

Luca Frei

Musica Viva Spreads

The work *Musica Viva Spreads* by the Swiss artist Luca Frei consists of quilts referring to double pages from the first edition of the magazine *Musica Viva*, a journal for new music that Hermann Scherchen, a German conductor, philosopher and researcher founded in Brussels in 1936. Unfortunately the magazine was short-lived, only three editions saw the light of day. Every article was printed in four languages underlining the magazine's intent to be international.¹ To draw attention to this, Frei assigned a color to each language printed on double pages, red for German, blue for Italian, green for French, orange for English. Furthermore the display of the quilts can be changed from day to day or unfolded by request hinting towards a social application of textile opening up to notions of “plurality, collectivity, working together and sharing of space and time”.² The installation *Musica Viva Spreads* incorporates the application of multiple languages to color and can be read through a perspective of Color Pluralism, a term explored by perception philosopher Mark Eli Kalderon, whilst the tactical application of the quilts can be read through a politics of folding and sharing as can be seen in the seminal work of the German artist Franz Erhard Walther.

Color Pluralism

Within Perceptualism theory, the perception of color can not be objectified because of the high variety of colors discernible to living beings and the different machinery for color vision that people and other species have. Color Pluralism claims that perception is in the eye of the beholder, that color is not a given property of an object and that it is prone to social interpretation rendering objectification impossible.³ In a same way Frei emphasizes with the work *Musica Viva Spreads* firstly a societal need for plurality and difference and secondly the subjectivity of human perception through underlining the

¹ Subsequently forming a silent resistance to the social-nationalistic artistic practice of Nazi Germany.

² From the exhibition text “Musica Viva Spreads”, Artissima 2016

³ Vivian Mazrahi, “Color Objectivism and Color Pluralism”, <http://www.mizrahi.ch/philo/Colorpluralism.pdf> (28.10.2016)

relationality of the object. For both the artist and the conductor it seems not to be about the extent of colors and languages, but about multiplicity; it is about diversity and co-existence rather than uniformity and “pureness”.⁴ By taking an internationalist position Scherchen consequently was at odds with the politics of his time.⁵ He was in exile, fleeing Nazi Germany. The rest of his life was a struggle to find a neutral position between politics and life. A struggle which can be further visualized: if Social Nationalism is an attempt to reduce plurality (colors) and to level identities into coherent and understandable values (to objectify it), Internationalism is in a way an obliteration of values as well, because it dilutes social values by over-relativization.⁶ It is as if one is looking at a contracting or an ever expanding spectrum of colors. It is hard to make an objective decision as to what color one is looking at, one is relative to the other, no matter the resolution. Henceforth, values are never static, but are negotiated through open dialogue or through mediatization which brings us to the social connotation of the work.⁷

Delaying references

By reworking the frames of colors from the magazine into a quilt, Luca directs us towards the source and its context, but at the same time delays any reference to it. The quilt consists of a grid of different dimensions and colors, they are simple forms. What remains is a tactile object, that rests folded in an idle position, but upon request can be unfolded opening up its formal qualities to social practice reminiscent of the work of the German artist Franz Erhard Walther. The intention of Walther's pieces are to be performed, they are configurations of cloth in different shapes that can be worn by the public and according to directions of the artist activated. It is the tactility of *Musica Viva Spreads* that resonates most with the work of Erhard Walther. By moving from visual image to tactile object, a

⁴ Dr. Adel Bshara, "Social Nationalism VS National Socialism", http://www.ssnp.com/new/ssnp/en/ssnp_001.htm (31.10.2016)

⁵ The colors could stand for a spectrum of possible colors and languages.

⁶ The obliteration of values plays out in nationalism through the use of systematic identity politics and in internationalism through an over-relativization of identities such as with the terms 'angry white man' or 'black lives matter', in which color monisms are being played out. With this terms it is uncertain who is being referred to and the terms are used as labels under which all sorts of agendas can find shelter.

⁷ Color Pluralism as perceptual relativism poses us with a dilemma? If on the one hand the need for difference is imperative even when incompatible, we risk over-relativization. On the other hand when values are strictly framed, we risk bigotry?

transition from perception to application takes place. By delaying references, the artist renders the object into an image with the risk of reduction, but with the choice of reworking it into a quilt, he resolves the issue; the artist makes a personal gesture and introduces us to its tactile properties, its utility and prospects of sharing. It is this utility that gives us ground to think about the intentions of Scherchen and the position he took before, during and after the Second World War. As a proponent of the music of Arnold Schoenberg and Edgard Varèse and later a mentor to Karlheinz Stockhausen and the young Iannis Xenakis he precipitated a form of music beyond image, a music that strives for heterogeneity and complexity by bringing all of “the world into music”. He even went further by moving from Pierre Schaeffer's Concrete Music to Electro Acoustic Music, perpetuating and help laying the ground work of what we now know as Electronic Music.⁸

Personal and Collective histories

It is these intertwined histories that Luca Frei unravels by combining his personal histories with the collective ones he seeks to investigate. The history of Scherchen traverses multiple times and trajectories, showing us a struggle of finding “neutrality” as writer Gauthier Lesturgie beautifully puts it. Accompanying Luca's previous exhibition on Herman Scherchen, *alles hörbar machen II*, that focusses on the final years of the conductor and the dynamics of his Gravesano studio, the writer explains that Scherchen was looking for a refuge beyond politics, nationality or dichotomies between ancient, modern, concrete or electronic music and found this in his studio.⁹ Here the search for the 'new' and ungraspable continued albeit in a more peaceful environment. The gestures Luca makes become even more specific and remarkable when one understands that he is the grandson of the famous musician, conductor and perpetuator of the new and sharable.

Hicham Khalidi,

Brussels, 31 October 2016

⁸ Of course others contributed as well such as Dick Raaymakers, Edgard Varèse etc. - http://www.inventionen.de/Inventionen_08/GRMtoMusic.html

⁹ Gauthier Lesturgie, "Luca Frei Hermann Scherchen: alles hörbar machen II", http://www.barbarawien.de/gallery_exhibition.php?archive=57 (28.10.2016)