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Making Inaudible Forces Audible

Why us non-musicians?

Pierre Boulez's method led to the selection of these five works of music. The relationships between these works are not filial or dependent. There is no progression or evolution from one work to the others. It is as if the five works were chosen halfway by chance to form a cycle where they begin to react to one another. This weaves a group of virtual relationships from which one could draw a particular profile of musical time applicable to these five works alone. You could easily imagine Boulez choosing four or five other works: you would have had a different cycle, other reactions and relationships and another unique profile of musical time or of a different variable than time. It is not a method for generalization. It is not a question of using works taken as musical examples to reach an abstract concept of time where one could say: "This is musical time." It is a question of taking limited, determined cycles under certain conditions to extract particular profiles of time, and then potentially superposing these profiles to make a veritable cartography of variables. This method concerns music but could just as well be used for a thousand other things.

In the specific case of the cycle chosen by Boulez, the particular time profile had no aims to exhaust the question of musical time

in general. We saw a kind of *non-pulsed* time emerging from a *pulsed* time, even though this non-pulsed time could become a new form of *pulsation*. The first work (Ligeti) showed how a non-pulsed time rose from a certain pulsation; the second, third and fourth works developed or showed different aspects of this non-pulsed time; the fifth and last work by Carter showed how a non-pulsed time could lead to a new form of original pulsation, a very particular, very new pulsation.

Pulsed time and non-pulsed time are completely musical, but they are something else as well. The question would be to know what makes up this *non-pulsed time*. This kind of floating time that more or less corresponds to what Proust called "a bit of pure time." The most obvious, the most immediate feature of such a so-called non-pulsed time is duration, time freed from measure, be it a regular or irregular, simple or complex measure. Non-pulsed time puts us first and foremost in the presence of a multiplicity of heterochronous, qualitative, non-coincident, non-communicating durations. The problem is therefore clear: how will these heterochronous, heterogeneous, multiple, non-coincident durations join together since it would appear that this eliminates any recourse to the most general and classic solution that consists in relying on the mind to appose a common measure or a metric cadence to all vital durations. From the start, this solution is blocked.

Turning to a completely different domain, I think that when biologists now speak of rhythms, they have found similar questions. They have also renounced the belief that heterogeneous rhythms are articulated under the domination of a unifying form. They do not seek to explain the articulations between vital rhythms, for example the 24-hour rhythms, in terms of a superior form that would unify them, or even in terms of a regular or

irregular sequence of elementary processes. They seek an explanation somewhere completely different, at a sub-vital, infra-vital level in what they call a population of molecular oscillators capable of passing through heterogeneous systems, in oscillating molecules coupled together that then pass through groups and disparate durations. The process of articulation does not depend on a unifiable or unifying form or a meter, cadence or any regular or irregular measure, but on the action of certain molecular couples released through different layers and different rhythmic layers. We are not only using a metaphor to speak of a similar discovery in music: sound molecules rather than pure notes or tones. Sound molecules, coupled together, are capable of passing through totally heterogeneous layers of rhythm and layers of duration. Here lies the first determination of a non-pulsed time.

There is a certain type of individuation that is not reduced to a subject (I) or even to the combination of a form and a material. A landscape, an event, an hour of the day, a life or a fragment of life... proceed in other ways. I have the feeling that the problem of individuation in music, which is surely very, very complicated, is more of the type of the second paradoxical individuations. What do we call the individuation of a phrase, a little phrase in music? I would like to start with the most rudimentary level, the easiest in appearance. A piece of music can remind us of a landscape. Thus the famous case of Swann in Proust's work: the Boulogne woods and Vinteuil's little phrase. Sounds can also evoke colors, either by association or by so-called synaesthetic phenomena. Motifs in operas can finally be connected to people, for example: a Wagnerian motif is supposed to designate a character. Such a mode of listening is not empty or without interest; perhaps at a certain level of relaxation it is even a necessary passage. Yet everyone knows it is

not enough. At a higher level of tension, sound does not refer to a landscape, but music itself envelops a distinct sound landscape inside it (as with Liszt). We could say the same about the notion of color and consider that durations, rhythms and timbres all the more so are themselves colors, distinct sound colors that are superimposed on visible colors and that do not have the same speeds or the same passages as visible colors. The same for the third notion, the notion of character. We can consider certain motifs in opera in association with a character. The motifs in Wagner, however, are not only associated with an outside character, they change, have an autonomous life in a non-pulsed floating time where they themselves and by themselves become characters inside the music.

These three different notions of *sound landscapes*, *audible colors* and *rhythmic character* thus appear to be the aspects in which a non-pulsed time produces its very particular individuations.

Every direction leads us, I believe, to stop thinking in terms of substance-form. To such an extent, that we have stopped believing in the hierarchy that moves from the simple to the complex, substance-life-mind, in it in every domain. We even thought that life would be a simplification of matter; one might think that vital rhythms do not find their unification in a spiritual form, but on the contrary in molecular couplings. All of this substance-form hierarchy, with a more or less rudimentary substance and a more or less scholarly sound form, isn't that what we have stopped listening to, what composers have stopped producing? What has formed is a very elaborate sound material, not a rudimentary substance that received a form. And the coupling occurs between this very elaborate sound material and forces which by themselves are not sound, but that become sound or become audible by the material that makes them substantial. Thus Debussy's *Dialogue Between Wind*

and Sea. The material is there to make forces audible that are not audible in themselves, such as time, duration and even intensity. The *material-force* couple replaces the *matter-form* couple.

Boulez: *Eclats*. All of the very elaborate sound material, with the extinction of sounds, was done to make sensible and audible two tempos that were not of sound. One was defined as the time of production in general and the other as the time of meditation in general. Therefore, the couple simple substance-sound form informing that the substance was replaced with a coupling between an elaborate material and imperceptible forces that only become perceptible through the material. Music is thus no longer limited to musicians to the extent that sound is not its exclusive and fundamental element. Its element is all the non-sound forces that the sound material elaborated by the composer will make perceptible, in such a way that we can even perceive the differences between these forces, the entire differential play of these forces. We are all faced with somewhat similar tasks. In philosophy, classical philosophy presents itself with a kind of rudimentary substance of thought, a type of flow that one then attempts to submit to concepts or categories. Yet philosophers are increasingly seeking to elaborate a very complex material of thought to make sensible forces that are not thinkable in themselves.

There is no absolute ear; the problem is to have an impossible one—making audible forces that are not audible in themselves. In philosophy, it is a question of an impossible thought, making thinkable through a very complex material of thought forces that are unthinkable.