's canon, isn't it?

GL: No, no. It's something else, a third movement of *Apparitions* that I didn't finish.

JE: But the second one?

GL: No. The first movement, the first variant, only exists in manuscript, but it's not played because I composed *Apparitions*, as the score [remained] two years later, in 1958. It's the same piece, only better, because at that time, in 1957, [I had] the possibility of knowing all the music of Webern, Boulez and Stockhausen. I didn't want to make music like Stockhausen and Boulez, but naturally..., it was a very important help for me to compose my music with a higher level. I think that was the whole situation until 1957.

JE: Yes, at some point your music was nationalistic.

GL: Hmm, look, when I was young and studying, everybody in Hungary was very much influenced by Bartók and Kodaly, which was a very natural view. Bartók and Kodaly were idols for me – Kodaly partly, but Bartók! (we laugh). I wrote during my student period and some years later Hungarian folk music using Hungarian and Romanian folk songs. I also collected folk music in...

JE: ... [...] ... for a year you did this?

GL: ... It was only for a few months, in Romania, I have articles [about this]. So, I was interested in folklore, also now I'm interested in folklore, different folklore, not Hungarian or Romanian, everything, from all over the world, but not to compose it.

JE: You are no longer a nationalist? ¹²

GL: No, no. In any case I am very much against all nationalism – and in politics very much against nationalism – and not against folklore, which is very important. No, [in] folklore you don't have...: For example, I have great interest – also today I am influenced by Tibetan music, for example, and [by] many other things.

JE: There are ... a lot of links, right? (unintelligible).

GL: Yes, yes, yes, many. Like, for example, Boulez, *Le marteau sans maître*, ¹³ has a lot of influences from Balinese and Javanese gamelan music, but it's not a general influence, you know? It's just that naturally I have a lot of influences, but not nationalistic ones. When I lived in Hungary, I was very much against nationalism, but I was interested in folklore, it was immediate information, the education there was that everybody wrote in a musical language influenced by Bartók. That was the situation.

JE: And what were the musical ideas that struck you the most when you left Hungary, and what aspect of musical thought appealed to you the most?

GL: Yes. So, when I left Hungary, I was very open and [for] political reasons, because [...] I'm only for freedom, I'm against all dictatorships and [these] can be left-wing or right-wing...

JE: ...or of the center (we laugh).

GL: All dictatorships. I didn't like being in Hungary: I lived through the Nazi dictatorship and the Stalinist dictatorship. It was enough. [That] was one thing. The other, was the situation of the arts, not only music, because under the Nazi dictatorship modern art was *Entartete Kunst*: ¹⁴ it was not possible. And in the Stalinist communist era it was the same thing. Even, for example, Bartók himself in Hungary, who was a very important national composer and had already died, but his more

¹² My question at that moment refer indirectly to the Mexican context, when Nationalism was the main musical stream.

¹³ Boulez, Pierre. *Le marteau sans maître*. 1954. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljcDXPcWRvI>

¹⁴ "Degenerated Art", title of the nazi exhibition in Munich, 1937, against Modern Art. In: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arte_degenerado

advanced, more progressive pieces, like the Quartets 3¹⁵ and 4,¹⁶ or the *Wonderful Mandarin*,¹⁷ or the *Music for strings, percussion and celesta*,¹⁸ it was impossible to play them during Stalinism. Now it's different, now it's a communist country, it's a dictatorship, but you can play everything, and in the arts, everything is possible, but it's difficult situation, you know. But at that time, 1956, my position as a composer was impossible because I had the opportunity to publish my folk pieces and to hear them in concert, but they are pieces that, for me, a little later, were of no interest. [...] But my more progressive pieces...; for example, I wrote a quartet that was played later in Vienna, when I was there in 1958, but in Hungary it was impossible because it was very dissonant, it was music that...

JE: ...is that your first quartet?

GL: It's my First Quartet,¹⁹ it was very, very Bartókian, Stravinskyan, Alban Bergian, also 'Ligetiian' if you like (we laugh), but it was not the music of today, and many of those compositions are just for my closet, for the drawer [...]. That was one thing, and the other was the isolation from the whole development of music in Europe. I heard something on the radio, but, for example, the West German stations played a lot of contemporary music, so I heard the names of Stockhausen and Boulez and, for example: Henze and Stockhausen were both very modern for me because I only heard their names, but not their music. [In Hungary] it was very difficult to hear the music: all the West German stations had noises on them: that, for the music! To prevent the population from hearing news from the radio it was possible to "hear the news" although with a modulating curtain: like this, but you could hear it, although the music was absolutely destroyed. Only the piccolo could be heard, very high-pitched things, and so I heard music; for example, Messiaen was a name only for me. I never heard Messiaen's music; I heard the *Turangalíla Symphony*²⁰ [...] but only the vibraphone and the very sharp bells, the glockenspiel, the piccolo, the piano and the xylophone! It was a lot of fun (we laughed). And even, I heard pieces by Stockhausen and Boulez, but only some very high-pitched sounds, very filtered, so it was impossible. [...] These were the two reasons for [leaving] Hungary: [one] was political, because I don't like

¹⁵ Bartók, Béla. *String Quartet No. 3*. 1927. In: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Knd04_iYTGc

¹⁶ Bartók, Béla. *String Quartet No. 4*. 1928. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJLb7-m-pAY>

¹⁷ Bartók, Béla. *A csodálatos mandarin* (The wonderful Mandarin). 1918-24. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGuE20hKaDw>

¹⁸ Bartók, Béla. *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta*. 1936. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEIT9KD4uX8>

¹⁹ Ligeti, György. *String Quartet No. 1, Métamorphoses nocturnes*. 1953-54. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tfHXqUTdaA>

²⁰ Messiaen, Olivier. *Sinfonía Turangalíla*. 1946-1948. In: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eCO7le_6LzU

dictators, and the other was very practical: as a composer it was impossible for me. I was a teacher at the Academy of Music after I finished my studies and immediately, I had a position [to give] counterpoint and harmony, [which] was very good and an opportunity to live. [...] Personally it was not difficult for me, but I wanted to have contact with all the new composers [...]. In December 1956 I went out to Vienna and then... [in] 1957 to Cologne, because I was interested in electronic music and Cologne was a center. Stockhausen was there and a year later Kagel also arrived [...]. Cologne was an extraordinarily important center at that time. So, I was influenced by Stockhausen, Boulez.... With Stockhausen I had a very good contact, I lived in Stockhausen's house because I was a refugee with no money. Nothing at all. I had a radio, a small grant, I was able to live very modestly and for 6 weeks I was Stockhausen's guest. I was influenced by all the information he gave me, by Stockhausen, Boulez, Nono [...] and all the scores that were played then. I started working in the electronic music studio and I was making my own compositions, of which I already had very naive sketches in Budapest [...]. Starting this whole method on a higher level, which was better for me, I rejected all my old music. It is very long, I think ... (refers to the length of the talk, although it is unintelligible).

JE: Do you have serial music?

GL: Not exactly serial. I never applied the dodecaphonic method nor the generalized serial method, but my 1958-1959 piece, *Artikulation*,²¹ an electronic piece, *Glissandi*, which is not known, and in *Apparitions*; there are no series, as in Stockhausen and Boulez, but 'organizations', a very exact predetermination but not serial; it's another method, the statistical method, but not random, very exact.

JE: Is there any connection with Xenakis?

GL: No. At that time I didn't know Xenakis' music. A little bit later I became very interested in Xenakis, for example, *Metastasis*,²² [...] which was written in 1954, so I was not influenced by Xenakis nor Xenakis from me, we are absolutely different composers. But, for example, *Metastasis* was a piece that I heard later, I think in 1960, and I was very interested in it. But Xenakis has a mathematical method and always with algorithms. I never: it is intuitive music, although also exactly organized, but the first thought is absolutely intuitive, and the organization is not mathematical. It is as if you design a plan, a plan that is very precise, but in which there are also

²¹ Ligeti, György. *Artikulation*. 1958. In: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=71hNL_sKTZQ&t=86s

²² Xenakis, Iannis. *Metastasis*. 1953-54. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZazYFchLRI>

calculations, but only for the auxiliary things, not for the whole: it is not as exact as the music of Xenakis or the serial music of Boulez.

JE: And in what plan do you make a very precise organization?

GL: It differs from piece to piece, for example, in the first part of *Apparitions* I have elements like a series of durations; it was a very precise calculation of durations, not a series, but a 'repertoire' – it's like a typographer working with his hands, which have a division for A, for B, for the 'boxes'.²³ I have [a box for] the shorter durations and then a box with the other durations. But no: had it been a series I would have adopted a more automatic path, but [this] was different: a 'statistical arrangement'. The longer elements of the durations would be just one part in a box, the shorter ones, many chunks [where] the sum [is] exact. It was a linear distribution because, in all boxes, the sum of the [small] elements equals the longest duration. I used this repertoire of durations, and the same for the timbre. So, it's not serial, but it was composed very exactly, a very exact plan. I used all these elements for the first part of *Apparitions*; when all the duration elements are finished the piece is finished. So, for the big form, I have the relations of [the] golden section – Bartók already has that relation.²⁴ So, for example, in the first part of *Apparitions* there is a longer section and a shorter section, a very exact division. The longer section is very dark and low, and then a [second] section... it's exactly the golden section. [...] So I have two divisions. The big shape which is derived from the golden section – golden section up to a middle level, you know? – and [where] I have the smaller rhythmic elements, elements with successions [...]. The elements don't follow the golden section, it's just an approximation, and so I have a strange organization [...] for the durations, for example, I assigned [long] durations that are filled with these small elements, but in the succession of these small elements there is an extra, a third organization. How have I combined these elements? It's like [in] language, it was a given syntax and in the given syntax I can work freely. In all my compositions the organization always differs, but I always have a basic organization, a formal principle [...] exactly given, and operations that are free [...], a case like that of a language: it's always the syntax.

JE: Yes, and there is always a mathematical approach to organization?

GL: The word mathematical is perhaps too much. Xenakis, for example, he always has an algorithm that maybe is stochastic or [other]. I'm not using it here. But maybe it's not mathematical; it's like an architect [who] makes a house: he makes a plan of this

²³ The idea of 'boxes' refers to the printing system at the time to order the different letter types in wood boxes.

²⁴ A well-known case is *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* (see note 18).

house that comes out of his imagination and then there are calculations for the balance [...]. It is the same thing. I have an intuitive imagination and then, when I create the piece, I have a certain syntax; I use very simple mathematics, just arithmetic. For example, duration relations, relations... for a piece using given intervals and transformations of these intervals, for example, but it's not very mathematical.

JE: How would you describe, in very general terms, your current music?

GL: In general terms, from *Apparitions* until today, it has been an idea that is still very important to me. I've given it a name, micropolyphony, which is having a polyphony of many voices, [which produces] a tessitura [or] a polyphonic texture. But, in a polyphony, for example, in Palestrina or Bach you can hear melodic voices, [although] I worked in a very typical way, in *Atmospheres* or in the *Requiem*,²⁵ with many voices that form a [textural] tessitura so dense that it is impossible to discern the individual voices; [these] are just the result [of] that [textural] tessitura, so that the rhythm and the pitches are indistinguishable. [The] textural tessitura [is] a new timbral result that is not the timbre of these instruments or [of] the voices that have produced this very dense rhythm-timbre. In the last three or four years, I've been using a micropolyphony that is not really micro. So, a dialectic between the micropolyphony and [...] the voices – human, instrumental or even electronic – that can be heard. For example [...], if you have a textile and you have seen the recurrence in [it, up close] you can see that there are white and black and blue filaments, and so on. If you want to see the textile from a meter away, you only have a sum of all those filaments: you can't distinguish the threads. Now, that is micropolyphony, but in the more recent pieces, like the *Chamber Concerto*²⁶ or *Melodien*,²⁷ there is a dialectic between the voices: at one moment they are so dense that they give a micropolyphonic result, although it is one sound, a combination of voices. But then come individual voices that appear and disappear. This is then the recent piece I finished, which I gave the title *Melodien* because you always hear melodies, many melodies with different tempi, and they are

²⁵ Ligeti, György. *Requiem*. 1963-65. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJBZ7jeU2YI>

²⁶ Ligeti, György. *Chamber Concerto*. 1969-70. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hboFvSaKUHU>

²⁷ Ligeti, György. *Melodien*. 1971. In: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fZ_cK04ilbM *Melodien* was premiered the same year of this conversation, December 10, 1971, in Nuremberg, and the idea of different *tempi* refer to a previous project indicated by John Henken, “*Clocks and Clouds –variation of “Under Clouds and Clocks”*”, lecture by Karl Popper, 1965 (1902-94). In:

Chrome-

extension://efaidnbmnniibpcajpcglclefndmkaj/http://guindo.pntic.mec.es/~ssag0007/hemerotecal_archivos/pdf-nov09/ssg-popperesena.pdf

which will be the tittle of a work for female voices and orchestra rescued by Ligeti of an opera project which was cancelled the following year. <https://es.laphil.com/musicdb/pieces/492/melodien>

melodies that are [...] figurations, melodic elements, but they are very...: For example, here in Mexico...

JE: It's a lot like *Apparitions*, isn't it?

GL: No.

JE: Where there are many simultaneous melodies?

GL: Yes, but in *Apparitions* the melodies are so combined that the result is not melodic, the result is a mass. You never hear an exact pitch. Now, in *Melodien*, and, in the *Chamber Concerto*, which was before *Melodien*, you have this mass and a melody that appears and disappears in the.... It resembles [...what] I saw in Mexico, in Tepotzotlán, that extraordinary Churrigueresque church [...] – my music has nothing to do with that because I didn't know it, but I give an example –: [...] in this church, with many golden details, you can look at the details, you can even look at the totality [...], it's an extraordinarily complicated thing all the way up. It's like that in my piece: you can hear the details, [and] you can hear the totality. There's always a mass of detail, so full of detail.... Or, for example, in Bosch painting,²⁸ with so much detail, you can hear the details, but you can also hear the whole.

JE: I think maybe your music is [...] “pre-environmental music”. Now, there is “environmental music,”²⁹ for example, something that Terry Riley does, *In C*,³⁰ very much in the young American line, isn't it?

GL: Yes. I know the music of Terry Riley and Steve Reich, which has a lot to do with repetition. There's an affinity between Terry Riley and myself, [but] when I made this music, I didn't know Terry Riley; [...] I knew Terry Riley personally and Reich's music I only heard for the first time a few weeks ago. I don't know Reich personally, but I listened to him [...]; there is a very strong connection, very important. For example, like with Stockhausen and Cage, there is a relationship [but they are] very different methods. [Like,] I have a close relationship with Terry Riley, but we have very different methods. In 1962 I wrote the *Symphonic Poem for 100 Metronomes*,³¹ which was the first music with many rhythms. It was very “Terry Rileyan” music, but before Riley. It's

²⁸ Bosch, Hieronymus. In : https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Bosco

²⁹ My denomination of a "pre-ambient music" is clumsy, although it served me to highlight, in the context of Tepotzotlán, repetition and *Melodien*, the experience of perceiving the parts and the whole – the birth of the mass–, as occurs with minimalism, which by contrast I identify as "ambient music", where the goal of repetition –the parts–, resides in building the whole –the mass.

³⁰ Riley, Terry. *In C*. 1964. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yNi0bukYRnA>

³¹ Ligeti, György. *Symphonic Poem for 100 Metronomes*. 1962. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-mUv705xj3U> I ignored this last piece, two years before *In C* (1964), which I premiered in Mexico, 1969, with the Conjunto Pro Música Nueva at UNAM.

not a question of priority, I like it very much, but a question of affinity. So, I'm very interested in it. For example, *In C* by Terry Riley is a piece that I like very much, but [...] it's a tonal piece with modulations from C major to G major, to E minor and then to G minor. I don't use tonality, but, for example, if you listen to *Melodien*, it's a piece that has a lot of "Terry Rileyesque" elements, but the result is very different and I don't use improvisation, you know, everything is exactly determined.

JE: I mean, you are much more selective, and he is much more democratic in his choice.

GL: Yes. So, if you want to...,

JE: ...yeah, it has nothing to do with his political thinking, but he talks about democratic music, doesn't he?

GL: ...Yes, if you want, I am elitist in my music (we laugh), not in my political thinking, in that I am very democratic.

JE: Especially on *In C* you say it's a democratic process - that there's a huge number of simultaneous tunes.

GL: Yes. And in *A Rainbow [in a Curved Air]*,³² which is very beautiful music, I like it very much. So, there's a certain affinity... But is it already too much... (referring to the recording)?

JE: No, let's move on...

GL: ...what is very different [is] that I will organize everything very exactly; even in this piece for 100 metronomes, it's an automatic concerto [...] but it's very exactly organized, so that the result has elements that the English call random. It's not "random", but an inaccuracy, although a very organized inaccuracy [...], very different from Cage's music, for example.

JE: You don't want to be organized... (I laugh)?

GL: No. I am in favor of organization, of a very exact organization. For example; in the piece *Melodien* I have a transformation of harmonies; there are no [...] static harmonies in this piece, but all the melodies have contours that always result in harmonies, absolute and extremely defined – like, for example, Terry Riley's *In C*, but Terry Riley's piece is a very simple harmony, and its rhythmic models change when each instrument takes a new model – [but in *Melodien*] I give those models, which are

³² Riley, Terry. *A Rainbow in a Curved Air*. 1969. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hy3W-3HPMWg>

much more complicated [...] a great precision and I control the result. You can hear a [...] harmonic base – like in the figured bass in the Baroque, without being the same music – that is heard in the whole composition and the melody [is] like in a..., how do you say, magnet, when [...] you have a [...] ...

JE: ...ah yes, a magnetic field...

GL: ...harmonies are like a 'magnetic field', which is only a harmony existing in my sketches, not in the music. For example: all the pitches are very compressed, then the intervals are expanded [and] then they are extremely expanded [...], torn (...). then I have a new compression and so on. [...] In this way [harmonies] are like magnetic fields and melodies are like little pieces of earth thrown into the magnetic field. For example: I have a melody that goes from one harmony to another harmony and makes [...] a new curvature that corresponds to those new magnetic fields, or two magnetic fields that are neutralized in that part: then there is a disorder. And then I have, for example, an interval, a very clear harmony, a disorder, and then a new very clear harmony. But it's always the melodies or the voices that lead. And, when listening to the piece, one can concentrate on the melodies or listen to it harmonically. It's always like that and it's given very exactly, so I can't give anything to improvise, I must write very exactly.

JE: Regarding Terry Riley – you know, his name reminds me of repetition – do you work in your music from repetitions or varieties of repetition?

GL: No, not so much. There are some patterns that repeat, but not automatically; there is only one exception: the very old piece for 100 metronomes, which is a purely rhythmic piece. In the other pieces there are no repetitions, or they are [...] repetitions that [...]; for example, in [...] *Melodien* there are three different layers: one, very long melodies, for example (he sings a long tone that suddenly takes a melismatic turn, stops on another tone and turns again), and so on, where the pitches of these magnetic fields are given by the harmony, but they are long melodies that are not repeated, that appear and disappear, and others appear and disappear; many meet and disappear. Then there is a second layer: quasi ostinato models, but not exact repetition – for example, as in Steve Reich, music that interests me a lot, as I said [...], I like the music of Terry Riley and Steve Reich – but for example, if a quasi-ostinato figure repeats [it is that] it is influenced by this magnetic field; so, exact repetition does not exist, when they repeat the pitches are always different or even the rhythm. There is, for example; a figure that makes an allargando and at that moment another

figure makes an accelerando –an example, in *Zeitmaße*,³³ by Stockhausen, you know he works with *accelerandi* and *ritardandi* at the same time–, but that music that I make [is] very different, closer to Terry Riley [...], they are models that make an accelerando and another model a rallentando and it disappears, or a model that [...]. Do you know a piece of mine for harpsichord, *Continuum*?³⁴ It's very typical [because it has] a tempo prestissimo that is absolutely, if you will, Terry Rileyian³⁵ (coincidentally, we hear a bell call), but they're ever-changing models. There's this model and then the model disappears, a new model comes; it's already this technique with these chordal 'magnetic fields'. So, the models are destroyed, and new models come - that's why it's a very typical thing.

JE: It reminds me a lot, and it has nothing to do with this (laugh), but I just wrote a piece that, listening to your *Continuum*, I found many relations to it; [...] I don't write any melody -[...] it is written for [all] keyboard instruments-, but [...] I just give a definition: the interpreter must start from the melodic turns he makes himself, but I give him only the 'modalities to repeat': how to repeat and how to evolve within the repetition through changes....

GL: Why is it a decision of the instrumentalist?

JE: Yes [...], it's his choice, I would say, his responsibility, mine was...

GL: ...can you show me what you have [...] when you have...?

JE: ...yes, sure, but I'm sorry that it's [written] in Spanish...

GL: ...I can read in Spanish because [...] French, Italian and Romanian [...] are three Latin [languages]...

JE: ...perfect...

GL: ...I can't speak Spanish, but I can understand by reading, not everything, but almost everything. That's not a problem.

JE: In this piece are [...] prescribed almost all the possibilities of repetition: if you have "1, 2, 3, 4, 5", it will give [for example]; the possibility of "eliminate the 5", or "add x", or "plus 6", etcetera, but each time it must be exactly, preserve the original patterns...,

GL: ...only the form of repetition...

³³ Stockhausen, Karlheinz. *Zeitmaße* (Time measures). 1955-56. In:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9SiYVE3Hzg>

³⁴ Ligeti, György. *Continuum*. 1968. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPgWF3G5i4k>

³⁵ As in *In C*, in which all over the performance, the piano sustains a *tempo* at 120 beats per minute.

JE: ...and each time the new is a new model...

GL: ...that interests me a lot...

JE: ...this is with both hands, you know, I propose a way of playing in parallel and...

GL: ...is it simultaneous for many instrumentalists? This gives a result that...

JE: Oh, yes, no matter how many instrumentalists there are, we just...

GL: ...a million...

JE: ...play it with ten pianos... in the museum... ³⁶

GL: ...ah, this piece had already been played... and I heard that it was a concert with ten pianos...

JE: ...yes (I laugh), I was the responsible...

GL: ...ah, yes, a piece by Cage?...

JE: ...yes, also by Cage³⁷ and [...] a text by Stockhausen. ³⁸

GL: Ah, yes, and did you also [...] this piece with a lot of...?

JE: ...yes, I did that too, yes. ³⁹

GL: Did you also do Terry Riley's *In C*?

JE: Yes. I presented *In C* here [in Mexico] two years ago.

GL: Ah, it's a wonderful piece.

JE: Yes, yes...

GL: ...I'm very interested in it, please show it to me, because I have a great interest in all those things.

JE: Yes, yes, I'll show it to you. [...] Excuse me, I was here thinking about [...] it's not to broadcast it, you know, it's not...

³⁶ The mentioned work is *Memories for a keyboard (Memorias para teclado, 1971)*, premiered at the end of 1971 in a "habitational music" concert –though my allusion to environmental music– with 10 pianos disposed in the three floors of the technological Museum, where the audience could freely move to listen the ten pianists of the Conjunto Pro Música Nueva playing simultaneously their own versions.

<https://soundcloud.com/juliusedimus> (Velia Nieto, piano solo version).

³⁷ Cage, John. *Winter Music*. 1957. In:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pDFiQMjX_G8

³⁸ From *Aus den Sieben Tagen*, collection of texts for group improvisation.

³⁹ Ligeti's question maybe refers to Cage's *Winter Music*.

GL: ...yes...

JE: ...I mean...

GL: ...no, you can do it.

JE: When I heard your music, I thought it would be a counterpoint of dynamically chosen harmonies and timbres in a constantly evolving agglomeration of sounds...

GL: ...yes...

JE: ...would you say that in a general way?

GL: In general, yes. [...]

JE: These are phases of the 'Ligetian composition', not the Hungarian phase but later, from *Apparitions* to the *Requiem* (1964), and when I worked [...] always with this very dense polyphony, so dense that the rhythmic motives, or the 'rhythmic models', are all erased; the music is erased and the pitches erased, very typical of *Atmospheres* or *Volumina*,⁴⁰ and also of Kirie of the *Requiem*; I don't know if you know it, there is a disc that is not very good, but you can listen to it.

JE: Yes, I know it. I heard it in Paris.

GL: Oh, yes, you heard it there with the Radio Orchestra. I wasn't there, but I know they did. It was a piece where I say: —Now I'm finishing with this absolutely continuous piece and I introduce rhythmic models (he plays with his fingers on the table like a keyboard), like different grid systems (you hear the spoon in a cup); for example, you have a strobe, [...] it has grids (new finger touches) and when it has a velocity you [can't] perceive static things. That was, for example, the idea behind the harpsichord piece, *Continuum*, is so prestissimo that after a while you forget that it's a repetition and (plays faster with the fingers) ...

JE: ...it becomes an environment...

GL: ...yes, it was a new phase. And then, in the newer pieces of the last three or four years, from '69 to today I want to go towards a music that, in relation to that absolutely static music – model *Atmospheres*, with (new fast finger touches) grids like *Continuum* or like the first piece for 100 metronomes, [which] is old, from '62, it was played in '63 the first time – and I use this thing, this micropolyphony [...] which is no longer micro but you can hear the melodies, the combinations of these melodies fading out to come back and so on, with (finger touches) rhythmic elements always –

⁴⁰ Ligeti, György. *Volumina*. 1961-62; 1966. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbLcl9-Js0U>

as you said of your piece, that a model is always transformed-but the transformation is continuous in this piece. I have pieces that are very different, for example: *Adventures*,⁴¹ a piece with breaks [...], but they are a lot of continuous [type] pieces [...], torn with a scissors and glued [...]. Wait, I don't know if you know the Second Quartet,⁴² I've...

JE: ...yes, of course.

GL: Do you know it from [the Deutsche Gramophone recording]?

JE: Yes. I know most of it, except *Ramifications*,⁴³ [which] I don't know.

GL: Ah, now I have a disc with *Ramifications*. But, for example, in this Second Quartet, from '68, I made a recapitulation of all (knuckle or finger touches) these methods of continuous, grids and rips, in a collage. And in the pieces after *Ramifications*, which are the *Chamber Concerto* and *Melodien*, I want to go in different directions, for example, the microtonal direction, with microtones. That's *Ramifications*...

JE: ...with microtones? ...

GL: ...micro intervals...

JE: ...ah, but not microtonal?...

GL: ...yes, for example...

JE: ...with quarter tones?...

GL: ...no... yes, quarter tones, but I don't like, for example, writing quarter tones with instruments because that's not...: In *Ramifications* I use a string orchestra that is in two sections: one section is a quarter tone *scordatura*...

JE: ...ah, quarter tone...

GL: ...that is, a quarter tone difference...

JE: ...Bartók's Quartet No. 2 is like that too, isn't it? Or in No. 5, I don't know, a quartet of his? ...

GL: ...not with the *scordatura*...

JE: ...in some quartet of Bartók...

⁴¹ Ligeti, György. *Adventures*. 1962-63. In:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdQse2lVh2k>

⁴² Ligeti, György. *String Quartet No. 2*. 1968. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMd6EEqkWo>

⁴³ Ligeti, György. *Ramifications*. 1968-69. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLSEPEPQjxQ>

GL: ...no, no, I never heard that...: Bartók uses microtones in the Violin Concerto,⁴⁴ in the Sonata for solo violin,⁴⁵ the first publication, not the definitive one, and in the Quartet No. 6,⁴⁶ but not with the *scordatura* [...like...] tuning. There is, for example, in Mahler's Fourth Symphony [...],⁴⁷ there is a solo violin tuned one tone higher.

Penderecki has a piece, *Emanations*,⁴⁸ with two parts one tone apart [...], it's to give it a timbre. Tōru Takemitsu, in *Dorian Horizon*,⁴⁹ uses a lot of microtones, but much less than Penderecki or Hába used. But not instruments that are differentiated (he plays a regular rhythm on the table) by a quarter tone; maybe it exists.... I use it in... –well, it's too long to explain, I must have the score and demonstrate how. I don't use exact quarter tones, but only an intonation that is destroyed, that is not exact, that is...

JE: ...higher...

GL: ...higher and more...: I have a quarter tone difference [between] the two parts of the string orchestra, but the result is not quarter tone music, it's always an approximation.

JE: Ah, yes, it's practicing the tuning of each...

GL: ...yes, but, for example, when you have spoiled meat, you know, it's music that's already...

JE: (I laugh) ...destroyed [sic: decomposed] ...

GL: ...a little decomposed, for example, I have an exact pitch and then...: I give an example in *Ramifications* (he describes it from memory): there is at certain moments [...] an Eb and an E in the violins –or you can also say a RE# and an E–: [it's] a little segment [in the] second minute, but they have four different pitches because I have two different E flats: a low Eb and a high Eb, a low E and a high E –the low E is higher than the Eb, the low E is higher than the one that's high Eb. It's not a quarter tone difference, it's a different difference every time [...] and the result is like an [in]filtered noise between the Eb and the E. So, the violins on Eb below go silent [and] I only have three: Eb above, E below and E above. It's a noise that's clearer. Then, the Eb goes

⁴⁴ Bartók, Béla. *Violin Concerto No. 2*. 1938. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KbAaM9tIYhs>

⁴⁵ Bartók, Béla. *Solo Violin Sonata*. 1944. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtdCRPglq-g&t=49s>

⁴⁶ Bartók, Béla. *String Quartet No. 6*. 1939. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aR55nJWcJiM&t=15s>

⁴⁷ Mahler, Gustav. *Symphony No. 4*. 1900-01. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCuHCMitaoQ&t=73s>

⁴⁸ Penderecki, Krzysztof. *Emanations*. 1958. In: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_VrewpA0iY

⁴⁹ Takemitsu, Tōru. *Dorian Horizon* (Horizonte dórico). 1966. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVOL165qzOY>

quiet, I have two different E's; I destroy this before on a viola C string, the harmonic E, which is a lower E than the tempered E, for example:

—Eh? (waiter arrives): A moment.

And then the E below goes quiet, and the high E is left alone. So, I transform an [in]filtered noise into an exact pitch (phone rings at the reception), where I have a very exact harmony, and I introduce sounds that are almost the same and...

JE: ... there are beats?...

GL: ...also beats, when it's very close...: An example; in many pieces that are notated in the twelve-sound system...

— ...“Ligeti...” (waiter)

— ...Ah! Telephone for me?

— “...Mister Ligeti...”...

— ...“Yes.” (The recording is interrupted.)

CASSETTE side B

JE: You have an essay on the new methods of teaching composition, what could you say about it?

GL: I have an essay, but it's very old, I wrote it in '63; I taught [...] in the '60s in Stockholm, I continued it, but not very much. I have [...], for composers who are already advanced, something current, not current now but 'current' at that time, [for] composers always worried about pitches, about given intervals, [I tried] to make them think with timbres, with densities, with ways of transforming sound complexes and things like that. Then, I made an experience for two years –'61 and '62– in Stockholm with some young Swedish composers, maybe you know them: Jan Bark, Folke Rabe,⁵⁰ I don't know if they are known here, and so, ...

JE: ...yes, I know [about] them...

GL: ...composers that are very interesting, I think, and it was a method to make them forget Hindemith, *Teaching for composition*⁵¹ (we laugh) –I'm not against it, but it's one thing, you know..., and all the traditional counterpoint.... So, I gave them, like [if

⁵⁰ Bark, Jan & Folke Rabe. *Bolos*. 1962. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=evibu-mu0bs>

⁵¹ Hindemith, Paul. *Unterweisung im Tonsatz*. Schott, Germany, 1971.

they were] counterpoint studies, composition studies, for example, composing intensity differences, or having a model and doing a dilation of that model –an intervallic and rhythmic model and a contraction of that model. In those days everybody was very dogmatic serial and [one should] have a freedom, not to think in serialism. But I think that now that method is not current because there is [other] thinking [...]. The situation is very different from what it was ten or twelve years ago.

JE: And have you come up with a new method?

GL: Not right now. I don't like a method now. It was a method like a purgative (I laugh) to eliminate all the serialism and all that. If I teach composition, it's always something very personal. Always when a young composer has some problem, for example, a young composer who is very good at writing improvisation methods, I say: —Now finish with this improvisation and make something that is absolutely organized. And to a young composer who only thinks in very orthodox or organized ways: —Forget everything and do something improvised. And so, always work with the young composer in the sense of what he has not developed. That's it, I'm anti-dogmatic. The method I wrote in German, in the essay "New Method of Composition,"⁵² was an anti-dogmatic method at that time, but today I don't want to do the same.

JE: Yes. And, for you, what are the most consistent, most solid current trends, what trends in general?

GL: Yes, one example: in the 50s there were two very important directions: serialism and randomness, or we could say Stockhausen and Boulez, and Cage. In the 60s the situation is that there were no longer two, but many different possibilities: improvisation, controlled randomness, uncontrolled randomness, happenings, ambient things, organized composition, collage composition, pop, everything (you hear cups and plates). I think we are now, and it's very good, in a very pluralistic situation. I also want to do something myself, but I want other composers to do things that are very different. I'm not in favor of one method, I'm in favor of everything that is original. We talked about Steve Reich, for example; I didn't know Steve Reich's music until just a few weeks ago when I went to the United States, because Steve Reich is not known in Europe and his records don't exist, and it was listening to a piece like *Violin Phase*,⁵³ you know it, that attracted me very much; I said: —Ah, now there is somebody who, even he has some similarities with Terry Riley, but he is a composer who does a very original thing and it's very good. But [...] another composer who makes music à la Terry Riley, no, no –no, excuse me–, à la Steve Reich, no. Or, for

⁵² Ligeti, György, "Neue Methode der Komposition".

⁵³ Reich, Steve. *Violin Phase*. 1967. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjxSoQeZYAY>

example, Morton Feldman, who was in Cage's circle—he's a very good friend of mine and I'm also a very good friend of Cage's, although I do something very different from them—; for example, Morton Feldman, I know his music, he used to be very much in the direction of Cage, but in the last two years he makes music very different from Cage. I was very excited to hear his new pieces. I don't know if you know the viola pieces, *A Viola in my Life*⁵⁴ (coffee cups arrive), there are four different pieces. And also a very new piece – you might not know it because it hasn't been played yet; I saw the score in Berlin, he is now in Berlin – [...], a piece for solo cello with orchestra that has nothing to do with Cage's direction.⁵⁵ It's very simple music, very melodic – not 'melodic à la Ligeti', no, nothing to do with it (we laugh) –... then at that moment I said to myself: —Oh, it's very good that Feldman does something that nobody has done before, it's very, very original. So, for me, if you ask me what direction I perceive to be important, I do perceive directions that are original. I expect a young composer to come up with something absolutely (in English) 'crazy'. I don't like 'normal things' (I laugh). The only criteria to be original is to be crazy in a nice way, you know (we laugh). To do very different things. I'm anti-dogmatic: it can be tonal music if you want, I like many pieces by Lennon-McCartney, by the Beatles: not everything, it's very commercial, but there are some things that are such good music, why not? Maybe a composer makes collages of music –of music that already exists–, and makes things, it doesn't matter what. Maurice Kagel, for example...

JE: ...who makes musical instruments...

GL: ...yes, yes, yes, with noises that are [like] unmade...

JE: ...waste?...

GL: ...oh..., I wouldn't know in French...

JE: ...things that one throws away...

GL: ...yes: thrown away noises. All the destroyed things, the sound, the instruments – I don't do that, but I really like the new Kagel pieces, which are very original things – sound combinations, sonorities very much like... thrown away preserves, like for example...

JE: ...*Der Schall*...

⁵⁴ Feldman, Morton. *A Viola in my Life*. 1971. In: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlbz4kGEm28&list=RDEMKu-bGY23DzFIZt9T8ZQ7Gg&start_radio=1&rv=PmRUAAa37lvq

⁵⁵ Ligeti refer to *Cello and orchestra*. 1972. In: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZTdv4-zx5Jg>

GL: *Der Schall*,⁵⁶ you know it, extraordinary, with those telephone conversations (we laugh) or the Swiss bell, it's a Swiss music box; it doesn't resemble any address in music [...]. I think that's very important.

JE: And the trends that you don't like, for example?

GL: Ah, I don't like moderate things (I laugh) [...], you know, fancy modern, (in English) 'establishment' music, and that has nothing to do with politics. There are those who, for example, are leftists but make very bourgeois music. I don't like – I don't want to mention names, you know? –..., but generalizing, music that is established, of great contacts.... Or, for example, I also wrote a Requiem, but never a new Requiem: I am very much against the great compositions with prestige [...], of all the ideologies and mythologies that are not original. For example, pseudo-Buddhist music. Yes, the music that comes from India or so, it's very interesting popular music. An example: the music of Terry Riley [...]; he is very influenced by all this oriental music, but the music of Terry Riley [is] very original, it is so original that I forget this ideology....

JE: ...the Orient is washed out...

GL: ...yes, exactly, but there are many composers – no names because I am not malicious – who make music in this pseudo [...] which is not true oriental. [...] For example, Debussy or Ravel, [who] is a very good example: Ravel made pseudo-Chinese music, but it's so original that it's okay. There can be cheesy music, pompous, in bad taste, but in such bad taste...; for example, here in Tepoztlán, that Baroque is in terrible taste, but it's so terrible that it's wonderful (we laugh). It's in such bad taste that it's wonderful! So, I like it... Why not speak directly? [...] For example, very ideological music, very Buddhist [...], I don't like it, because I think that the original music, from the East, from India and so on, is much more direct: why create an ideology, a mythology that is artificial? [...] You know, I am against everything that is great official music, commercial music.... I have even heard that I write commercial music because my music was used in a movie, you know, *2001*, but I was neither asked nor paid...⁵⁷

JE: ...that's what I thought... (I laugh)

GL: ...I'm absolutely against it: if they ask me, I say [that] no.

⁵⁶ Kagel, Mauricio. *Der Schall*. 1968. In:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0vhKJoBFHQ>

⁵⁷ Some years later the agreement became satisfactory for Ligeti. In:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001:_A_Space_Odyssey_\(soundtrack\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001:_A_Space_Odyssey_(soundtrack))

JE: That's what I thought. Do you have students?

GL: You know, not direct students but indirect students. I taught in Sweden [...] not for a long time, always for a very short time and in the last five years almost nothing, I have had no students. But [...] next year, in '72-'73, I will be in Hamburg with a composition class, forever, and I start to have students, but I don't want to have students influenced by me, students who write music absolutely....

JE: ...Ligetian...

GL: ...yes, anti-Ligetian. Not 'Ligetian' music. I don't like that.

JE: Right. I think I have a lot, a lot of material.

GL: Well. Listen, those things said about [some] don't publish...

JE: ...there will be no mention of any names.

GL: You can say, "I like everything that's experimental, and I don't like what's official." That's enough. Thank you very much.

JE: Thank you.