

The battle between Chronos and Aïon

by Gianfranco Vinay

La forme du temps est un cercle (Time's form is a circle), François Bayle's most recent acousmatic poem, invites the listener to explore "time in its various states, in five passages" through very rich, poetic philosophical sound images.

The "first state" (or movement) is *concrecence*¹, a keyword in Bayle's poïetics, suggesting a dynamic interpretation of musique concrète "that which grows together": conjunctions of intermingled growths – the word "concrete" coming from 'cum' -with, and 'crescere' -to grow.

In this first movement "passage/time's state" (bubbling, time's pressure?), the sound image of a "*spinning top in the sky*"² creates a vortex generating a long series of fluid images : liquid fluidity of running water, atmospheric fluidity of crickets, verbal fluidity of a crowded marketplace, rhythmic fluidity of jazzy fragments. And finally, the bucolic and wooded fluidity of a Pan flute, the sound icon of natural fluidity and musical time's circular nature (in Homer's *Hymn to Pan*³, the "nymphs that live in the mountains sing with a clear voice while dancing in rounds", celebrating the god playing his flute).

The "close" and "far" evoked in the second movement's title refers just as much to distance and proximity as it does to the perception of that which is identical or different. At first, sound homologies and differences attract our perception. Bells, birds, Pan flute, chorus, a xylophone's metallic sounds : images played in near-unisson provoke us to question the diversity of their timbres and the quasi-identicalness of their pitches. Later, the spatial principle comes into play. Polyphonic elaboration, concrecence of sound objects, interplay between reverberations and echos make these images move around the acousmatic space which, little by little, is transformed into a dream-like scene, into a mysterious and disquieting nocturnal.

The third and fourth movements are also connected by a mirror-play based on the relationship between homology and difference. Shorter than the others, these two mirrored movements resonate with all sorts of percussive sound objects : metal-sheet bells, metalophones, sleigh bells, bells and hand bells, drumheads, human voices and coughing bouts, plucked instruments, air punctuated by breath...The time-flow differentiates the two movements. In the third movement, the multiplicity of tempi-phenomena as well as of relationships between objects (sounds) and subject (creator), "that place of temporal vibrations," is expressed through shifts of silence and extremely varied animations, between the full and the void. Such a phenomenology of musical time is both very modern and very ancient (consider, for example, Saint Augustin's sublime speculation in his Confessions on the relationship between musical time and the soul, between "*internal time*" and "*external time*"⁴).

In the fourth movement, on the other hand, time becomes less morseled, now that the author's attention is concentrated on its

¹ attributable to A.N Whitehead, 1925

² to quote one of Bayle's previous tittle (*Erosphère III*, 1980)

³ Homère Hymn to Pan : verses 19-26

⁴ Saint Augustin, Confessions – 11° Book

pace, or allures (meaning, "in Schaefferian solfeggio, the fluctuating quality that a sound maintains. The movement that animates the life of a resonance."). This series of 'inner pulsations' is closer to the theoretical notion of Philoxenos' *chronos taxin* (rhythm as a series of time measures) than to that of traditional rhythmic measures measured and codified by writing, based on mathematical proportions between time and notes' durations. Therefore, the distinction between acousmatics and mathematics (in the ancient Greek sense of "the science of learning") does not only affect the pedagogic methods of listening (Pythagoras' famous curtain⁵), but also the actual nature of musical elements.

The last movement begins with a circular image similar to a grain of energy spinning in an accelerator of particles. An image, not unlike that of the first movement's "spinning top", which provokes a chain and a coexistence of fluid sonorities. A regular clinking resonates in sidereal space, leading to a last repetition of fluid images, further and further distanced.

"It is readily understandable, this game could go on..." are François Bayle's concluding notes. Indeed...Pythagoras' circle, evoked in the quoted Borgès poem, designates the geometric form of time controlled by Aïon, the god of vital fluid origins. and consequently, that of the destiny of mortals and the duration of their lives, symbolized by a serpent biting its own tail (an image of eternity, of oriental form, of the Jungian concept of soul, etc). Another poem by Borgès⁶ enumerates human civilization's *topoï*, rich in allusions to metempsychose and to the eternal return.

*"A fish jumps out of the sea
and a man from Agrigente will remember
having been this fish" ; "The entire past returns like a wave
these olden things come into view
because you were kissed by a woman".*

Two thousand years of the history of Western music could be interpreted as a battle between two temporal principles : a Chronos-time, linear and dialectical, expressing the teleological orientation of christian times (from the birth and death of Christ to the Apocalypse) and an Aïon-time, circular, pagan, underlying, repressed yet always present in the collective unconscious as a reservoir of poetic and dream-like images, metamorphic and labyrinthian sequences.

Chronos-time is at the root of rhythmic regularity codified by musical notation as well as of the harmonic dialectic of tension/release. On the other hand, Aïon-time opposes rhythmic regularity through all sorts of *agog*, aleatoric, metrical, polymetrical and metaphorical loopholes. It is also this Aïon-time that attempts to transform the linear and dialectical sequences of tonal harmony and tempered scales into a circular and labyrinthian procession (by the circle of fifths and the 24 keys).

The fluidity of time, the circular nature of the sound images, the series of sound transformations in François Bayle's most recent work demonstrate the composer's vocation (as well as that of acousmatic music) to let Aïon-time triumphantly return during an epoch when Chronos-time (whose attributes are a scythe and a clepsydra) exercises its tyrannical powers, encouraged by the contemporary atomization of existential time.

⁵ Porphyre, *Life of Pythagoras*, 18-19

⁶ Borgès, *Hymn*, verses 8-10 et 30-33

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Bayle's œuvre is notable for its masterly craftsmanship and rhetoric, its agile discourse and its sophisticated thought. Large-scale forms include long developmental sections shot through with recycled mutations of various 'proto-elements' (Son Vitesse-Lumiere) and vast sequences of contrasting, but complementary movements that give rise to variations on certain initial propositions (Grande polyphonie, Les couleurs de la nuit, Tremblement de terre tres doux).

Additional style characteristics include intertwining textural variations (Toupie dans le ciel), filigree-like sound (Jeita), sequential proliferations and reactions (Motion-émotion), distinctive tone colours and syntactical articulation ('montages-catastrophes') (Théâtre d'Ombres, Fabulæ, La main vide, Morceaux de Ciels).

Bayle's music is brought to light through a succession of unveilings since, as he would say :

"the underlying attributes of the listening process gently disrupt any given ideas."

after F. Dhomont in New Grove Dictionary - 2000

Most of F.B' works are published by Magison label (vol. 1 à 15 -cf. p.2).

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