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Presence and absence of creation

Stéphane de Gérando

Originally, this reflection was part of one of the research themes presented during a viva to become habilitated thesis director in France (2005) and had the following premise: contemporary musical creation cannot be confused with the presence or existence of the piece. To think creation through, I avoided the iterative idea of the piece on the piece by using an element which is exterior to the work: concept. The six chosen concepts did not belong to traditional musicological and analytical language, to « shatter the impulse of a reflex expression » and to « destroy within the non-debated convictions », as Bachelard would say (*La psychanalyse du feu*, p. 186).

Following “*L’œuvre musicale contemporaine à l’épreuve du concept*”, this article is divided in three parts: “Variation on a binary theme: Frontier and Apogee then, Coda: Non repetition” (I), “Three variations on a single concept: Presence” (II), “Variation on a binary theme: Chance and Determinism” (III). The conclusion is entitled “Variation of the variation – Introduction to the concept of creation”. This article is a summary of a French book published in 2012, *L’œuvre musicale contemporaine à l’épreuve du concept*.

Keywords: contemporary music; concepts; frontier; apogee; non-repetition; presence; chance; determinism; creation; absence.

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I Variation on a binary theme: *Frontier* and *Apogee* then, coda: *Non-repetition*

The general concept of « musical frontier » defined a delimiting or transition space between various states. Then three singular concepts represented by critical analyses of contemporary works were undertaken: the frontier interpreted as a bridge, the piece with a frontier and the piece without a frontier.

The first example concerned an auditory commentary of the string trio *Ikhoor* (1978) by Iannis Xenakis: the concept of frontier was very clearly present as a transition or bridge participating in the overall coherence of the piece. But this notion of bridge existed prior to the 20th century, and it was particularly developed in tonal times, namely as sonatas.

Oddly, the auditory analysis of the Xenakis trio underscored the presence of frontiers and enabled the appearance of extremely precise symmetric and teleological structures of the piece, a finalism a directionality of time symbolized by the return of the first part at the end of the piece.

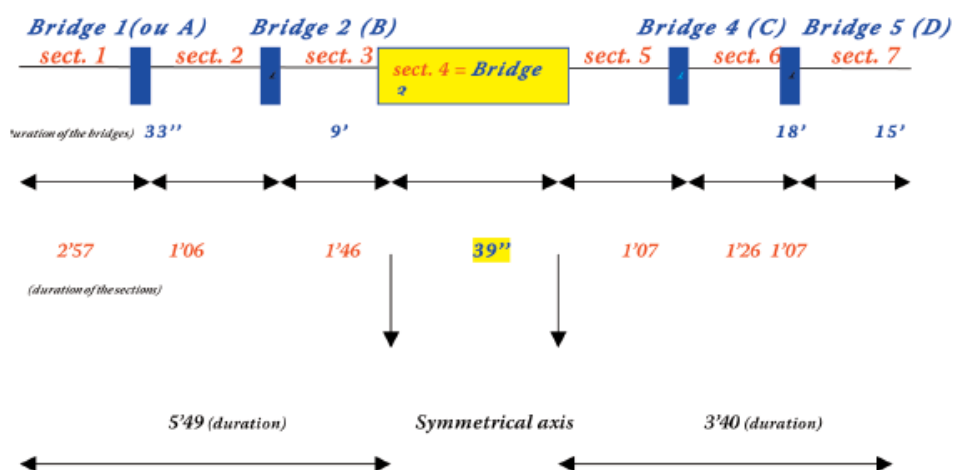


Figure 1: formal layout of *Ikhoor* by Iannis Xenakis

The succession of pitches and rhythms seemed to be the sign of original writing, but this archetypal listening to the frontier drew its references from a traditional architecture.

The second example, *Anahit* (1965), by Giacinto Scelsi, introduced the concept of « frontier piece », a space closed by the continuous and indivisible perception of the piece.

Following the discovery period of this continuous and indivisible time often characteristic of Scelsi, the global perception of structure has revealed itself as being once again archetypal: a global crescendo decrescendo, a chromatic tension, an agogic acceleration then deceleration. Listening closely to *Anahit*

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revealed a fragmented piece by a systematic repetition of alternations between solo violin and orchestra. The chromatic melisma of micro-intervals, globally ascending from D to G sharp of the solo violin, conveyed a sense of dual structure, contrary to the idea of « frontier piece ».

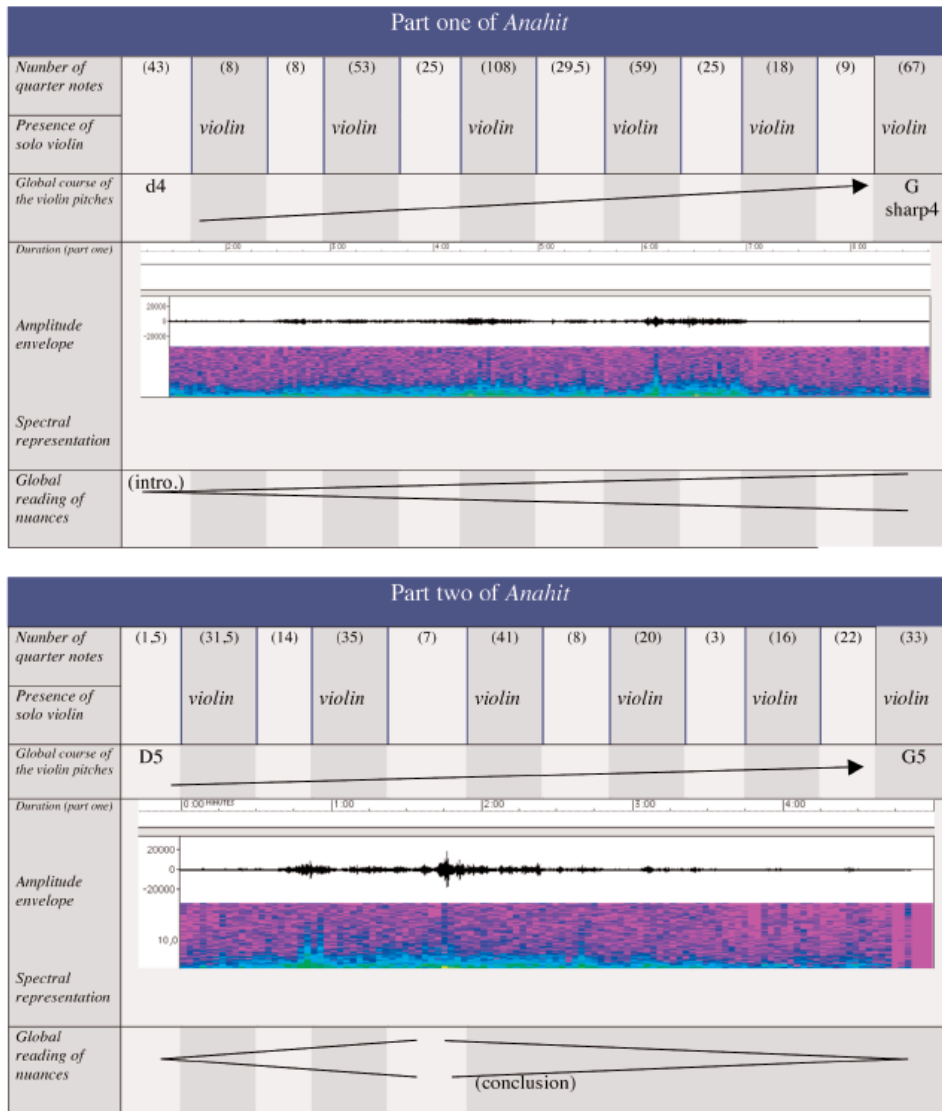


Figure 2: structure of *Anahit*

The last example – *4'33"* (1952) by John Cage – illustrated the concept of « piece without frontier » a continuum between existence and art. Cage likens the silence in this piece to « all the sounds it does not define » and attempts to trigger an absence of intentionality and finality through, for example, the chaotic response of the audience. Art is life and vice-versa. Was this compositional project, which showed the definition of the concept of « piece

without frontier », completed?

In the end, in its concert version and with the mute presence of instruments on stage, the composer controlled certain sound parameters: for example, it was unlikely that a member of the audience start singing while walking in circles around the auditorium during the performance. There were therefore stable and predictable parameters (timbre, specialization...), because they were not directly « activated » in the writing and performing process of 4'33".

What is more, and contrary to Cage's original project, still within the framework of a public performance, it was possible to very generally foresee the structure of 4'33": decrescendo (silence of the public before the start), crescendo (progressive sound, even minimal, of the public during the performance), decrescendo (end of the piece or of the instruments), crescendo (after the performance)... this determinist, cyclical, crescendo structure... conveys an archetype contrary to the 4'33" project. Later, starting in the 1960s, as if to echo these remarks, Cage wrote durations equivalent to 0'00".

4'33" became more a place of separation rather than a true continuum between existence and art, calling into question the concept of work without frontier.

Apogee

As the second chosen concept, Apogee was indeed developed based on the piece for piano *Lemme-Icône-Epigramme* (1981), by the English composer Brian Ferneyhough. Following a detailed analysis, it was found that this concept was not always linked to the expression of tension. A more abstract definition of apogee became necessary for a composer and precisely locally in a piece as a category integrating various musical interpretations or situations, a symbolic and essential form for the diachronic outlook of the piece. Observations and listening sessions were done about this renewal of invention of the musical concept of apogee which became poly-morphous and of functional nature (combinatory of the piece, expression of the writing process). But the unease felt by the composer was shared: Ferneyhough speaks of the failure of his work describing the last beats like a resolution.

Figure 3: End of *Icône* (m. 159), « convulsion » structured in an apogee

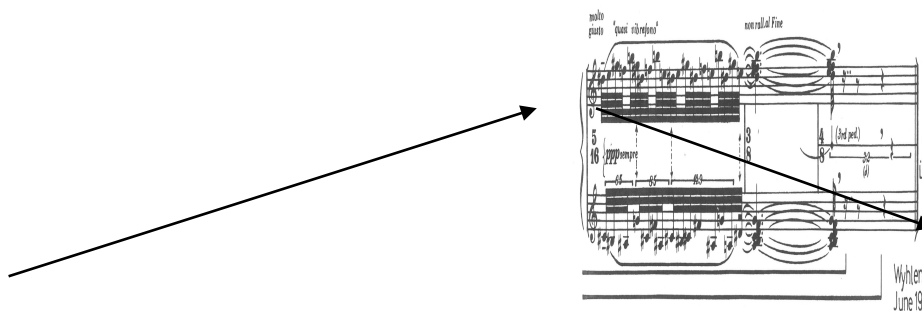


Figure 4: End of the piece performed like a resolution

This comment showed the work's reading as being prisoner of the traditional concept of apogee interpreted like a peak, a tension which culminated in the development of the structure. If *Lemme-Icône-Epigramme* was originally perceived as a network of multiple and endless sensations and meanings due to its extreme density, strong agogic, remarkable instrumental virtuosity, the trajectory of the piece lost its sense of mystery because the writing process was in and of itself contradictory.

A first assessment was important: the concepts of frontier and apogee existed in contemporary music, conveying various interpretations depending on the context. But in the end, these same concepts were seen as a resurgence of the past, a stifling of invention.

Non-repetition

The presence of the chosen concepts became a feeling of absence, like Schönbergienne's attempt in 1909 to liberate music of all repetitions, structure, relation symbols and logic; this idea eventually led to a « rather silent period » from 1917 to 1923, until repetitions (structure, durations, themes, combinatory processes) were rendered an architectonic element of his work, which was a failure in terms of his initial project in 1909.

This study of the concept of non-repetition in Schönberg's work for piano led you, in the second part of your book, towards a problematized concept of presence, through 3 studies reminiscing publications from *L'analyse musicale* and *L'Éducation Musicale*: popular repertoire in western music (2003, pp.29-35), the opera after 1978 (2003, pp. 5-13), and the choice of a new technical potential exploitable whilst creating music (2003, pp.55-70).

II Three variations on a single concept: presence

Presence of popular repertoire in western music

The previous part is echoed in that it came to light that a discourse about a work which may initially be coherent can suddenly lose its primary sense. This depended on the « observer's perception », or on the way the notions are defined and put into relation.

Concerning the first issue, the presence of popular repertoire in western music, the twenty some musical examples showed more or less consciously the notion of presence or influence of one repertoire on another. The first category referred to the link between extra-musical popular culture and modern western erudite music – presence of rituals and beliefs, nature, the circus and popular theatre – and the second referred to the relation between popular music and western erudite music where oral tradition, traditional music, hymns and non-European music are noticeable. The conclusion showed there were two different listening experiences of the work. As defined by Apollinaire K. Anakesa, « erudite world music » (« aesthetics of the diverse ») is a product of mixed heritage of various cultures, whereas the ethnomusicologist Simha Arom distinguished the true from the false, the original from the fake. In the end, deforming was in fact creating clichés. But was it possible to break away from the principle of endless deforming, as is noticeable in the various contemporary musical examples presented?

Presence of opera after 1978

A broad historical assessment on voice treatment before 1978 announced an original musical situation. We then presented four operas by European and American composers who adhered to major singular aesthetic trends: *Europera 5* (1991) by John Cage, *Dédale* (1995) by Hugues Dufourt, *El Niño* (2000) by John Adams, *Das Mädchen Mit Den Schwefelhölzern* (1996) by Helmut Lachenmann. After a personal interpretation of the Cage (absence) and Dufourt (separation) operas, we evoked the projects of director Peter Sellars (« the dialogue ») and composer Lachenmann (« tone »). Again, the last part of the argument showed a distortion of the initial commentary, provoked by the introduction of two aesthetic conceptions from music history. From progress in art (Theodor W. Adorno) to the metamorphosis of a genre (Danielle Cohen-Levinas), we had concluded an imaginary opera (virtual) that could nowadays be presented outside the stages of research or courageous experimentations.

Presence of a singular technological potential

This ending triggered a technical and aesthetic study on models of sound synthesis, which is the topic of another chapter. More precisely the emphasis was put on the presence of a technical potential which was over forty years old in its digital version and not yet fully exploited: additive synthesis represented the future of a unified model between sound and image – polysemous language, parametric continuity – pending the reunification of all senses in the writing of virtual interactive artistic worlds. In conclusion, the concept of presence was understood as the sign of an absence: presence of a singular technological potential belonging to an era, absence of the work as a reflection of this technology and of a new type of unified control of parameters of a « multi-sensory synthesis ».

Since the beginning of this research the same conclusion systematically came out: the listening of the various concepts – frontier, apogee, non-repetition, presence – and consequently the imagination of the work did not seem to be able to invent or reinvent itself or even to exist. The three first parts referred to

analytical commentaries of works or techniques. The following part concentrated more on introducing the question of link between concept and history, symbol of evolution and constancy hardly avoidable.

Concepts of chance and determinism in music

These two « very current » notions are described in science, philosophy and other fields as being the origin of a sort of logic and coherence which guides our actions and thought processes. More precisely, the objective was to define the musical chance and determinism concepts by means of looking into history and science. The analysis of a conceptual multidisciplinary context underscored the hegemonic character of determinism on the scale of human development. From cause and effect relations – implicitly understood by the fabrication of the trap in prehistoric times – to the mechanistic outlook on the world of the end of the 19th century, an all-powerful and efficient idea was developed, based on three logical and infallible dimensions of time, past, present and future. In the baroque era, there is an example of a fugue which music scholars questioned as truly being a structure, since every fugue seemed so different. *L'Art de la fugue* by Johann Sebastian Bach, which is commonly accepted as the peak of musical creation, was placed in a determinist framework of history.

This hegemony of determinism was disrupted over the next half century. The English botanist Robert Brown noted in 1827 that suspended particles in static liquids were subject to incessant and erratic movements. Their movements were thereafter named Brownian. Their trajectory could not be precisely determined but their overall movement was visible. The inherent complexity of studying billions of microscopic particles was hard to imagine with the scientific capabilities at hand. Statistical physics or statistical mechanics were invented in 1872 by an Austrian physicist Ludwig Boltzmann, who wrote the founding formula of statistical mechanics. What was impossible to predict for an isolated particle was in fact possible for billions of particles by considering the system in its entirety rather than the microscopic units. In 1900, Max Planck invented the « quantum theory » which is the cradle of modern physics: radiant energy, just like matter, has a discontinuous structure, and can only exist as grains or quantum (minimum possible quantity of energy which can be emitted, propagated or absorbed). As atomic physics developed, scientists started realizing that at the level of the atom, the elements (electrons, protons, neutrons) had a different behavior than that of the subjects studied on a macroscopic level. They became unable to draw determinist (« classical mechanics ») links between various states of a single system. In 1924, Werner Karl Heisenberg exposed his infamous uncertainty principle which said it is not possible to describe both the speed and position of an electron: it is the idea of fundamental randomness as constitutive of matter.

This period also came with a profound evolution in art. In music, chance progressively appeared, almost insidiously and indirectly. By associating chance, unpredictability and autonomy (determinist non-relation of elements), the evolution of tonal language, which tended towards the systematic use of chromatism or complex chords beginning in the middle of

the 19th century, created an ambiguity of musical material favoring a plurality of harmonic directions or resolutions (chords used in *Tristan und Isolde*, 1857, by Richard Wagner).

Also, harmony blended with timbre like the founding of an acoustic space having a certain expressive autonomy through the control of color (*Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, 1892, by Claude Debussy). As a progressive manifestation of chance, an idea of an independent blending of cause was mentioned – 5th movement of the 2nd symphony (1902) by Charles Ives or his *Central Park in the Dark* (1911), the premises of open structure as seen in a piece like *Hallowe'en* by the same composer in 1911, the use of cluster or noise (acoustic manifestation of chance) in *The Tides of Manaunaun* (1912) by Henry Cowell, the contingent and unintentional choice of sound material asserted in *L'Art des bruits*, manifesto written by Luigi Russolo in 1913, the notion of indeterminate timbre of the piano prepared in *Bacchanale* by John Cage in 1938, ending with a piece fully generated by chance based on the Yi-King « method », *Music of Changes* (1951) by Cage.

Starting in the 1960s, computer applications showed that a simple determinist system could generate a chaotic state. A few years later, Brian Ferneyhough complexified a musical invention synonymous with unpredictability, renewal or even chaos, based on simple determinist systems, combinatory systems originally strictly opposed to the idea of chance. Thanks to this « more open and stronger » understanding of chance and determinism, the debate on the aesthetic aspect of intellectual resources was reopened and questioned the dualist vision of the first part of the 20th century.

Musical definition of chance and determinism

Four levels of perception described the listening of a piece. Each level symbolized a potentially different listening of concepts of chance and determinism. Through a single listening of a work, one would hear its genesis (1), the writing techniques used (2), the relation between the score and the performance (3), and the reality of the finished work (4). Either the composer gave priority to unpredictability, as defined by the concept of chance, or he attempted cause to effect relations to generate predictability (determinism). He could also mix these concepts.

The definitions of chance and determinism are also part of a complex combination of these four levels of perception. As in the previous paragraph, one could perfectly well imagine an unpredictable piece as being the rendering of the accumulation of determinist gestures. A meaningful example is the genesis of the piece which could be the projection of a defined imagination (mimesis), the writing technique being combinatory, the score precisely written and the final perception of the piece contrary to any feeling of predictability.

Intermediary assessment

The definitions of musical determinism and chance were mainly oriented towards the notion of predictability and its contrary. As such, it again came to

mind that these concepts within a musical piece had a story. The informed listener was able to date the writing of the piece based on the implemented concept: the listening of raw chance (1951) is not to be confused with directed or combined chance (1956) for example.

But there was no more unique and systematic relation between a particular writing technique and the final perception of the piece. Associated to the various layers in which the concept could be used in a more complex fashion (genesis, writing technique, relation between score and performance, listening of the piece), the birth of the piece concretely symbolized a point of hypothetical and fragile balance between these different constraints.

Furthermore, in the context of an erudite occidental culture, this research called to mind the inseparable and extremely tight links between the piece, the creation and these two concepts. Was it possible for the artist to choose to imagine a piece beyond these notions of chance and/or of determinism? Besides the ability to renew or transform itself, this dual concept formed the walls of a prison in which imagination and sensibility were confined. This topic ended with two important ideas: experience and invention.

Experience and invention

Experience was singled out as a means to approach and define the concept of creation. It did not allege universality and remained a simple ephemeral expression of time and partial memory. The conclusion of this research confirmed that experience was not a given; it is to be cultivated, learned, rationalized, and forgotten. Referring to Friedrich W. Nietzsche, the philosopher Bernard Sève speaks of musical experience as being « self-work presupposing will » (« an appropriation of otherness or rather a confrontation with it » (Sève, 2002, pp. 34-35). A work became a critical self-reference defining the experience of creation.

Concerning the notion of invention, one of the ways of looking at music history was to analyze the times of great shifts. According to Isabelle Stengers, when referring to history of science, invention is « a liberation from all social, historical, cultural... determinations ». « The break from the common world is not only part of the artist's vocation; it is also the result of his inventive activity and opposes the unprecedented to habit [...] » (Stengers & Schlangerf, 1991, pp. 150-151).

Invention is a necessary but not sufficient condition to be able to refer to musical creation, since the inventor is not necessarily a composer. Music scholars stressed the historical importance of *Quatre études de rythme* for piano by Olivier Messiaen, to his great surprise, because it was the invention of a new musical language referred to as generalized serial. Messiaen's reaction is symptomatic, an excessive focus on a type of work possibly generating confusion between invention and major a musical piece.

It remains that musical work and the very idea of creation also represent the expression of various types of conditions, which was the conclusion of your book...

Borrowing singular aesthetic outlooks and based on the analysis of Pierre Cometti, Jacques Morizot and Roger Pouivet (Cometti, Morizot & Pouivet, 2000), it was thought in conclusion that there were six ways of tackling the notion of creation, domains of possible conditioning.

1. The role of institutions

In Western Europe, composers have a strong relation with public or private institutions. It is the notion of commissions by a few institutions for orchestras and high level ensembles which frequently perform contemporary music. Certain contemporary composers do not take the risk of writing for big ensembles because their writing style is not adapted to this institutional framework (psychology of orchestra musicians, decision and policy processes of big symphony orchestras or operas, number of rehearsals...). Also, composers can be more or less isolated from institutions which can have immediate consequences on their work since they cannot « regularly » listen to their own pieces. A radical fracture is rarer, for example in the case of Charles Ives in the US during a good part of his life.

We can cite the works of Goerge Dickie (1992) about institutional art, stressing the importance of recognition by institutions which safeguard objective judgment criteria.

2. The public

To simplify, certain composers openly take into account the public's reaction in their creative process, while others seem to ignore it. Regardless of speeches or hasty interpretations, the case of composers with no will of communication is extremely marginal. Also, composers are mindful of the public's welcome, a factor which contributes to the evolution of the individual and collection imagination. Research on the evolution of writing styles of composers such as Pierre Boulez, Mauricio Kagel, Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, Iannis Xenakis... is, in these matters, significant.

The public's welcome is particularly important in Hans Robert Jauss' (1978) research, in which he proposes aesthetics of reception based on three reactions: immediate satisfaction, deception or irritation, and the desire to change and to adapt to the newly presented horizons of the work. These reactions determine the norms of quality and rank the works (balance between novelty and satisfaction).

3. The link between technique and creation

In an article called « Science and technology as source of inspiration in the 20th century » (Battier, 2002, pp. 512-532). Marc Battier shows how the development of new technology – from electronic sound at the end of the 19th century to the birth of virtual worlds – influenced research and musical creation.

Still in the realm of a strong relation between technique and creation, Jürgen Habermas proposes aesthetics of communication using technological media

for the renewal of aesthetic experiences and the possible rational influence on individuals (Habermas, 1987).

4. Evolution and dating of musical material

How to isolate the concept of creation, which is synonymous with invention, from any idea of evolution of musical material as pertaining to history? If we accept that material is a consequence of technique, then there is indeed a link between material and technique. Is it then possible to create something new with something old? Musical material participates actively in our listening to a piece of the creation concept, and we cannot therefore avoid a critical and historic vision. When listening, the musician is capable of dating the use of the sound material: a nuance, a timbre, a type of pitch sequence, the structure, these are all elements constituting musical language which are stamped with temporality.

There are here certain elements of a European aesthetic tradition strongly represented by Theodor W. Adorno who proposes an aesthetic of modernity encompassing the notion of progress of material (Adorno, 1948) (works from the Vienna School, Pierre Boulez, non-figurative painting, “avant-garde” literature – Stéphane Mallarmé, Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Paul Valéry, James Joyce, Paul Celan, Samuel Beckett...). The analysis sheds light on the subversive nature of the works.

5. Mechanism of a work

A musical piece has its own logic which originates from the invention of new types of coherence. Symbolic and combinatorial logic, introduction of chance in the piece, intuition, invention of psychoacoustic models as processes for inducing the piece, these are all mechanisms which either work or not; all these characteristics can enable understanding the concept of creation.

This compositional constraint is within the tradition of Anglo-Saxon aesthetics based on analytical philosophy and the works of the nominalist philosopher Nelson Goodman. Analytical philosophy proposes to analyze the structure of language as a series of signs and symbols rather than to ponder its meaning. Language says nothing to the world: it is a symbolic system which enables the creation of worlds, whether it is knowledge, nature or art. Ideas are not at the center of the aesthetic experience, and comprehension of the aesthetic mechanism becomes fundamental. Arthur Danto (1989), like Nelson Goodman (2005), considers judging taste, subjective appreciation and quantitative evaluation to be superfluous and inadequate. This interpretation, which is unintelligible to the non-initiated, is not spontaneous and requires an informed public which would let itself be absorbed into an atmosphere of art theory.

6. Pure perception

The case of auditory illusions explored by Jean-Claude Risset (researcher – composer) in his works such as *Mutations*, *Contours*, *Electron-Positron*, *Little Boy* enable us to look at creation from the standpoint of cognitive

sciences and of a reality linked to our psycho-physiological perspective abilities. Researchers in this field pointed out limitations which are not only psychological, but also physiological due to the mechanism of ear perception.

Christopher Peacocke (1987) radically defends the theory of a non-cognitive pure perception which he calls depiction, a purely perceptual phenomena which does not require any mastering of symbolic systems of representation. It is a phenomenal skill as an intellectual disposition which is to be distinguished from a doxastic ability which consists in applying a concept (Dretske, 1995 – Pouivet, 1996).

My research linked to a definition of the concept of creation seemed to differ from these types of categorizations, with various insights also based on experience.

Conclusion: Variation of the variation – Introduction to the concept of creation

It became clear that reflecting on creation could not be reduced to one of the aesthetic paradigms cited above. Various approaches showed that a piece or creation is simultaneously apparent to its institution, technique, material, functioning, perception... these concepts never becoming exclusive or contradictory. Aesthetics, like other fields of study, could engage in defining what could be referred to as the idea of a whole, an inherent complexity to the concept of creation.

You mention a context which pre-exists creation, stating themes which are dear to certain philosophers like Alain Finkielkraut.

The philosopher Alain Finkielkraut states that according to Johann Gottfried von Herder, there is no absolute, but rather « regional values and happened principles ». Herder wants to « stop the secular mistake of intelligence » which « decontextualizes human works of art, extracts them from where they were produced, and then judges them based on timeless criteria of Good, Truth, or the Beautiful » (Finkielkraut, 1992, p. 17). Finkielkraut goes on in his analysis stating that « society does not come from mankind, as far back as we can go in history, humans are born into an existing society. We are forced, instantly, to apply our own actions like we house our words and inner thoughts within a language which developed outside ourselves and which is beyond our control. Instantly: whether it is our nation or our language, we enter a game where rules are not ours to be decided, but rather to be abided by » (Finkielkraut, 1992, p. 26). Given these conditions, we are not born with free creative will, we acquire it « by overcoming the agitation of ambitions, the narrowness of personal benefit and the tyranny of common place » (Finkielkraut, 1992, p. 168).

Mircea Eliade indirectly sheds light on Finkielkraut's thought by showing how the development of cultures is a living incarnation of myths. « Myths not only describe the origins of the World, animals, plants and mankind, but also all the fundamental events which contributed to making mankind what it is today, that is a mortal, sexed, organized into societies, having to work to live,

and working according to certain rules. If the world exists, if mankind exists, it is because Supernatural Beings deployed a creative activity at the « beginning ». But other events took place after the cosmogony and the anthropogony, and mankind, as it is today, is the direct result of these mythical events, it is made up from these events » (Eliade, 1963, pp. 23-24). Mankind is not born into a neutral environment, its existence is, according to Eliade, molded by myths, individual and collective memory being the rendering of the origin. Still in the same book, *Aspect du mythe*, he quotes the comic strips which present a modern version of mythological heroes, or otherwise describes the passion the elites have for *Finnegans Wake* or atonal music as an example of rituals of initiation: « the fascination by means of difficulty or even incomprehensibility of works of art exposes the desire to discover a new meaning, secret, so far unknown, of the World and human existence » (Eliade, 1963, pp. 230).

René Girard even evokes a « purism of innovation » (Girard, 2002, p. 299) referring to the birth of modern art: « the desire for novelty be devoid of any trace of imitation, is the same as wanting a plant to grow with its roots in the sky » [...] « the mimetic formula of innovation applies to our economic lives just as well as to all realms of cultural activity » (Girard, 2002, p. 213). He reminds us of the imitators of one generation which became the audacious innovators of the next (Girard, 2002, p. 304). In the conclusion of his book *La voix méconnue du réel*, Girard is more categorical: « the radicalism of the idea of an absolute invention is obviously flawed ». « The tendency to define innovation in more and more « radical » and anti-mimetic terms [...] reveals the abdication of modern intelligence in face of this mimetic pressure, a collective joining in self-deception which Marx, despite all his intuitions, illustrates perfectly » (Girard, 2002, p. 308).

As we have seen before, for Eliade, « the fascination by means of difficulty or even incomprehensibility of works of art » or the « desire to transcend one's own personal and historic time and to dive into an unfamiliar time, whether ecstatic or imaginary, will never disappear. As long as this desire lives on, it can be said that modern man still preserves certain remnants of a mythological behavior. The traces of such behavior can be found in the desire to recapture the intensity with which one has experienced or known something for the first time; to recover the distant past, the bliss of the beginnings » (Girard, 2002, p. 235). This outlook on history shows, in its own way, the aesthetic debates opposing « retrograde » and « avant-garde » music: some tend to be in relation with history, others advocate a break. In both cases we are faced with a lively expression of mythical thought.

Eero Tarasti, a Finnish musicologist, concentrated his research on the link between myth and music, and named his book (released in France in 2003) accordingly. Inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss, he attempts to demonstrate that despite many cultural and stylistic differences between the works of Richard Wagner, Jean Sibelius and Igor Stravinski, there is a « mythical dimension », « a stratum whose components – mythemes in Levi Strauss' terminology, or functions, in Vladimir Propp's – have their equivalent in music » (Tarasti, 2003, p. 16).

Art history shows us that all breaks or removals from context of communication are not irrational. As with Judith Schlanger (1991) in the field of science, there could be non-integrated novelty, and deviance phenomena, in other terms, an artistic logic of rupture based on the ability to integrate historical reality while altering it. Whatever the vocabulary used in these various analyses may be, these remarks confirmed my research and the presence of a context which pre-exists creation, in a superficial way, or more deeply integrated in a musical piece. Freedom to imagine seemed irrevocably conditioned by history, technique, aesthetics, culture... The artist was « clear » from this context in only two ways: by conflicting or collaborating. Coming back to the concepts of frontier and apogee, their presence disappeared giving way to a feeling of absence by creating a stylistic artifact which would destroy the coherence of the piece. Absence was not the same as a vacuum. On the contrary, these concepts can be seen as being part of the work, like the sign of past times or inevitable presence, the unfeasibility of altering imagination. As with the chance and determinism duo which symbolizes both evolution and a persistence without any true renewal. *L'œuvre musicale à l'épreuve du concept* had cast an important doubt on the artist's ability to cope with the concept of creation and invention. The more pondered the problem was, the more the work revealed its often irregular relation to the past. The imagination of the work was imperfect, the sensibility was altered by thought, and the mystery of creation was crumbling leaving me facing the imaginary threshold limit of time and memory. This imagining of a unique time of creation evoked the question of myths, metaphysics or religions. In astrophysics, we think of 10⁻⁴³, the time as defined by Planck, which indicates an extreme limit of knowledge and the end of the voyage towards the origin.

If we look at the case of so-called democratic societies, creation is confronted with the risk that the piece becomes the direct expression of an all-powerful majority, generating a conformism and oppressive power upon minorities. Also, the worldwide economic crisis of 2008, with its extravagances and consequences, reminds us that creation could spawn, thereby reflecting an all-powerful economic might of minorities.

The composer inevitably collaborates, even though our societies tend to diminish or even ignore this interested relation. Any important creation on the material level depends, for example, on the decision of a few private or public associates, and therefore on the ability of the creator to not deceive them. Composers are not alone in this situation, deciders having themselves the same type of pressure from their employers..., as in a never-ending chain.

But it is not because the concept of musical creation does not convey a type of reality that it is obsolete. The idea of presence associated with the concept of creation also determines a presence, like in Schrödinger's story of the cat which is both dead and alive at the same time.

The relation of the concept with musical works lets us foresee a double movement: the more memory – history – develops, the less the concept of fundamental creation exists, and the greater the ability to create becomes. This thought also confirms the presence of an asymptotic movement which defines the ability to create. Objective measures of this movement towards this

utopian act seem possible: it is what comes out of *L'œuvre musicale contemporaine à l'épreuve du concept*, this conclusive, catastrophic somewhat systematic form linked in every chapter, not being only synonymous with the collapse of discourse, but also, of course, with a prolonged and objective attempt to evaluate the presence of the piece.

We must then wonder about the meaning of words and fight against common places. On the one side composers speak like almighty creators; in schools they boast the merits of « creation », creators flourish with the internet... on the other, the very idea of creation is associated with certain ideologies, and evoking the notion of a major work is seen as elitist, pondering cultural peculiarities is not fashionable.

The idea of a work in movement which would be defined by its ability to tend towards the concept of creation introduces challenges which go beyond the strict realm of art. In this trajectory, even if the final object is utopian, the positioning of each work is not clearly equivalent. Like an intellectual standpoint or a singular piece of research, the composing of a piece is or becomes, even beyond its own realm and in a form of ephemeral mix, a social, economical and political act with consequences.

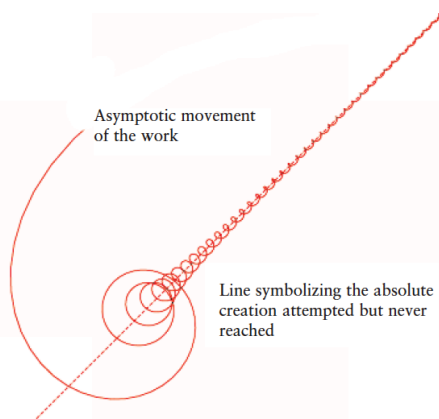


Figure 5: Diagram symbolizing the presence and the absence of the work and creation

It is indeed this context which is called for when listening to a work, with neither judgment value nor feelings of progress or superiority, but as a will to exist. Ending the thought process, the reader is reminded that our outlook on a work is neither acquired nor a given. Its presence is a manifestation of experience. To say that the definition of the work is limited to its unique and finite characteristics would be reductive: the concept of creation is the expression of conditionings of all sorts associated to our limited ability to function outside the system. The simple will and pleasure of researching, pondering, venturing, communicating and sharing are not in vain: they still, in our times, express a courageous attitude. A work tends towards creation in an asymptotic and utopian manner: it is this trajectory which still allows to believe in the presence of creation, as well as in its absence.

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