

Wine and Dust

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"Without the imperialism of concept, music would have taken the place of philosophy: we would have had a paradise of inexplicable evidence" [Emile Cioran]

"The purpose of music is to create soul" [Jani Christou]

[...]

Wine is such a wondrous discovery... I am flying over Mongolia and I can see frozen rivers while I drink Chilean wine and listen *'Blue rondo a la Turk'*. What is the final outcome of all this? Wine has the answer: it is an enhancer of the soul; it makes me realize instantly that what is driving my perception is actually the broadband sound matter of the plane itself. It contains all the sounds and none of them at the same time. It is a moving micro-environment of normality in an immense sea of raging invisible weather wilderness.

The trip is thus a flowing transfiguration of time and matter, and not just a way of moving from one place to another. A very similar kind of transfiguration to that of the close-up profound listening of all the rivers, seas, mountains, forests, buildings, trains, machines... that preceded this very moment for me. That is, a solipsistic morphing of the potential of 'reality', that –irrelevant?– chimeric environment. And so the plane, the wind, the large masses of crackling ice, the slow water below, become the same thing: immaterial ephemeral power that can only be exerted by oneself over oneself; the kind of power that moves me the most and also the most frightening of all.

[...]

New York City, after an intense sonic immersion inside mechanical and boiler rooms in office buildings, two killer cocktails: vodka with plum wine, caipirinha with sake. That fine touch of a thin slice of cucumber floating in the clean atmosphere of the glass. Like the high-pitch crispy sounds that swing around the space, freed from the speakers, as I carefully move the EQ faders to create them during the performance. To give them birth from that 'primordial soup' that is the broadband sonic universe. They are born and dead in seconds; they have an ephemeral virtual immaterial life; they are flow, not repetition. And for those who have the innate capability of listening with the spirit, these sounds –as all sounds, for that matter– easily overcome any possible status as signifiers or carriers, becoming beings. Immaterial beings, ungraspable, ghosts of themselves. Creatures that merge in our perception and travel deep inside us with a precious load of confusing beauty, passion, peacefulness, horror, and other vital elements. Open enhancers of our souls and not just mere servants of language and purpose.

[...]

Nothing is more repulsive than music as entertainment. In fact, the very concept of entertainment itself. That lack of respect for the deep commitment to uselessness (or even worse, the ignorance of it). Entertainment is the dog of pragmatism.

I discovered the beauty of Romanian music from musicians in Brasov and Sibiu who played for crowds in restaurants. There it was, unexpectedly; an alluring thread of brilliance emerging from the thick layers of conversation and laughter.

[...]

Near Havana, diving in an underwater cave, I no longer think about the oxygen tank I'm effortlessly carrying with me. No loads or objects to take care of. Instead of that, the overwhelming presence of my breathing; myself as my own environment. Free in the dense slow flight. After the dive, a huge 'Montecristo A' cigar. Powerful, refined, with a presence formed by many layers of taste and smoke. Not simply a very pleasant thing, but, much more importantly, another wondrous discovery in the ancient

human quest for richness, detail, delicacy, carefulness and relevance. And all of it slowly vanishing before my eyes; I feel amazed by this.

Like the unexpected sudden clash of melting memories from the sonic density and richness of Tokyo and Patagonia, of crowds and wind. Quickly vanishing and morphing in the weak hands of my memory, but firmly reshaping and invigorating my soul with *'belle confusion'*.

For a number of reasons –most of them unknown to me– I dislike possessing material things; their physical presence troubles me in different ways, sometimes in an obsessive manner. If they are around, at sight, they get easily covered by the 'normality dust'; a kind of dust that can hardly be removed and that gives most things an annoying futile presence. 'Death by presence'; mummified before my eyes. If they are conveniently stored, out of sight, they get a 'forgetfulness tint', they yell at me for attention, they quietly cry in solitude and darkness. 'Death by forgetfulness'; mummified inside their little tombs.

The more I like an object, the more I want it to be possessed by someone else. Someone with the courage and skills I lack for keeping material things alive and healthy.

That is, I think, where an important part of my fascination for the work with sound comes from. I have an endless amazement and a profound sense of satisfaction for that intrinsic immateriality of sound 'matter'.

For example, CDs (or tapes or records) are commonly considered as equivalent to books as physical supports for sound. There is, however, an essential difference between them that pinpoint sound's elusive beauty: sound recordings have two separate successive levels of physicalization; the first one is the material encoding of sound (be it analog or digital) and the second one is the materialization of sound as a physical concrete reality. The first one is, in fact, not essentially different from traditional score notation (although sound recording supports have a greater level of specificity). For this reason, *concrete music* –the idea of a fixed *'objet sonore'* in the Schaefferian sense– is an impossible dream (but nonetheless, an appealing ideal).

The final materialization of sound dramatically depends upon the sound system used and the actual space that the sounds are projected into. This seems obvious, but its consequences at a phenomenological level are rarely acknowledged. Melody, rhythm and words are corrosive agents of phenomenological substance in music. We can recognize the same melody played over a small radio receiver, a huge sound system or simply whistled. But the question is to what extent we give importance to the fact that we are listening to different things.

To me, the beauty and strength of the substance of these 'things' lie in their vivid physical presence, their potential for mutation and transformation, and their ungraspable ephemeral immateriality. A subtle whispering rumor and an overwhelming wall of sound can both be created starting from the same encoded sonic information. And both are wonderfully weightless.

'Blank' phenomenological substance is an amazing catalyst for irrational transcendence; to forcefully move away from meaning and purpose. Sonic substance has this potential, and its immateriality is an added virtue for our voyage through the strange path of profound listening. If we want to undertake such a journey.

[...]

In Dakar the trash is just dust. Like a kind of thin, dry dirt. Anything more consistent than that is used in some way or another. Computers are five times as expensive as in the 'first' world, and they have to be covered as protection from the red dust that quickly impregnates everything.

While I keep recording through the maze of unnamed streets of the large poor suburb of Pikine Icotaf, I admire the ability of the people here to simultaneously keep everything running with almost nothing, and to maintain an intuitive joyful spirit towards the cacophony that is being created by all of them. Exactly as I experienced it during other hidden-recording wandering walks in similar places, like the 'medina' of Fes or the 'favela' suburbs in Brasilia.

A couple of weeks later I was in Basse Cassamance, observing the dead body of a monkey completely filled with worms. The whole savanna grassland around me was on fire and I was surrounded by an astonishing mass of crackling sounds from the burning grass. And once again I felt the complex beauty and strength of non-bucolic nature.

To me, both traditional structuralism / 'proceduralism' (from classical tonality and serialism to Cagean deconstruction) and today's 'technologism' (in its admiration of either success or failure of

technology) are dissipative forms of rationalism. Both are equally uninteresting and futile for me. Both are ultimately revolving around craftsmanship and technical knowledge; two irrelevant concepts.

It seems to me that the most relevant and far-reaching consequence of the changes brought by the socialization of both technology and the 'unlimited' conception of music in the twentieth century (especially in the 80s and the 90s) is precisely the unfolding of their self-destructive character as paradigms in music.

I believe that we are currently undergoing a largely unnoticed revolution in relation to the driving forces for music creation. Instead of a change in paradigms, I think that what we have before our eyes (our ears) is the crackling of an old ground base, after decades of stretching these paradigms. And we are very fortunate because of this.

Today anyone can be a musician / composer. To be such a thing has, in fact, become irrelevant. There is an immense number of people all over the world recording and releasing their own music. They all have the right and –now– the courage and means to do it. There is no need for either 'serious music' prestige or rock'n roll / pop starship anymore. At the same time, both musical and technological means and knowledge are valid for what they can provide but they are no longer needed for giving validity or credit to the music being created. In synthesis, we are assisting to the denial of the protagonism of 'The Instrument', be it real or conceptual. And all of this makes a big difference.

What has become strikingly relevant, what has forcefully come to the forefront, is personality, soul, spirit, individual intuitive substance. To be sure, these qualities have always been important, but the difference is that today we can appreciate them bare, pure, clear, standing alone, *'instrument-less'*. From my perspective, personality in music today is stronger and more essential than ever before.

It is my belief that we need to clearly perceive the shining and the darkness from passion, strength, courage, delicacy... not as universal objective values, but as firm statements from individuals. Neither the master craftsman (from the classical academic composer, to the rock'n'roll virtuoso or the computer geek...) nor the 'useless' Cagean man. A man facing spiritual decisions, not game rules. A man with individual substance, not socio-cultural coherence. A man playing instruments without showing them off.

Involuntarily, we have been freed from 'proceduralism' and 'technologism'. We are naked now. But we are not all equal. And now it is time to show what each one of us is capable or incapable of doing.

I am laying down on the wet floor of the rain forest in Sarapiquí, Costa Rica. Alone, in complete darkness. Following the activities of the leaf-cutter ants and recording the endless flow of the sonic environment. And I feel like a creator; not because I am recording or because I might be later 'composing' something with these sounds, but simply because I am listening to them with dedication and passion.