# THE DISCOURSE OF SOUND

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**Abstract:** This article offers a short overview of the development of listening theories concerning Western art music since the end of the eighteenth century. Referring to Michel Foucault, I consider such theories as *discourses* which produce 'power effects', such as the training of listening attitudes, or the construction of specific spaces, such as the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth. During the eighteenth century, predominant discourses considered musical pieces as orations and, since the nineteenth century, as complex organisms or structures. In the last third of the twentieth century a focus on sound, evinced for instance by the field of 'sound studies', has produced a new configuration that dissolves the prevailing model of structural listening. This perspective may shed light on some technical features of contemporary compositional styles, which I examine by considering the use of melodies, gestures and loops in two compositions by Fausto Romitelli and Simon Steen-Andersen.

No one interested in contemporary music would deny that it has increasingly been concerned with sound. Music appears frequently nowadays as an homage to its own medium: the work glorifies sound, whereas before, sound emphasised structure. Eventually, to quote Marshall McLuhan, the medium itself may constitute the ultimate message – evincing the sheer presence, complexity or beauty of sound. A host of magazines and reviews are dedicated to sound,[1] as well as innumerable academic publications, including such aspects as silence, rumour and noise.[2] The new sound-discourse has produced scholarly conferences on such topics as echo or resonance;[3] it underpins research on listening history, and quite a number of philosophical

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[1] For instance, *Organised Sound* (Cambridge), or the French magazine *cultures sonores* (online). During the 1990s and up to 2011, the venerable *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* bore the subtitle 'Magazine for new Sounds'.

[2] See, among many others, Sabine Sanio and Christian Scheib, eds, *Das Rauschen* (Frankfurt: Wolke Verlag, 1995); Joanna Demers, *Listening Through the Noise: the Aesthetics of Experimental Electronic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Caleb Kelly, *Cracked Media: The Sound of Malfunction* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009); Makis Solomos, *De la Musique au Son* (Rennes: PUR, 2013); Camille Hongler, Christoph Haffter and Silvan Moosmüller, eds, *Geräusch – das Andere der Musik* (Berlin, Transcript, 2014).

[3] See Karsten Lichau and Viktoria Tkazcyk, eds, *Resonanz: Potentiale einer akustischen Figur* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007), or Veit Erlmann, *Reason and Resonance: A History of Modern Aurality* (New York: Zone, 2010).

investigations.[4] Festivals carry names such as 'Pixelsound',[5] or 'Bruits blancs',[6] and even traditional concert series try to attract the secret sound lover in every music lover with titles such as 'Klangkunst',[7] or mottos such as 'Per un'Epifania dell'ascolto'.[8] Reference to listening and sound is now commonplace in classical composers' theoretical texts and introductions. The specific domain of *sound art*, extremely well researched, including its connections with the visual arts, appears as the 'Great Other' of classical contemporary music, encouraging composers increasingly to experiment with new forms of venues and listening contexts. Sound, finally, has not only become a central issue for musicians: the ecological aspects loom large in the general interest in 'soundscapes',[9] and the study of its historical aspects has led to entirely new fields for research, such as 'sound studies'[10], or the 'sensory history' advocated by Alain Corbin or Mark M. Smith.[11]

Can something new, one might ask, be added to the interpretation of this obvious 'acoustic turn'[12] in the human sciences, or to the wealth of signs proving the importance of sound within the practice of contemporary music, signs that are already being considered as symptoms by some critics?[13] The abundance of specific characteristics of a given object, Descartes held, allows us to see it in a 'distinct' way (as opposed to a 'confused' way). It is only when we see to what other objects it stands out that we perceive it in a 'clear' way (as opposed to an 'obscure' way).[14] Following this suggestion, I shall try to add some 'clarity' to the pervasive reference to sound, so typical of our time, by claiming that in music it stands out against the model of 'musical discourse' and the model of the 'organic' work, which both preceded it. I then try to add some 'distinctiveness' to the issue by introducing the notion of 'discourse', which I take from Foucault. Both perspectives may shed some light on the technical features of actual compositional styles.

## Orations, Structures, and Sounds

Since the eighteenth century, in music history we can make out three instances of what Jacques Rancière calls a '*régime*', that is 'a specific type of links between modes of production of works or artistic practices, a form of visibility of these practises, and modes of

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4 See for instance Peter Sloterdijck, 'Wo sind wir, wenn wir Musik hören?', in *Weltfremdheit* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 294–331. For a phenomenological approach, see Jean-Luc Nancy, *À l'écoute* (Paris: Seuil), 2002.

5 Held in Cologne, in October 2012.

6 Held in Arcueil (France), in November 2014.

7 Title of the programme book for the 2014–2015 season of the Rias Kammerchor in Berlin, comprising the usual works by Bach, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Rihm and Dusapin.

8 Flyer for the 2011–2012 season at San Fedele, in Milan.

9 See for instance the *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* (online).

10 In the recent *Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld define sound studies as an 'interdisciplinary area that studies the material production and consumption of music, sound, noise, and silence, and how these have changed throughout history and within different societies'. See Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld, 'Introduction', In *Oxford Handbook of Sound Studies*, ed. Trevor Pinch and Karin Bijsterveld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 6–7.

11 See for instance Alain Corbin, *Village Bells* (London, Macmillan, 1994); Mark M. Smith, ed., *Hearing History: A Reader*, ed. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Mark M. Smith, *Sensing the Past: Seeing, Hearing, Smelling, Tasting, and Touching in History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); *Sound Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Arts, Humanities and Social Science* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming).

12 See for instance, Petra Maria Meyer, ed., *acoustic turn* (Munich, Wilhelm Fink, 2008).

13 Trond Reinholdtsen, quoted in Ole Hübner, 'Meine Unsicherheiten', *MusikTexte*, 138 (2013), pp. 5–10, here 8.

14 René Descartes, *Les Principes de la philosophie*, (1644), § 45.

conceptualisation of the former and the latter'.[15] Thus, in the late Baroque period, a composer was supposed to express and to arouse affects; a musical work could be likened to an oration which had to be 'clear and distinct', following rhetorical rules. For theorists in the eighteenth century it was important that a precise affect predominated in every musical movement, that it was encapsulated in the main theme, and that contrasting elements did never obfuscate its effect.[16] Thus, the listener was the addressee of an oration – wooed, persuaded, securely guided. A different model begins to prevail at the end of the century. As Mark Evan Bonds writes, 'after 1800, writers gradually abandoned the metaphor of the oration, preferring instead to describe the musical work as an organism . . .'.[17] Now, the 'organic' work could be (though not always was) a complex object; it could be likened to body, or to a complex building, for instance a cathedral – a metaphor Vincent d'Indy used to describe the '*sonate cyclique*'.[18] This means that a new communication model prevailed. Before, each listener, facing an oration, was by right a subject who could test and tell immediately whether the listening process had been successful, whether the composer had done a good job in this respect and had expressed himself in a clear and intelligible way. Now, the complete understanding of a new musical work may be the task of a few – the rest will follow. Charles Burney described this new type of music lover in 1789: '. . . I have seen French and German *soi disant connoisseurs* listen to the most exquisite musical performance with the same *sans-froid* [sic] as an anatomist attends a dissection. It is all analysis, calculation, and parallel'.[19]

This musical 'régime' culminated in the middle of the twentieth century in the aesthetics of Serialism, producing works that illustrate, in the terms of Hugues Dufourt, an 'art of splendour and contrast' but grounded on 'hidden architectonics' and 'antagonistic correlations',[20] eluding any immediate understanding by the listener. The turning point arrived in the 1970s, via different practices which Dufourt polemically summarized in 1978: 'Savage participation to the sound element, rituals of collective improvisation, para-oriental liturgies, collages and deconstructions of the traditional forms of musical expression . . .'.[21] What slowly emerges now is the paradigm of sound. A musical work is no longer (or is no longer described as) a *critical structure*, but a *listening device*. Composing doesn't essentially mean, as it did largely before, confronting oneself with what Adorno called a musical 'material' that bears the marks and stigmata of History. A musical work can now be legitimised, and it will be accepted, even when its essential purpose is to confront, to unfold, and to zoom sounds, wherefrom it may deduce its formal process. Sounds are

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[15] Jacques Rancière, *Le Partage du sensible* (Paris: La Fabrique, 2000), p. 27.

[16] See for instance the article 'Hauptsatz', in Johann Georg Sulzer, *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste*, Teil 1 (Leipzig, 1771), pp. 522–4, or Johann Nikolaus Forkel, *Allgemeine Geschichte der Musik* (§ 99), ed. Othmar Wessely (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlangsanstalt, 1967), vol. 1, p. 50.

[17] Mark Evan Bonds, *Wordless Rhetoric: Musical Form and the Metaphor of the Oration* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 4.

[18] Vincent d'Indy, *Cours de composition musicale*, 2ᵉ livre, 1ᵉʳᵉ partie (Paris: Durand, 1909), pp. 377–8.

[19] Charles Burney, *A General History of Music*, IV (London, 1789), p. 630.

[20] Hugues Dufourt, *Musique, pouvoir, écriture* (Paris: Bourgois, 1991), p. 292.

[21] Dufourt in interview in: Pierre-Albert Castanet 'Hugues Dufourt: les années de compagnonnage avec l'Itinéraire (1976–1982), in *Vingt-cinq ans de création musicale contemporaine: l'Itinéraire en temps réel*, ed. Danielle Cohen-Levinas (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998), pp. 15–40, here 27.

understood as forces and intensities, which explains that the predominant aesthetic reference is no longer the philosophy of Adorno (the work of art as critical structure), but of Gilles Deleuze (the work of art as 'assemblage' of intensities).[22] At the same time, in the United States, the 'New Musicology' dismisses Heinrich Schenker's exploration of deep structures, sometimes assimilated to Adorno's 'structural listening'.[23]

This description of the evolution of contemporary music is no more than an 'ideal-typical' one, in the sense of Max Weber. Assuredly, innumerable exceptions to these 'régimes' can be found. Baroque music is full of complex fugues (though progressively confined to the realm of sacred music or to the training of future composers). The nineteenth century is not only the century of Beethoven, Brahms and Wagner – that is of composers who venture to go against the expectations of their listeners, or even to educate them – it is also the century of an 'anti-sublime' culture, brilliantly described by Richard Taruskin, and illustrated by such composers as Georges Bizet, Giuseppe Verdi or Pyotr Ilyitch Tchaikovsky.[24] In the twentieth century, this same culture, challenging sublime (and often German) complexity, comprises the works of Francis Poulenc, Benjamin Britten, Hans Werner Henze, Michael Tippett, John Adams and many others. And finally, 'régimes' may overlap: Brian Ferneyhough still works out an over-complex music, and Helmut Lachenmann, though his aesthetics rest on new sounds, noises, and playing techniques, defines his 'musique concrète instrumentale' as a 'dialectic structuralism'.[25] But the fact remains that a new *configuration* has formed that predominantly articulates the compositional practice and the theoretical discourse aligned at the new importance accorded to sounds.

## Topics, Discourses and Configurations

Michel Foucault provides us with a more specific definition of discourse: 'Between "all that is said" and "a discourse," I make a difference. "What is said" represents a set of utterances made absolutely everywhere, on the market, in the street, in a prison, in bed. The "discourse" instead, among all what is said, comprises a series of utterances that we may group in a systematic way, and that produces a number of regular power effects'.[26] Following Foucault, I should argue that every new 'régime' consists, firstly, in a growing *quantity* of statements, topics, or theories that will form a 'critical mass'. Secondly, all these utterances will relate to one another, creating a coherent *constellation*. Thus the examples quoted above showing a growing fascination with sound are no isolated items: such reflections

[22] See for instance the contributions by Frank Ilschner, Kim Cascone, Norbert Schläbitz and Christopher Cox to *Soundcultures*, ed. Marcus S. Kleiner and Achim Szepanski (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2003); *Deleuze and Music*, ed. by Ian Buchanan and Marcel Swiboda (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Bruno Heuzé, 'Du Devenir-insecte de l'iPodiste', *Chimères* 73 (2010), pp. 65–77.
[23] See Theodor W. Adorno, *Einführung in die Musiksoziologie* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1975), chapter 1, and Rose Rosengard Subotnik, 'The Challenge of Contemporary Music' [1987] in *Developing Variations. Style and Ideology in Western Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 279–83.
[24] Richard Taruskin, *Defining Russia Musically* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), chapter 11.
[25] Helmut Lachenmann, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung. Schriften 1966–1995* (Wiesbaden, Breitkopf&Härtel, 1996), pp. 83–93.
[26] Michel Foucault, 'L'Inquiétude de l'actualité' [1975], in *Le Monde*, September 19–20, 2004.

are publically exchanged, and published in anthologies or readers or on internet sites, forming thereby a huge mass of utterances that disseminate the idea of an 'auditory culture'.[27] Thirdly, such constellations will have real consequences: a discourse becomes *active*. For instance, the 'power effects' of the new 'organicist' discourse arising at the end of the eighteenth century consists in the prescription and/or training of new *listening attitudes*: the music lover is expected to have read programme notes and explanations before attending a concert, he has to know how to behave during a concert – that is to remain silent and refrain from applauding until the end of a piece.[28] The new discourse may as well stipulate a specific shaping out of special *listening spaces*: we can define a venue as the materialisation of a listening discourse. And finally, the power effect of a discourse consists in a feedback on the *compositional practice*. A composer does not create exclusively by the means of techniques, of knowledge of the musical past or poetic vision. Composers draw on discourses located in their work like quotation or allusion, a point I shall turn to in my last section.

A discourse may be said to consist of 'terms'[29] or 'topics' that are assembled in a new way, forming new 'sentences'. It is the systematic combination of such topics, which form a network. The actual sound-discourse, for instance, connects the terms 'body' (and/or 'gesture'), the term 'listening', and the term 'continuity' (and/or 'fusion' or 'immersion'), to mention only the most important. Describing a discourse as a network allows us to see that a discourse never grasps *the entirety* of the elements or aspects of a given work, or style, or epoch.[30] Rather, it explains how musical forms may be understood, how a work may be declared plausible and convincing, how it may be perceived as the expression of a sensible practice. Every discourse stems from selections: a score, a work, a style, a practice is at the same time supported and trimmed.

It is important to see that such 'terms' or 'topics' are rarely invented out of nothing: rather, they pre-exist, and some of them will be enhanced, while others will be depreciated. For instance, concentrated listening has probably existed at any time,[31] but it was made 'visible' by theorists only at the end of the eighteenth century. Listening to an oration mainly meant to express an immediate judgement (and perhaps one's pleasure). Now the ideal listener is supposed to refrain from doing so, to remain 'virtually frozen' in his seat,[32] and to decipher a 'new' message, possibly written in a new code. As to the

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[27] Michael Bull and Les Back, eds, *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford/New York: Blooksbury, 2003).

[28] In 1788, Baron Knigge's list of 'minor social inconveniences' mentions 'chattering during concerts' (Adolph Freiherr von Knigge, *Über den Umgang mit Menschen* (Frankfurt/Main: Insel, 2001), p. 65). For other instances see Peter Schleuning, *Das 18. Jahrhundert: Der Bürger erhebt sich* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1984), pp. 103–8 and 171–9; James H. Johnson, *Listening in Paris. A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), chapter 3; Martin Kaltenecker, *L'Oreille divisée. Les discours sur l'écoute musicale aux XVIIIᵉ et XIXᵉ siècles* (Paris: Editions MF, 2010), pp. 69–78.

[29] See Martin Geck, *Zwischen Restauration und Romantik. Musik im Realismus-Diskurs 1848–1871* (Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler/Bärenreiter, 2001), pp. 1–16.

[30] Günther Wagner has shown, for instance, that the rhetorical grid (considering a sonata as an oration) does not allow Heinrich Christoph Koch to explain 'immanent musical techniques' that determine the autonomous unfolding of a sonata movement ('Anmerkungen zur Formtheorie Heinrich Christoph Kochs', *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft* 41 (1984), pp. 86–112, here 94).

[31] See for instance Jeffrey Dean, 'Listening to Sacred polyphony c.1500', *Early Music*, 30 (1997), pp. 611–36.

[32] Peter Gay, *Naked Heart: The Bourgeois Experience* (New York and London: Harper Collins, 1995), p. 21.

issue of sound, probably no composer ever has been indifferent to the sound surface of his music. Still, the increasing importance of sound colour since Berlioz and Wagner could be *overheard* by music lovers in the 1920s, as Paul Valéry once observed: 'I have noticed sometimes, while I listened to music, how I did not perceive the sounds of the instruments as, so to speak, impressions of my ear. The symphony itself made me forget the sense of hearing. It transformed itself so quickly, so precisely in living and general truths, or else in abstract combinations, that I knew nothing anymore about the intermediary sound'.[33] Fifty years later, the sensibility to sound had led to a positive turning point, after which sound as such may be considered as the *causa finalis* of a musical work.[34] The topic has been inserted in a discourse.

The new sound-culture elicits its own institutions and venues. Pierre Schaeffer not only developed a new theoretical approach to listening, he created a special institution, the Service de la Recherche (1960–1974), where 'reduced listening' (with reference to Edmund Husserl's *épochè*) was trained and explored.[35] This would in turn be a point of reference for IRCAM, founded by Pierre Boulez in 1978: here again, compositional practice and research in acoustics were (and still are) brought together. Likewise, decisions made in the second half of the eighteenth century to build concert halls dedicated exclusively to the rehearsal of music eventually led to such 'listening laboratories' as Wagner's theatre in Bayreuth, or Arnold Schoenberg's 'Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen' (1918–21) – in the latter, an (un)happy few, hearing a new work played twice, had no right to utter any critical judgement, or to applaud.

On the contrary, the ideal venues at the end of the twentieth century are 'open' spaces, preferably vast and obscure, or spaces that already bear the traces of their own history – 'places', not abstract 'spaces', following a distinction introduced by anthropologist Jean-Didier Urbain.[36] The ideal listening situation is staged, it has to be exceptional, mysterious, immersive, creating the intense feeling that one belongs to an ephemeral community. Consider the following announcement of a multi-media event recently hold in Cologne. It resulted from the collaboration between a 'sound-architect' and a composer of classical contemporary music, both extending the limits of their respective genres, the former by combining dance with 'cinematographic elements', the latter by adding 'extended electronic instrumentation' to the acoustic sounds produced by the musicians. They were joined by two dancers who 'artificially interpret[ed]' the whole event 'like the sensory motors of stereotypical clubbers and night-owls. PULSA:RE is an homage to metamorphosis, to movement, and to the liberty of music and creating it'.[37]

This startling 'modulation' from the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk to the club leads to the last notion I should like to introduce. When a

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[33] Paul Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'architecte* (1921) in *Œuvres II* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 105–106.
[34] Something comparable may be said for the importance gained in retrospect by composers whose influence was limited at their time. Inspired *bricoleurs* such as Luigi Russolo, Henry Cowell, Harry Partch or Giacinto Scelsi acquired a new status as important predecessors in the 1980s, and were inserted in the common 'genealogy' of sound practice.
[35] See Pierre Schaeffer, *Le Traité des objets musicaux*, chapter 6, as well as the recent *Pierre Schaffer. Les Constructions impatientes*, ed. by Martin Kaltenecker and Karine le Bail (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2010).
[36] Jean-Didier Urbain, 'Lieux, liens, légendes. Espaces, tropismes et attractions touristiques', *Communications*, 87 (2010), pp. 99–100.
[37] Announcement for a concert by the Ensemble Garage, 7 December 2014.

discourse gains a larger social relevance or resonance, when certain listening attitudes are integrated in social behaviours, we may call it a *configuration*, the powerful effects of which exceed the simple 'art world' (Howard Becker) of music. In Germany, towards the end of the eighteenth century, concentrated listening was not only a feature of the genuine music lover: it symbolised the new social status of the 'enlightened' amateur (or the claim for such a status), the new bourgeois 'distinction' with all its political implications. Knowing how to judge music and how to behave in a concert attested the amateur's aptitude for judging political matters and for playing a new political role.[38] Thus, listening attitudes may be integrated into new 'forms of life' (Ludwig Wittgenstein), or life styles. In our times, immersion is perhaps the best image to describe these attitudes, while the metaphor for music itself is now more likely to be the 'wave' than the 'thing'.[39] Music of every kind being available on the internet, the boundaries between the styles and genres, as well as the original contexts and limits of the pieces, are blurred. The creation of play lists as mosaics of our subjectivity, and the omnipresence of music in MP3-Players and iPods, that is in small objects that follow the body and hug its figure, with the result that music does not constrain it any more, produce new forms of socially branded musical behaviours. Arild Bergh and Tia DeNora speak of an 'increasing atomization of the musical experience, coupled, paradoxically, with a yearning for (musical) community', and they claim 'that listening is far from being a passive, receive-only mode of interacting'. Thus, '. . . listening needs to be theorised as a form of social practice, even if it takes place in solitude'.[40]

The new configuration in the history of listening – that is, the discourse of music as inexhaustible sound, combined with its social value for the construction of the subject (who integrates into a community) and for the protection of the individual (who shields from society)[41] – thus appear as a new figure of the upgrading of *openness* that characterises our postmodern society.

## Melodies, Gestures and Loops

A network consists of and is held together by *knots* which are significant points of interaction between the terms of a predominant discourse. One way to analyse contemporary classical music is to evince the effect of such knots on a musical style. Indeed, an important 'power effect' of a discourse consists in a feedback on the compositional practice: we must think in terms of a reciprocal construction of compositional practices and discourses. I shall try to show this by means of two recent examples, taken from the music of Fausto Romitelli (1963–2004) and Simon Steen-Andersen (b. 1976).

My first example concerns the issue of melody. If we take the risk of simplifying, we might sum up the history of melody since the second half of the eighteenth century by saying that melody was the 'red

[38] See Hannah Arendt, *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

[39] See Christopher Small, *Musicking. The Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1998) and Jonathan Sterne, *MP3: The Meaning of a Format* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 185–97.

[40] Arild Bergh and Tia DeNora, 'From Wind-Up to iPod: Techno-Cultures of Listening', in *The Cambridge Companion to Recorded Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Eric Clarke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 102.

[41] See Tia NeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

thread' leading through a musical piece considered as an oration.[42] Already in the 1790s, though, Charles Burney noted that in London, genuine connoisseurs loved a musical piece even when it didn't contain any melody which one could 'carry home', or any predominant melody at all.[43] During the organicist '*régime*', composers undertook to deconstruct melody: a splitting between 'melodies' and 'themes' occurred that has been extensively analysed by Schoenberg, who defines a melody as an 'answer' and a theme as a 'problem'.[44] And there is perhaps no better way to describe the difference between Taruskin's two 'cultures', the culture of beautiful and the culture of the sublime, than to recall this essential difference – one party wants answers to be carried home, the other wants problems to think about. A massive attack on melody is launched by Wagner, who avoids the most important melodic type in classical and romantic music, that is melody conceived as a 'micro-narrative' that culminates in a climax placed in its last third.[45] One important 'modernist' melodic type, created by Igor Stravinsky and Edgard Varèse, consists of brief melodies that frequently turn back to one or more 'polar' notes. They show in the same time the hold of *rhythm* on melody,[46] a hold that persists within modernist music until the 1960s.

In *EnTrance* for soprano and large ensemble (1995) Romitelli uses sometimes the modernist type (see Example 1), which recalls a bee turning nervously around a flower. Another type stems from the 'biomorphic' aesthetics of the *musique spectrale*: melodic lines imitate the inspiration/expiration of the breath, or the systole/diastole of the heart (see Example 2). The six phrases share a common pattern, which starts with an energetic gesture (a dissonant interval, or an ascending fourth traditionally associated with resolute moves). The beginnings of phrases 4–6 are symmetrical to those of the phrases 1–3 (and 'appease' them). The central member is always formed by rapid jumps, and the voice either reaches the climax by means of a dissonant interval (1, 2, 3: ascending minor ninth), or leaves it by means of a dissonant interval (4 and 5: descending minor ninth). Finally, the last member is formed by a descent that consists of an irregular combination of tones, semi-tones and minor thirds (i.e. intervals that are looser and easier to sing), finishing systematically on a D. Finally, we must note the use of portamenti and little glissandos: the glissando is one of the basic features of Romitelli's style and it forms (especially in its descending variant) the pole of his melodic writing.



Example 1:
Romitelli, *EnTrance*, soprano, bars 133–140.

Both types, I should claim – the 'bee-type' and what one might call 'the fan-type', as it evokes a fan unfolded and fold up again – are essentially linked to the idea *of a sound emerging and vanishing*, gaining more and more presence, tension or density, and losing it

[42] See for instance Sulzer, 'Hauptsatz'.
[43] Quoted in H.C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976–80), vol. III, p. 103.
[44] Arnold Schoenberg, *Fundamentals of Musical Composition* (London/Boston: Faber, 1970), pp. 98–105.
[45] Ernst Toch, *Melodielehre* (Berlin: Max Hesse, 1923), pp. 34–5.
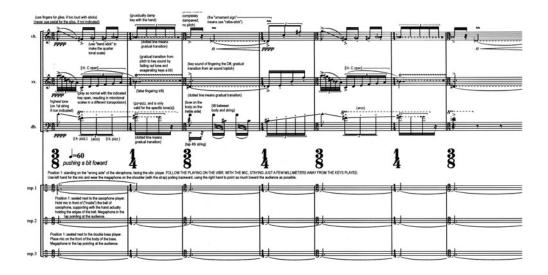[46] See Arthur Lourié, 'An Inquiry into Melody', *Modern Music*, 8/1 (1929–30), pp. 3–11.

Example 2:
Romitelli, *EnTrance*, soprano, bars 211–257.

again. In Romitelli's music, this deep structure commands the surface (the melodic lines) as well as the overall formal process. Melody, one might say, has been swallowed up and transformed by sound. The template for melodic writing is no longer the narrative, but the sound-wave.[47]

Steen-Andersen's *On and Off And To And Fro* (2008) is written for a trio of acoustic instruments (soprano saxophone, vibraphone, double bass) and a trio of megaphones activated by three other musicians. During the piece, the megaphone is meant to evolve, 'achieving an emancipation from passive amplification to the status of a musical instrument in its own right'. The composer regards it as a 'symbol of communication' and he gives it 'a political value which both tends to repression and revolt'.[48]

*Section I* (bars 1–71) could be entitled 'The Story of Two Loops'. The first loop comprises the first four bars (Example 3). It is made up of (bar 1) a quick descent covering a wide interval (a minor ninth in the vibraphone, a twelfth in the saxophone) and an ascent on a tightened interval (a sixth in the saxophone, a second in the vibraphone); it stabilises (bar 2 on G♯, bar 3 on C♯); it goes back up (bar 4) with a final accelerando effect (quaver triplet in a 1/4 time signature). The descending and ascending movements are simultaneously performed by the three instruments, but with a diffraction or a 'blurred' effect, both at the level of rhythm (bar 1: two glissandi with a different range overlaid onto a semiquaver sextuplet; 3, 4 and 5 pulses overlaying) and pitch (bar 1: glissando and arpeggio in the intervals symmetrically arranged around C♯, then an ascent overlaying a glissando 'written' in quarter tones in the vibraphone, a 'diatonic' scale in the saxophone which, since the left hand C key remains open, actually creates a microtonal progression from A♭ to B♭, and a glissando on

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[47] Note that Luigi Nono already considered a single note in Webern to be the equivalent of a whole melody by Schubert, 'an extreme concentration of a melodic curve' (Matteo Nanni and Rainer Schmusch, eds, *Incontri: Luigi Nono im Gespräch mit Enzo Restagno* (Hofheim: Wolke, 2004), p. 24).

[48] Quoted in Isabel Herzfeld, '"Radikal und unmittelbar": Ein Porträt des dänischen Komponisten Simon Steen-Andersen', *MusikTexte* 135 (2012), pp. 5–12, here 8.
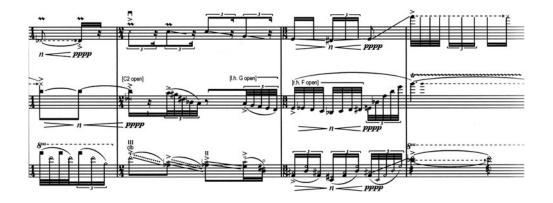
Example 3:
Steen-Andersen, *On and Off And To And Fro*, bars 1–7.

the double bass). Moreover, these pitches are somewhat blurred by the different playing techniques that are highly concentrated in a few second spans. What matters and represents the common denominator of all these elements is their direction and their gestural character: it is essentially a variation of the idea of glissando. The first loop thus establishes the 'theme' or basic topic of the piece: it is saturated with symmetries and, at the same time, it subtly plays with order and disorder through a quasi-identity of figures.

The second loop, with four bars too, appears completely at bars 34–37 (Example 4). Here, the beginning is noisy and hoarse, whereas the two middle bars are more harmonic. A descending tonal arpeggio can be heard – C–G–E–E♭ (underlined by the unison) – which eventually stabilises (bar 37) on a single pitch: thus, the two loops are in inverse relation to each other as to their gestural behaviour (immobility/mobility/immobility). Moreover, a fragment of the first loop is included in this second loop (the arpeggio of the saxophone in bar 1). The loops do not fully oppose each other; they comprise common gestures (scales, glissandi), and do not relate 'dialectically' with one another (nothing of the two themes of an 'organic' sonata movement). Instead, they give rise to a 'layering' or intertwining process: the second loop gradually invades the first loop, through increasingly narrower appearances while never being absolutely identical.

Let us briefly turn to the last section (bars 339–378), where the harmonic character of the chords of the vibraphone is more and more scrambled (by multiphonics on the second beat of each bar in the saxophone), while the chords themselves get absorbed by the dislocated gestures of the percussionist who must, alternately, play his thirds and rapidly lower and raise the weights on the planks. The chords are played more and more with the handle of the mallet so the pitches become indistinct (the composer allows the percussionist's mallets to miss some of the bars . . .[49]), before disappearing completely

[49] Steen-Andersen, conversation with the author, 21 September 2013.

Example 4:
Steen-Andersen, *On and Off And To And Fro*, bars 34–37.

(bar 354). Thus, musical figures can be both explained by the gesture required of the performer and the musical material it contains: the 'to and fro' is a motif on the two different levels.

Comparing these extracts from Romitelli and Steen-Andersen, we may conclude that, on the one hand, *bodily images or gestures* command the conception and the development of the melodic, harmonic and formal writing. On the other hand, *repetition* – in the guises of the 'fan', the 'loop', or the 'to and fro' – is a central feature. It is not only minimalism, as Taruskin holds, that incarnates the ultimate style of Western music.[50] Sound art and classical contemporary music are essentially concerned with repetition, via the image of sounds emerging and fading away, or melodic loops that do not evolve, but erode, or are exhausted, or interrupted.[51]

Repetitions and loops are situated at the intersection of bodily and technical sound. The loop recalls the closed groove or the 'repeat memory' key, but also the body that spins around itself and does not know how to get out of a situation (including a political one). The densification of a process, as it frequently occurs in spectral music, may both stand for the volume button that you turn up on the home stereo and the increasing and decreasing emotion, the systole and diastole. And the *cut* end evokes both the stop key and the moment when, in Steen-Andersen's piece, the megaphonist 'freezes' on a silent scream. Most significantly, repetition and sudden interruptions also pervade various styles of popular music, ranging from techno to hip-hop, and pop.[52] The loop, which illustrates the essential technophilia of our time, appears moreover as its most important sound signature.

[50] Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, vol. 5: *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), chap. 10.
[51] For examples by non minimalist composers, see for instance Giuliano d'Angiolini, *Und'ho d'andà* (1995), Salvatore Sciarrino, *Notturno* no. 3 (1998), Johannes Schöllhorn, *rota* (2008).
[52] See for instance 'Zealots' by The Fugees (1996), where an instrumental loop accompanies the text, or the entire melodic writing of the album *The Terror* (2013) by The Flaming Lips.