

# VISUAL TEMPTATION IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY MUSIC

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**Abstract.** With the new century began a metamorphosis of traditional art categories. The visual arts have been generalizing, even trivializing the use of sound in some of their works. A little later, especially since 2010, some composers, symmetrically, and as in a «counter-attack», have been designing installations, i.e. works of visual obedience. Nowadays, the visual aspect, in musical works, increasingly tends to develop. Czech composer Ondrej Adamek may have achieved his most notoriety by designing his *Air machines*, real musical sculptures. Pascal Dusapin recently completed his old fantasy of total art in a remarkable installation, *Mille plateaux* (2014). Do these examples betray the beginning of a fusion between the arts ? Or the end of each of them ?

*Keywords:* Visual, globalization, communication, 21st century, humour, derision.

Since the 1990's, "visual arts" meant no more sculpture and painting. Videos, installations, performances emerged. Since 2000, these visual arts were even commonly sound <sup>1</sup>. Let's remember, for instance, the success of *Power chords* (2005) by French visual artist Saâdane Afif. The sound was no more the privilege of music.

There must have been, then, some kind of struggle between art categories <sup>2</sup>. Because music seemed to strike back "against" visual arts. The conquest, by musicians, of visual aspects in their works, appeared like a «counter attack» against visual arts. It might have occurred a little later, probably after 2000 anyway. Finally, there were new relations between art categories. And these relations were paradoxal, dialectic. Let's take a first example. Chinese compos-

er Tan Dun sometimes asserted himself as a visual artist. His collection of piano wrecks became *Piano Installation* (2004) for Kimen's Bunker Museum of Contemporary Art in Taiwan. *Body percussive* (2001), a Cagian and performative work (and so visual in a way), invited the public to use one hundred chairs and five beds as percussion. And it was premiered at the Palais de Tokyo, that is to say in a Parisian exhibition venue: devoted to the visual arts. Tan Dun, after Varese and Cage, therefore participates actively, from the "musical camp", in the slow metamorphosis of the arts into one, protean form.

The phenomenon seems even clearer when the works are collective. The work *Capt-actions* was premiered in 2005, in Malakoff, near Paris. It was a collective work, mostly musical, and in fact, presented as part of a normal concert. The string quartet, plus accordion, had been composed by the Italian Ivan Fedele. But an efficient sound process of live remix was also performed by Thierry Coduys. The latter embodied a new category of transversal artists. He was plas-

1 See for example Joe Banks, "Soundproofs/Installations sonores", *Musica falsa*, n°1, 1997, p. 24–25.

2 See Jacques Amblard, "L'œuvre esthétique ou l'esthétique musicale comme art, concurrent de son objet d'étude", *Art et mutations*, Paris, Klincksieck, 2004, p. 12–13.

tician, turntablist, in the continuation of Christian Marclay<sup>3</sup>. But he was also a composer and a sound ingeneer. The association "Fedele plus Coduys" built a new fusion, typically postmodern<sup>4</sup>, a fusion between contemporary music and popular sound<sup>5</sup>, sometimes "cosmic like" because full of echo. But the work was even more protean. Sébastien Michaud, a plastic artist, projected different *monochromes* during the performance, on a screen *behind* the musicians. And perhaps for the first time in history at this level of technicality, colors and music were deeply associated. It was no more the simple ideas of Debussy, Messiaen, Schönberg or Kandinsky<sup>6</sup>. It was an embodiment, an incarnation. And also for the first time of history, at this level of organicity, visual arts appeared behind music (and not the contrary as usual). Because vision might be the first sense. But when one sees only colors, monochromes, one by one, there are no forms, no possible visual imagination, putting music behind, as usual. It is no more a video with music, or a movie score. Vision becomes the second sense, behind audition. And it is rare. Vision becomes non-conceptual, like music traditionally. Like music, colors become what Lévy-Strauss called "pure symbols"<sup>7</sup>.

For instance, at the end of each movement, the screen becomes black, as to symbolise a final black nothingness. Or when accordion becomes some kind of tango bandoneon, the color is blue,

3 This swiss artist invented turntablism during the 70's.

4 As Judith Lochhead noted, the term "postmodern" is used in an extended sense to characterize the contemporary period. Introduction to *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 4.

5 See Jacques Amblard, "Musiques en fusion", *Accents: La revue de l'Ensemble Intercontemporain*, n° 28, january-february-march 2006, p. 16.

6 At the end of his life, Kandinsky finally conceived the project of a ballet of Bacchantes with Thomas von Hartmann, his most faithful (if not the most talented who might have been Schoenberg) composer friend. Hartmann composed the music of this stage composition, *Der gelbe Klang*. It was an abstract ballet, moving, in addition to mute characters, shapes and abstract colors.

7 Otherwise, "symbols are more real than what they symbolise". Lévi-Strauss, "Introduction à l'œuvre de Marcel Mauss", in Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris, PUF, 1950, p. XXXII.

as if music, then, were melancholic, had "the blues". The red color comes in excited passages. The green color seems to underline "fresh moments", or some vegetal peace.

However, this association of artists "died". The work has neither been re-programmed, nor recorded. Indeed: how could it be recorded? Like a video clip? Or a brief DVD? And obviously the different musicians or artists of this collective work didn't totally understand the importance of this unique balance between colors and music. There was a dispute between them. The visual artist (Sébastien Michaud) demanded too much money. Because he was used to it. And this probable masterpiece finally disappeared. According to us, it may have been some kind of proof that art history, or musical history, in its eventual transcendence, doesn't really exist<sup>8</sup>. Because otherwise *Capt-Actions* would probably be famous nowadays.

Why would it be so famous? Because obviously the fusion between arts has got a historical importance. It might be an aspect of globalization. Let's take some other examples. Pascal Dusapin is now the most famous living French composer. We know he's always been interested, like his first model, Xenakis<sup>9</sup>, by architecture, calligraphy, and visual aspects in general. But now, recently we were able to *see* it at last, in a real visual installation by Dusapin. In *Mille Plaqueaux*, conceived in 2014, Dusapin showed his inner ways of composition, and if possible: his ways of imagination, through strange diagrams. The music, that the public could hear «behind», was not the kind of ordinary Dusapin» (which has always preferred acoustic instruments). Here it was concrete sounds *for once*, symbolic sounds of simple poetry: sounds of different *winds* recorded all over the world.

For younger composers, visual aspects are obviously a way of *communicate*, notably their music. It

8 For a more developed skepticism about a so-called art history, see Denis Coutagne, "Cézanne/Picasso. Une filiation picturale ?", *Picasso Cézanne. Quelle filiation ?*, Aix-en-Provence, PUP, 2011, p. 168.

9 Xenakis, born in Romania from Greek parents, mostly lived in France. Ingeneer, architect (pupil of Le Corbusier), he was finally famous as a composer.

is their *poster*, or their *logo* <sup>10</sup>. And this visual “advertising” seems necessary, in our globalized world where musicians have become numerous, and competition huge.

Some works literary tried to catch attention, with images. In *Black Box Music* (2012), Simon Steen-Andersen even showed the gesture of catching attention, with his own *hands* (gloved of white), like saying visually “hello, I am here, I do exist”.

To be visual, for a young musician, is also a way of existing in the new medias, typically Youtube. Visual aspects sometimes become a kind of design, in our time of *Design and Crime* <sup>11</sup>. In *Impossible Objects* (2010), the serious Russian saturationist composer Dmitri Kourliandsky used the technology of the collective “Abstract birds”, to exist on internet, on our commercial *Société du spectacle*, like guy Debord already called it in 1967 <sup>12</sup>.

Finally, visual aspects could also show a subtle suicide of music, or even art in general. As if music would finally go out of itself, as if to die. We have tried to show, in another text <sup>13</sup>, that this may have already been the unique position of John Cage. Kay Larson have notably shown that Cage was deeply influenced by buddhism <sup>14</sup>. For this philosophy,

art is mostly decision and then, is often ego. Since then, going out of illusion, of “*maya*”, as a consequence, could lead to go incidently *out of art*. Cage might have not only been out of music, rejoining visual arts. He’s probably been out of transcendence, modernism, history, serious aesthetics, asking if art could even be, in general, a foolish spectacle. In *Water walk* (1960), on the TV program *I got a secret*, he assumed to present a work to a public who thought it was a clown spectacle. The laughter of the public was franc. Of course, they were several degrees of reading for this performance.

Recently, perhaps the most famous work by the young Czech composer Ondrej Adamek was also visual. It was called *Air Machine* (2014). And it carried also an ambiguous sense of humour. This was typically what we called, in another text, the postmodern permanent *soft comic* <sup>15</sup>. Music was shown like an old derisory machinery. Like us? Like the world? It is now scientifically proved that we destroy our world. Already in 1973, Cioran wrote “Humanity is the cancer of the earth” <sup>16</sup>. If it’s true, we are not serious. *Air machine* is like the music of mankind. So how could it be serious? It is logically derisory, like the caricature of anything that mankind could create.

10 Nicolas Bourriaud, *Radical. Pour une esthétique de la globalisation*, Paris, Denoël, 2009, p. 175

11 Hal Foster, *op. cit.*, New York, Routledge, 2002.

12 *Op. cit.*, Paris, Gallimard, 1967.

13 *Vingt regards sur Messiaen*, Aix-en-Provence, PUP, 2015, p. 241–243

14 *Where the heart beats: John Cage, Buddhism, and the inner life of artists*, New York, Penguin Books, 2012.

15 “Musique, humour consensuel et postmodernité”, *Humour musical et autres légèretés sérieuses de 1960 à nos jours*, Aix-en-Provence, PUP, 2017, p. 24.

16 *De l’inconvénient d’être né*, Paris, Gallimard, 1973, p. 199.

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#### **Жак Амблард Візуальний соблазн музики XXI века**

**Анотація.** С началом нового века традиционные художественные категории подверглись метаморфозам. Изобразительное искусство стало использовать звук в некоторых произведениях. Чуть позже, особенно с 2010 года, некоторые композиторы, симметрично, как бы в «контратакте», начали разрабатывать инсталляции, то есть произведения, рассчитанные на визуальное восприятие. В наше время визуальный аспект в музыкальных произведениях развивается все активнее. Чешский композитор Ондрей Ададек, возможно, достиг известности, создавая свои «Воздушные машины» — настоящие музыкальные скульптуры. Паскаль Дюсапен недавно завершил свою старую фантазию о тотальном искусстве в замечательной инсталляции «Тысяча плато» (2014). Свидетельствуют ли эти примеры о начале слияния искусств? Или о конце каждого из них?

*Ключевые слова:* визуализация, глобализация, общение, XXI век, юмор, насмешка.

#### **Жак Амблард Візуальна спокуса музики XXI століття**

**Анотація.** З початком нового століття традиційні художні категорії піддалися метаморфозам. Образотворче мистецтво в деяких творах стало використовувати звук. Трохи пізніше, особливо з 2010 року, деякі композитори, симетрично, ніби в «контрататці», почали розробляти інсталяції, тобто твори, розраховані на візуальне сприйняття. У наш час візуальний аспект в музичних творах розвивається все активніше. Чеський композитор Ондрей Ададек, можливо, досяг найбільшої популярності, створюючи свої «Повітряні машини» — справжні музичні скульптури. Паскаль Дюсапен нещодавно завершив свою стару фантазію про тотальне мистецтво в чудовій інсталяції «Тисяча плато» (2014). Чи свідчать ці приклади про початок злиття мистецтв? Або про кінець кожного з них?

*Ключові слова:* візуалізація, глобалізація, спілкування, XXI століття, гумор, насмішка.