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TO THINK ABOUT MUSIC

ERRATUM MUSICAL

Email sent on May 30, 2019 to those involved in French contemporary musical production and research (IRCAM, INA-GRM, composers, etc.)

We have to think about a difficult idea, which makes identity tremble.

Jean-Claude Risset, quoting Michel Serres, in his article *Timbre and synthesis of sounds*, reinforces the accuracy of our impression regarding the existence of a linguistic dissonance specific to one of the uses of the word *timbre* in music.

We want to talk, not about the use designating the *timbre* object (drum, bell, chime), but about that designating certain characteristics of the sound phenomenon and its perception (quality, synthesis, envelope, spectrum, etc.).

By further researching the nature of this usage and the dissonance that accompanies it, we were able to see that they both bear a certain responsibility in the appearance of some Western musical trends of the 20th and 21st centuries.

For Risset, the notion of *timbre* once defined, fades away; for Antoine Bonnet, it is uncontrollable because it is a reality of music. This resistance could be due to the fact that certain words so naturally designate the things they mean that the clarification one would like to make of them would bring more obscurity than instruction (Pascal, 1728). However, we don't think so. It seems to us rather that the cause of this resistance comes from a linguistic dissonance mentioned above. In fact, the word *timbre* in no way designates the sound phenomenon or the perception we have of it. If it is considered in this way it is because it borrows designations belonging to the notion of rhythm (Bonnet. A, 1987; Nancy, 2002). This borrowing, a vector of confusion in the understanding and learning of music, nevertheless has the strange merit of having allowed music to evolve towards spheres that it perhaps never could have known and to have anchored itself in an even more complex way than

it already was, in the field of abstraction. By establishing the word timbre as a notion characterizing certain aspects of the sound phenomenon and through this, removing the word rhythm from these same aspects, musical theory has made an exact definition of timbre impossible in this context. Schaeffer's concrete approach and the French spectral school are two of the consequences of this shift. For example, the second part of the work for clarinet and orchestras, *Vagues, chemins, le souffle* (1970-72) by Gérard Grisey, being an attempt at interference of two essential parameters: rhythm and timbre, thought simultaneously (Grisey, 2008), seems to us to demonstrate a desire for clarity when it comes to the real properties of these parameters. This confusion also echoes a question constituting a large part of musical theory which, going beyond the accepted duality of content and form (what music says and the way in which it says it), places the notion of indeterminacy at the heart of musical content (Muller, 2013), therefore integrating it into the ancient Greek concept of aphasia (Pyrrhon of Elis). Music deprived of speech (melody), another voice speaks in its place. This other voice is ours.

It is accepted today that music designates a measurable extent through which a type of harmonic and temporal organization can be linked to hearing and/or understanding. The word timbre, in our opinion, designates a semantic space or a place of language (Foucault, 1966) in which we exchange and/or express words imbued with this organization. We think that designating in this way is a philosophical activity located before and after musical experience. The validity of this activity would make it possible to answer the following question: *Have we noticed... that the more we become musicians, the more we become philosophers?* (Nietzsche).

This difficult idea of timbre therefore truly shakes up identity. Indeed, when we express ourselves in this *timbre-lieu*, it is precisely the notion of identity

that we question. The verb to be, a pivotal verb of language (Foucault, 1966) which cannot be defined without then being trapped in a tautological mechanism (Pascal, 1728), seems to face, once summoned in this place, a most problematic mirror effect. And yes, Jean-Luc Nancy is right, timbre is indeed a reality of music. It is so because of its ability to convey orally or in writing the proof that music exists. Because music expresses nothing in itself, like number and trace (Bonnet. F, 2012). Its language only exists because it is asked to. This request requires a place of language where it can be formulated. The timbre is this place. According to the word that Plato attributes to Socrates, is philosophy not the highest music? we would respond that without it, a major part of current academic music could not be heard.

2019

*PORNOGRAPHY, DANCE WITH ME:
GEOMETRISATION OF THE PROOF*

I would like to talk to you but I'm not sure you want to talk to me. Listen, I'm smarter than you, much smarter, don't offend you, to talk to you I have to keep silent otherwise it could make you violent. For people who use drugs it's the same thing. I remove two long thin pine needles from my foot. I clean the wound with water. She is clean now. I have to listen to this girl, she is trendy, a guy is in love with her, it's very painful, I can't stand the way she talks.

Music is unique in that its discourse is absolutely hermetic to ours. Also when we talk about it, our desire to appropriate reality is thwarted. Aware of this, we only have to lie to ourselves and to others to justify its accessibility.

Music does not represent reality and we can doubt its existence.

His state, the immediacy, does not allow any distancing to be considered. To put it quickly, she is us but we are not her. It IS us but not IN us.

If we experience it, we belong to it.

Music asks us to be silent.

When a prohibition happens to us, it is each time unacceptable and we look for a way to transgress it.

Human intelligence does not tolerate negation. She learns to hear it but she cannot assimilate it quite simply because negation is not a natural phenomenon.

Time travel is pure fiction.

From then on, once rendered mute by music and if we are still alive, we make an act of resistance, that is to say we write, we trace, we print.

I heard something and I can prove it to you.

Our desire to live with others, that is to say, to love and/or be loved, is such that once possessed by music, we write it. Music imposes mutism, the only way to break it is to write, and to write is always to address the other. »

WHEN SAYING IS DOING

When saying is doing and doing is saying

(...)

but I wanted to say a few words to you before leaving. I will be back in New York on the 16th. In the meantime, I offer you an American military expression dating from World War II, which I recently discovered for the first time: FUBAR. (Translation: fucked up beyond all recognition). Not bad, right?

Sunday March 24, I listen to *La Mer*, three symphonic sketches for orchestra by Claude Debussy, a work begun in 1903 and completed in 1905. I fragment this listening by reading the biography of the composer found on the Wikipedia website and I notice that her mother's name is Victorine Manoury. A question comes to mind: does the composer Philippe Manoury belong to this same family? I note the complex relationship that Debussy maintains with his second wife, Lilly Texier, who attempted suicide by shooting herself in the chest in 1904. My attention then lingers on a paragraph where the characteristics of this musical work are described. I learned that it is customary to link it to the Impressionism movement. I quote the anonymous author of this biography: "His works are at first glance sensory, they aim to awaken particular sensations in the listener by translating precise images and impressions into music. The evocative titles of his plays illustrate this ambition quite well (...): *Footsteps on the Snow*, *The Girl with Flaxen Hair*, *What the West Wind Saw*, *The Sunken Cathedral*, etc. In this way he substitutes colors for notes and thus prefigures this kaleidoscope of timbres that the Second Vienna School will call *klangfarbenmelodie*. »

Usually painters see an impression, decide to paint it – attempt to do so but each time, by the time they attempt to capture it through their work, the first impression has disappeared. Through these constant changes, their paintings are in fact constructed of several successive images having no real unity.

The following Monday, March 25, the anniversary of the death of Claude Debussy, I went in the morning to my composition class at the university. All

by broadcasting a sound piece, Martin reminds us of the title of a painting by the surrealist painter René Magritte, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, to teach us the complexity of listening, some aspects of psychoacoustics and certain sound paradoxes. He then tells us about the particularities of ribbon and carbon microphones; to illustrate his point, he projects onto the board a photograph of Orson Welles standing in front of a microphone and performing the radio hoax The War of the Worlds on the American CBS network on October 30, 1938, with a pipe in his hand.

After having lunch, I will work at the Public Information Library of the Pompidou center. I head towards the music area located on the 2nd floor. I stop along the way to consult a work entitled The Factory of Life. This book is interesting but it bores me. I continue my journey and my gaze falls on another work entitled *The Factory of the Title*; René Magritte's painting *Ceci n'est pas une pomme* is reproduced on the cover page. I browse the summary and the article entitled Untitled catches my attention. I read Reinhardt's Autocritique taken from Iris Clert's catalog, dated June 10, 1963, in which the American painter, precursor of conceptual and minimal art, writes: "The twelve rules or how to avoid the twelve things to avoid... No texture... No brushstrokes or calligraphy... No signature or brand label... No sketch or drawing... No lines or outlines. .. No shapes... No patterns, no foreground or background, no volume or mass... No design... No color... No white. No light. No chiaroscuro. No space... No time... No dimension or scale... No movements. Everything is in motion... No object, no subject, no theme. No symbol, image or sign... No senseless work or senseless renunciation of work. No chess game. »

Itzhak Goldberg, the author of this article, then quotes Robert Motherwell: "Abstract painters love nothing (...) except the very act of painting." Further on, he jumps back in time and we recalls the approach of the American painter James Abbott McNeill Whistler. According to him, Whistler can be considered as a precursor in questioning the title of the work in pictorial art. Commenting on the painting *Symphony in White*, a contemporary critic writes: « Mr. Whistler was therefore led by the importance he attaches to color combinations, to give the particular arrangement of

colors as the main title to certain of his works, putting the subject as a subtitle. (...) The title no longer has a referential function, it programs a new type of gaze. This change anticipates the disappearance of traditional referential anchors. (...) From the 1910s, traditional titles, which described the subject of representation, became rare. Replaced by increasingly generic names (*Impression, Improvisation, Composition with blue, red and yellow, Composition*), these titles lose in precision everything they gain in presence.

A little later in the afternoon, I head towards the section of the library of 19th century painters and I choose to leaf through the work *The Anti-Origin of the World: How Whistler Killed Courbet* by Yves Sarfati . The author relates the relationship between the two painters based, among other things, on the great admiration felt by Whistler towards Courbet's painting. To illustrate this point, the author compares certain works. *The Man with the Pipe* painted between 1848 and 1849 by Courbet and *The Man with the Pipe* painted around 1859 by Whistler, are reproduced side by side in the work. The choice of model used by Whistler, a poor salesman met in an inn, leads the author to believe that this painting is *The Stonebreakers* of Whistler. This refers to a canvas by Courbet, painted in 1849 and destroyed in 1945, representing workers and considered one of the founding works of pictorial realism. *The blue wave*, painted in Guétary in 1862 by Whistler and *The wave*, painted in Etretat in 1869 by Courbet, are also reproduced side by side.

Around 5:30 p.m., I decide to leave the library and go to the Pompidou Center bookstore. I purchased two books, *Les neurones enchantés* by Pierre Boulez, Jean-Pierre Changeux and Philippe Manoury as well as *La musicothérapie* by François-Xavier Vraie. I then head towards the Hôtel de Ville metro station and I see the composer Philippe Manoury walking down rue Saint Merri in the company of a lady.

ROSAMUNDE

A painter with whom I fell madly in love one day gave me one of his drawings. In this drawing we could see a hand holding a knife by the handle. Thinking that this meant he wanted us to become friends, I reminded him that the hand in the drawing should then be holding the blade and not the handle as he had drawn it. He did not answer. Later I cut out this drawing in the form of a puzzle then I slipped one of its pieces through the soundhole and locked it in my cello; I sent the rest back to the painter by post.

One day, out of anger during an argument with another friend, I destroyed this cello, freeing the piece of the puzzle and the soul of the instrument at the same time. I will never forgive myself for that.

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