

Philippe Manoury, *La note et le son* (Note and Sound, 1998)

[*La note et le son*](#) is a 422-pg. volume of uniting 32 texts written by Philippe Manoury between 1981 and 1998, published in various journals or unpublished hitherto. For the occasion, the composer revised the texts with the aid of the musicologist Danielle Cohen-Levinas, who also provided a foreword for the volume. They were divided into four categories: theoretical writings, aesthetic writings, themes and variations on divers questions, and interviews. The work closes with an annotated catalogue of the works, covering the period 1972–1998.

The first part of the volume is devoted to the composer's theoretical writings, containing five essays among the longest of the collection. These offer insight into the foundations of Manoury's work, the conceptions governing his compositions, notably in the fields of mixed and real-time music, which combine acoustic instruments and electronic media. The last of the essays, "Les partitions virtuelles" ("Virtual Scores", 1997), is undoubtedly the best known, given the composer's reputation as a precursor of real-time music uniting instrumental and electronic. Just as the classical score is incomplete, with its economy of means, opening up to complex structures, only partially representing the sounding phenomenon, the virtual score in mixed music defines only a part of what is rendered electronically, the rest being determined by the relationships established between performer and machine, of which the latter recognises and follows the former's play. The foregoing text, "La note et le son : un carnet de bord" ("Note and Sound: A Logbook", 1990) constitutes in a certain fashion the prelude to these considerations. Written after the composition of three pioneering works that brought together instruments and electronic IRCAM real-time by means of Station 4X (*Jupiter* in 1986, *Pluton* in 1987–8, *La partition du ciel et de l'enfer* in 1989), the essay emphasises the main qualities of traditional writing—power of abstraction, symbolic character, the importance of the process of interpretation in written music—before showing its differences from electronic music, whose objects are difficult to detach from their sounding function and whose interpretation seems possible only in a real-time situation.

The three other essays in this first part are devoted to questions that go beyond the sphere of mixed music, although instrumental composition and electronic creation cross paths several times. The first, "La flèche du temps" ("The Arrow of Time") sets forth a general approach to Manoury's composition: as important as writing may be in his music, the composer proposes from the beginning that his creation is catalysed rather by consideration for the perceptual side. As often with Manoury, curious about the sciences and other arts, it is the perception of phenomena drawn from everyday life or discovered in other disciplines that intrigues him; he finds in them material for experimentation and construction. The composer reaffirms music's nature as an art of time, time being the necessary condition for all

perception, whether immediate, reflective, or premonitory. In the second essay, “La part consciente”, Manoury reflects on a question at the heart of all compositional activity, that of the link between conception and perception. The composer poses two extreme points between which every composition is situated: on the one hand, primacy is given to the creation of strong relationships between elements which sometimes allow exogenous perceptual phenomena to emerge; on the other hand, manipulation of the individual natures of isolated elements the perception of which is more univocal. The third text, “Les limites de la notion de timbre”, takes a position opposed to the ideas of “spectralism”, which portray timbre as a historically neglected element finally emerging in contemporary composition. In the domain of written music, Manoury considers timbre not to belong on the same conceptual level as the other components of sound—pitch, duration, and intensity. In the domain of electronic music, it is no longer possible to speak of timbre, so numerous have the means of its analysis and control become: attack, phasing, vibrato, roughness, etc. have been brought to light by the psychoacousticians and become manipulable by computer. The composer is left to conclude: “As a unitary object of composition, timbre, for me, is dead.”

The second part of the work, “Écrits esthétiques” (“Aesthetic Writings”), brings together shorter texts that testify to Philippe Manoury’s activity as an analyst and reader, one who never ceases to explore certain scores from the past in which he finds issues—not stylistic techniques—close to those involved in his own composition, as expounded in the first part of the volume. As with Baudelaire, it is a question of extracting what is eternal from what is transitory, as proposed in the essay “Le transitoire et l’éternel ou le crépuscule des modernes ?” (“The Transitory and the Eternal, or, The Twilight of the Moderns?”). These texts reveal the composer’s constant back-and-forth between Wagner, Mahler, the Second Viennese School, Debussy, Boulez, Stockhausen and his compositional workshop. They have been grouped according to three themes: modernity, opera, and models.

The theme “Modernité” comprises five essays. “Coupure dans l’instant” (“Rupture in the Moment”) takes up the question of the punctuation of the musical continuum by examining different contexts and means of implementation from music history, in a tonal context and beyond. In closing, it identifies examples of sound continuums that eliminate punctuation, whether in Berg, Grisey, Murail, Xenakis, or Chowning. The following essay, “Le geste, la nature et le lieu : un démon dans les circuits” (“Gesture, Nature, and Place: A Demon in the Circuits”) confronts the question of the alterity of computing machines and artificial sound devices, whose main interest is to obscure the link from cause (gesture) to effect (sound) in instrumental music by enabling a freedom from the laws of physical acoustics. The essay “Le transitoire et l’éternel ou crépuscule des modernes ?” is central, approaching the question of modernity in art and in music in particular, and proposing the necessity of differentiating between “general principles and aesthetic precepts on one hand [and] expression and technique on the other”. In the essay “À propos de quelques éléments stylistiques”, Manoury insists on the necessity of finding a personal musical form, one that goes beyond questions of musical language, but engages with the real in order to transform it, and not to be subjugated by it.

“La musique aujourd’hui : un univers en expansion sauvage” (“Music Today: A Universe in Wild Expansion”) raises the question of the nature of public policies in favour of art and culture (between which Manoury distinguishes), and especially that of a meaningful music education in schools, one that would enable the apprehension of music as something other than an element of the global landscape of functional products that surround us.

The theme “Opéra” comes to the fore in relation to works of composers from the past whose compositional strategies attract Manoury’s interest for his own creative purposes. Wagner enjoys two essays, the first showing the transformational potential of the leitmotifs in the *Ring*, the second considering modality and diatonicism in *Parsifal*. Manoury next analyses the thematic material of Richard Strauss’s opera *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and its deployment in almost cinematographic terms. This question of the relation to time in cinema then serves as a means of introducing Manoury’s work on his first opera, *60^{ème} Parallèle* (*60th Parallel*), which originated in the composition of a earlier, unfinished opera inspired by the Orson Welles film *Citizen Kane*, and which also made abundant use of flashback. The essay “Du fonctionnel au symbolique dans la musique d’opéra” (“From the Functional to the Symbolic in Opera Music”) presents several connections between music and drama which Manoury identifies especially in Wagner and Berg. The composer concludes the theme Opéra with a text originating from programme notes for the premiere of *60^{ème} Parallèle*, showing how the work’s form unfolds from the Prelude, to which the opera constantly returns.

With the final theme, “Modèles”, Manoury offers three essays based on remarks, phrases, or texts by composers and writers of the past. They sometimes take up themes already treated, like that of mixed composition (the essay “La petite phrase de Berlioz”). “Les points de vue de Borges” explores Borges’s universe as it relates to issues dear to Manoury himself, such as perception, memory, the relation of the macrocosm to the microcosm, and continuity versus discontinuity. The following essay takes up Milan Kundera’s book *Testaments Betrayed*, which interests the composer for the parallel it establishes between the great epochs of literary and musical creation, which Manoury develops by means of the dichotomy extension/proliferation/augmentation versus limitation/contraction/condensation.

The third part of the volume, “Thèmes et variations sur des questions diverses”, brings together miscellaneous essays, from the composer’s response to the book *Requiem pour une avant-garde* by Benoît Duteurtre to a series of brief *Impromptus* devoted to emerging intellectual and musical developments. The fourth part is devoted to interviews of the composer with Danielle Cohen-Levinas, Jean-Pierre Derrien and Peter Szendy, which give the reader a global sense Manoury’s ideas and trajectory.

In the course of these 32 texts there emerges a great coherence and unity of intention on the composer’s part, along the lines of one of his favourite compositional strategies which consists of presenting the same musical idea in various aspects. Despite the very rapid evolution of technology, the remarks on

electronic media have not lost their relevance, for they are approached from a compositional perspective concerned with their relation to musical writing, without reference to practical issues which may have grown obsolete.

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28/09/2019

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To quote this article: Alain Bonardi, "Philippe Manoury, La note et le son (Note and Sound, 1998)", Dictionary of Composer's Writings, Dicteco [online], ed. E. Reibel, last edited: 01/03/2023, <https://dicteco.huma-num.fr/book/43158>.