

The Trembling of the Sensible: Another Way to Think Musical Autonomy

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*But so many notes, my dear Mozart
None more than necessary, Your Majesty.
Mozart, to the king*

*...like a world that suddenly sounds strange.
Helmut Lachenmann*

The Musical Death of God and its Discontents

Max Weber has a thesis that, in its own way, sums up a certain still hegemonic way of understanding the emergence of musical autonomy. It insists that Western music has consolidated itself as autonomous from external ends by breaking its submission to ritual and theological functions. This process meant that both his audition and his composition were deprived of submission to what he calls "practical purposes":

Sociologically primitive music appears to a considerable extent to have been removed at an early evolutionary stage from the sphere of pure aesthetic

enjoyment and subjected to practical requirements. It was addressed to magical ends, particularly apotropaic (cult) and exorcistic (medicinal) needs (...) Rationalization proper commences with the evolution of music into a professional art, be it of sacerdotal or aoidic nature: that is reaching beyond the limited use of tone formulae for practical purposes, thus awakening purely aesthetic needs¹.

There are two important statements in this passage. First, we find the sociological assertion of the non-existence of unsubordinated music at a certain supposedly "primitive" stage of musical experience. Weber believes that a non-subordinate music has as a condition of existence the separation of the musical performance from other social functions. This separation supposedly occurred only in eighteenth-century Europe, mainly through the exhaustion of the Pythagorean perspective in music, with its holistic view of music as a phenomenon subordinated to the logic of celestial harmony². Such separation also expresses itself through the release from a doctrine of affects and rhetoric, this in favor of the advent of an expression that will no longer be thought as mimesis, at least in the sense that this term was taken as "imitation". Such processes produce a change in the social place of music, with the emergence of exclusive spaces for listening and contemplation, such as the concert halls which appear simultaneously.

But the proposition would only be sociologically interesting (although it should be anthropologically proven, which Weber does not do, as this would presuppose a knowledge of the historical development of the musical phenomenon outside of the West; an obstacle for analysis of this magnitude served by his Eurocentrism) if it wasn't follow by the affirmation of "purely aesthetic needs" initially resulting from the rationalization of the musical form and, consequently, from an immanent principle of development of its materials. This means that, free from submission to the unifying power of theological-political bounds, music would also be free from the external force that would cause stereotyping of intervals, structures and phrases. The disenchantment of its social function would, at the same time, release the plastic force of its materials.

Such immanent liberation of the musical form would be based, as it could not be different in the case of Weber, on the generalization of determinations through calculation, measurement and quantification. In other words, those principles of instrumental reason that unite capitalist economic rationality and the breakdown of the qualitative world of Aristotelian physics would not be foreign to the consolidation of the purely aesthetic needs brought about by the musical form. There would be a force of abstraction operating in the musical form, a force normatively symmetrical to

that operating in the fields of science and economics, which paradoxically ends up putting in check the Weberian narrative of the autonomous musical form, since it participates, in its own way, of the structural principles of hegemonic instrumental rationality in the capitalist order³.

Note, however, that the association between music and mathematics is an inaugural musical phenomenon in the West, this due to the influence of the Pythagorean perspective. Let's remember how, even in the Middle Ages, music is part of a Cosmos, having no autonomous reality, which justifies its presence in the *quadrivium* alongside arithmetic, astronomy and geometry. For centuries, musical sound will be treated as a "sound number" and its logic will be subjected to the mimetically sustained harmony between the celestial orbits and the movements of the soul. Music thus appears as a subordinate expression, subject to arithmetic. From the hegemony of Christian thought, such foundations will bear the marks of the principles revealed by God, as Saint Thomas Aquinas will say.

In a way, such subordination to arithmetic remains but on a now disenchanted horizon. As Hollander will say, the 18th century will experience a "untuning of the sky" resulting from a slow disenchantment of musical aesthetics⁴. This untuning is linked to the autonomization of the relationship between music and mathematics in the face of metaphysical principles of cosmological harmony. As we have seen on several occasions, the elements that define the axis of a structural transformation will almost all be present in the previous situation, but organized in a specific device that will collapse, freeing them to play new roles⁵. This is the phenomenon Max Weber has in mind. It is by means of mathematics that music was subordinated to cosmology. It is by means of mathematics that it will assert its autonomy. In a way, the early criticism of such a model of abstraction could be found in Hegel:

Since the musical element of sound and the inner life, in which the content proceeds, is so abstract and formal we cannot go on to particularize without at once running into technical matters such as numerical relations between notes, differences between instruments, keys, concords, etc. But I am little versed in this sphere, and must therefore excuse myself in advance for restricting myself simply to the more general points and to single remarks⁶.

No one should be fooled by this unexpected and unique confession of humility coming from the philosopher who never had any problem talking about everything. It's just a polite way of saying the irrelevance of music precisely due to its immanent process of rationalization. It is not surprising that the philosopher who has never stopped criticizing the abstraction of mathematical thought sees in music a sterile

path, with its relations of measure, proportion, its analysis of chords, etc. After all, as it was still said at the time: "Music is a science that must define rules: such rules must derive from an evident principle and such principle cannot be known by us without the help of mathematics"⁷. This rationalization would be, at least according to a certain tradition that encompasses Hegel, the ultimate figure of the sunset of art, of its incapacity to be the vehicle of social emancipation. The musical element of sound would be abstract and formal because it would simply indicate that the aesthetic experience delights in the contemplation of itself, it is lost in an autonomy that would be nothing more than the formalist cult of abstraction.

In a way, the Hegelian aesthetic has, as one of its greatest characteristics, the refusal of any possible relationship between meaning and aesthetic autonomy. The famous phrase that works of art have lost the power to make us bend our knees, is Hegel's poetic way of asserting that there is no longer rooting of the aesthetic experience in the spiritualization of social life, which it finds itself in an impasse very well expressed by the primacy of music within German romanticism. The Hegelian aesthetic is anti-romantic par excellence.

This impasse would combine extreme formalism and equally extreme subjectivism. Formalism would only be the instrument of a profound indeterminacy and formless interiority. For music would be: "of all the arts, the one that is most apt to free itself (...) from the expression of all determined content (*Ausdruck ingerdeines bestimmten*)"⁸. Unlike poetry, where the phonic signifier would continue to be the designation of a representation and would not aspire to meaning only by itself, music would allow the sound form to become an essential end in itself. But music loses the inner objectivity of the concepts and representations that poetic language would still be able to present to consciousness. Music would thus appear as a language of the subjective interiority of sensation: "Consciousness which is no longer confronted by an object and which in the loss of this freedom [of contemplation] is carried away itself by the ever-flowing stream of sounds"⁹. It is the empty abstraction that links formalism and subjectivism.

However, it is necessary to insist on the non-hegemonic position of the Hegelian aesthetic. For posterity from Schopenhauer to Clement Greenberg, music would have allowed, on the contrary, the consolidation of devices that will serve as a model for the development of other arts. And, in this sense, the drastic change in the evaluation of musical language from Kant and Hegel to Schopenhauer and Nietzsche indicates the consolidation of music as the paradigmatic art as such.

Such consolidation had been tested for over a century. Even in the 17th century, music appeared in a fundamental process for the constitution of a notion of modernity that was initially an aesthetic invention. It is for no other reason that

Charles Perrault, in his text *The Century of Louis the Great*, which will drive the Quarrel of the ancients and the moderns, regarding music, says:

Greece, I grant, had unparalleled voices
Whose extreme sweetness enchanted the ears
Its spirited masters composed songs
Like Lully's, natural and touching
But they had no knowledge of the incredible sweetness
The chords produce with its pleasant encounter
Despite all the noise made by Greece
In it such art was imperfect¹⁰.

In other words, music is the art recognized by Perrault in which antiquity can appear in its greatest imperfection when compared to modernity. This isn't the result of an idiosyncrasy. It is expressed as an objective condition of musical language in the mid-17th century. For music was about to express in the most explicit way the advent of a radical rupture in the ordering pattern, thanks to the emergence of the tonal system and its rules of harmony and progression. If the Greeks were unaware of the incredible sweetness that chords produce with their pleasant encounter, it is because they were not yet in the era opened up by the consolidation of the potentialities of the tonal system. It is in view of the unfolding of this quarrel that we will find, decades later, Jean-Phillipe Rameau trying to demonstrate why "our music is more perfect than that of the ancients."¹¹ And note the strong notion of historical progress driving this discussion. Our music would not be simply different from the old ones, it would be more perfect, it would be more advanced because it would finally have been able to unveil the structural principles of dissonance and consonance through the fundamental bass, thus allowing the direct thematization of the productivity of the constructive principle of form. In this refusal of origin, refusal of the weight of meaning guaranteed by the original that would express itself in a time without ruptures, aesthetic autonomy will appear for the first time in the West.

Origin of Melody, Melody of the Origin

The connection between Max Weber and the horizon opened up by Rameau is clear. If it is true that a social sphere of values will be more rational insofar as it establishes its valuation processes through a systematic plan of organization, a plan that takes its own certification from itself, then it is with the consolidation of the harmonic tonal system that music would precociously open to other arts the doors of what would be

modernity. To do so, Weber will need to assume what Rameau had stated in 1722, in a context that was far from being simply reduced to music theory:

Music is generally divided into harmony and melody, but the latter is merely a part of the former and a knowledge of harmony is sufficient for a complete understanding of all the properties of music¹².

This dichotomy, which crosses the musical debates of the 18th century, will oppose Rameau to Rousseau, adept at preserving a certain mimetic principle coming from *melos* and its supposedly natural clarity. For Rousseau, following a long tradition in which we find Charles Batteaux¹³ or in Vincenzo Galilei and the Camerata group, *melos* is the preservation of the transparency that prosaic language tends to lose, it is speech returning to its singing origin, by the force of rooting expression in the immanence with nature. At this point, Rousseau is faithful to the Greek understanding of *melos* as a derivation of the Homeric plurale tantum *μελεα* which, in turn, indicates the members of the body. That is, in this word, the constitution of the body and the melodic articulation are thought together, as if it were the case of highlighting the unity between the dispositions of feeling, the organicity of order and what is accessible to *logos*¹⁴.

The rupture between *logos* and *melos* produced by Rameau, a rupture that made his contemporaries see in his music “lack of clarity”, “lack of unity”, “difficult” or even a “formless monstrosity” is immediately felt by Rousseau as the last stage of loss of transparency of expression, as a dangerous emergence of an autonomy that should not be read as autonomy in relation to the forms of social life (as we do today), but mainly in relation to the potential of natural normativity. Therefore, this autonomy would be just a degeneration that would occur, mainly, through the abandonment of a music based on the expressive and mimetic power of the voice, in order to embrace a music that is realized, in a degenerate way, as “writing”: “that methodical, stiff Music, but without genius, without invention, and without taste, which is in Paris called written Music par excellence and which is in fact, at the very most, good only for writing and never for performing”¹⁵.

Thanks to Derrida, we know the metaphysical horizon presupposed by the topos of writing as a loss of transparency and self-affection proper to the voice¹⁶. For this topos seeks to sustain an equation between meaning and presence that would be definitively broken, at least for Rousseau, as soon as this music proliferates more apt for writing than for execution and listening. The critique against “formalism” has deep metaphysical roots. It refers to a certain notion of the substance's immediate presence to itself broken by the reflexivity of writing.

However, just like in Rousseau, there is a "naturalism" in Rameau. We should remember how he insisted on naturalizing the harmonic principles that would guarantee the consonance of the octave, fifth and third intervals and the dissonance of the chord derived from the seventh, performing, with this, the musical version of a *mathesis universalis*. This naturalism is strange to Rousseau for not allowing the foundation of a critical horizon linked to the supplementary recovery of the origin. This recovery allows for the political critique of language, of this current language incapable of making room for the common ground because it presumably no longer has any expression. Rameau's naturalism is based on physics, on considerations about the immanent normativity of the "sound body", whereas Rousseau's naturalism is a fundamental part of politics. However, this physics will, in turn, make room for a politic with strong consequences.

Let us remember how his *Essay on the Origin of Languages* ends, a text driven by the musical debate with Rameau: "every language with which one cannot make oneself understood by the assembled people is a servile language; it is impossible for a people to remain free and speak that language"¹⁷. A language that the people in assembly do not listen to, is one devoid of eloquence, of persuasion for separating the people, for being only a speech in its own name, reduced to its instrumental condition of description of interests. "The first maxim of modern politics", Rousseau will say about the politics that has concerned us so far, is: "the subjects have to be kept scattered" and it is language degraded to its instrumental and communicational dimension that separates them.

Let us remember what Rousseau says: "needs dictated the first gestures and passions drew out the first words."¹⁸ In other words, instrumental speech that expresses only systems of needs is a mute speech, closer to pure gestures. It separates humans because it places them in a competitive and defensive relationship. Nonetheless,

the strength of language does not lie in its power to provide images of things, but in its power to set the soul in motion, to place it in a disposition that makes visible the order of nature. Language imitates nature when it collaborates with order, when it restores, within humanity, the order that its birth had helped to erase¹⁹.

The matter of language will be present in a certain aesthetic ideology, namely, the topic of the *restoring power of music* that, for Rousseau, is inversely proportional to the *destitute power of theatre*, since the proliferation of representation invites moral degradation and perversion of the body politic. Musical autonomy could thus only be

a denial of this therapeutic restitution. A denial that will have greater political consequences for breaking the implicative force of a common ground mediated not by a communication language, but also by an expressive language, that is, a language based on the recognition of ties produced by passions.

Passions are implicative. They never concern just one, they change the other when enunciated, they are circuits of affects. For this reason, the language of passions is the one that really produces bonds. But passions depend on singing, melody, the mimetic power of music: "It is by means of the song, not by means of the chords, that sounds have expression, fire, life; it is the song alone that gives them the moral effects that produce all of Music's energy"²⁰, because voice is a promise of proximity and contact. This melody of passions makes the true language of the people, because being in an assembly is not just the act of being in the same space and seeking a consensus between different interests. Being in an assembly is the act of speaking another language, foreign to the language of interests, representations and strategies, but close to the language of passions. For this reason, true assemblies are rare.

For Rousseau, power not exactly mobilized by passions will always be the deepest mistake as it imagines that power mobilizes a language of passions. In fact, power will always seek to empty the language for expression, to make it either the mere space of unaffected description or the mere space of affirmation of my properties, of what separates me from other subjects. For this reason, the first revolt will always be a revolt of the language against the possibility of its degradation, a search for the language to stop a process described by Rousseau as follows:

that by a natural progression all lettered languages must change character and lose force as they gain clarity, that the more one aims at perfecting grammar and logic the more one accelerates this progress, and that in order to make a language cold and monotonous in no time, one has only to establish academies among the people that speaks it²¹.

The recovery of the expressive force of language is thus the condition for politics, as it allows for the emergence of proximity and the end of separation. In this sense, we can say that the major form of subjection is the elimination of this expressive force and this will be done, among others, when even the music no longer has any force. For the natural progress of "literate languages" would consist in losing strength in order to gain clarity, which for Rousseau can only mean as a form of subjection. This can explain why this new music brought by Rameau can only sound to Rousseau as the final consecration of an exact, clear, deaf, literate and, above all, cold language,

incapable of playing for passion, what Italian opera and its subjection to singing music would be able to do.

Thus, with Rameau, music would gain autonomy for losing the power to produce "moral effects" that are fundamental for the consolidation of a new social body in its force of generic implication. To fulfill its own political force, music should, on the contrary, submit to a morality, it should not create an ethos from the immanent development of its materials. For this reason, the modes of expression should be based on a natural and original ground, a strict normative horizon.

However, let us notice the specificity of the operation that animates Rousseau's thought. If we ask ourselves about a musical piece that could well express the Rousseauist restorative horizon, we will have no better example than the opera that triggered the *Querelle des bouffons*, namely, *La serva padrona*, de Giovanni Battista Pergolesi. The choice couldn't be more symptomatic. Pergolesi's opera not only marks the entry of the comic genre into the operatic field, it is not only the expression of a conscious limitation of means in view of the strengthening of the text at the expense of the music's autonomy and in favor of the clarity of emotions. One must remember how Rousseau chooses an opera whose central issue is insubordination, whether of class or genre.

Pergolesi tells the story of Uberto, who has a maid, Serpina, who doesn't obey him, who inverts the relationships of command and who will also end up freeing himself from the submission of class and labor relations by becoming his wife. In other words, unlike Lully's court operas, Pergolesi brought to the scene a desire for popular insubordination in a music with a drastic reduction of ornaments and cadences. Rousseau's formal conservatism shows itself as an operator of a politics whose true horizon of return takes place at the end of hierarchical subjection relations. The simplicity that emerges is the clarity of the popular desire to no longer be subjected to a hierarchical labor and masculine power of domination. Moreover if encyclopedists, such as D'Alambert and Diderot, will end up taking Rousseau's perspective, it is certainly because they perceived the emancipatory and egalitarian potential produced by this singular way of appealing to the origin. Which could not be different for the theorist of popular sovereignty²².

This idea of unsubmission is clearly translated musically. And "clearly" is not here as a mere rhetorical adjective. Let's take Uberto's first opening sentence, the one that unfolds between bars 7 and 20. The text says: "Aspettare and non venire, stare a letto and non dormire, ben servire and non gradire son tre cose da morire". The phrase plays with the enunciation of a desire and its refusal. Musically the process is clear: the words that express desires (Aspettare, stare a letto, ben servire) are sung in an imposing way, like orders, through two quarter notes and a half note

at the same height (progressing from G to A and then to B) to reinforce the form of a call. But the call finds no one, even raising a tone with each new utterance. There is no possible realization and this is musically transcribed by the consequent: always a descending sequence one octave below. Like someone screaming in the void, like someone screaming louder and getting no answer. This same movement is repeated by the strings in a clarification of the musical utterance. The answer does not come because the subordinate figure (Serpina) is no longer someone in subordination.

A Musical *Mathesis Universalis*

Indeed, Rameau's naturalism is of another nature, alien to the restorative force of music presupposed by Rousseau, but it will produce a specific form of openness to political transformations that is important to discuss.

Let's start by recalling how Rameau's naturalism is a kind of structural naturalism or a very peculiar type of "transcendental naturalism". It is not based on the expression that links us to the natural horizon, but on constructive principles, which are based on the immanent properties of the sound material. In an important reversal, expression appears subjected to construction. This allows harmony to appear as the unfolding of totality through constructive principles that define, based on themselves, structures of relationships, subordinations, hierarchy, orientation and unity²³. In this reading, the fundamental characteristic of modern harmony is its capacity to determine the "conditions of possibility" of the musical phenomenon.

In this regard, let us remember, for example, how the sense of harmony among the Greeks did not refer to the consonance of sounds, but to the diachronic arrangement in a melodic phrase²⁴. The application of the notion of harmony to simultaneous dyads only occurs with the consolidation of polyphonic music from the 10th century onwards. It is from definitions of this nature that dissonance will appear as discord between simultaneous sounds. In musical treatises from the fourteenth century onwards, dissonances in note-to-note textures should not be used, although they were allowed in passages devoid of rhythmic tension and through notes of short duration. It is only with Rameau that dissonance appears as the mobile tension of a note in relation to the fundamental sound, that is, it is dissonance in relation to the functional structure that defines the organic unity of the work. From then on, the distinction between consonance and dissonance will be defined by the conditions of possibility determined by the harmonic structure.

Let us also note how this system preserves unity while defining an orientation of development and immanent conflict in the unfolding of form. This is its most

singular characteristic: it does not need staticity to guarantee unity, as in modal forms, but it produces the coordination of materials through the prior definition of the axes that will determine its own temporal transformation. A disenchanted teleology rests on strictly formal, internal, and mathematical principles. This is what Weber has in mind when he insists that: "There would be no modern music without these tensions derived from the irrationality of melody, as they are precisely its most important means of expression."²⁵ For a system that accepts an element that is dissonant, "irrational" will be seen as rational, provided that such element can be anticipated, prepared and resolved. As Schoenberg will say, a few centuries later, in his *Treatise on Harmony*: "Careful introduction and euphonious resolution: that is the system! Preparation and resolution are thus a pair of protective wrappers in which the dissonance is carefully packed so that it neither suffers nor inflicts damage"²⁶.

But there is a point here that should not be forgotten and that radically limits the Weberian approach, showing its historical commitment. For such a figure of autonomy, in the end, expresses an insidious second-level enchantment, which makes it still the continuation of theology by other means. This enchantment is inscribed in the normative structures proper to a certain way of conceiving musical autonomy and its coherence. This enchantment will remain when it comes to moral autonomy. French philosopher and musicologist, Felip Marti-Jufresa says:

Thus, correlatively, to the death of god in music, the musical death of god will not only be the disaffection of the cultural sense of art, but the loss of value, the unstoppable devaluation of these characteristics, of these attributes marked as motors, as force-values of the compose music, as the characteristics expected and valued in a composition, as the essential features of the very concept of composition²⁷.

Such attributes identified as force-values of musical composition are the coherence of form and the unity of its dispersion. For this reason, contrary to the death of God in music, this musical death of God will need to wait a few centuries. Even Weber's autonomy will still depend on a theology that knows very well how to preserve itself, if it doesn't dare to speak its own name. We can say this because one has to ask what kind of autonomy is born from this musical form whose axis is Rameau. There are two aspects that I would like to emphasize. The tension between these two aspects will be a fundamental engine for the unfolding of the musical form.

First, it's not difficult to see how we have an order based on principles of subordination and hierarchy, with clearly defined centers, even if mobile. We have a law that guarantees the integral unity of meaning through respect for a principle of

development that, even when broken, allows such breaks only so that order can be restored in an increasingly unexpected turn of cunning. Thus, this autonomy as self-legislation will depend on a "theology of the coherent form" based on a principle that is a strict definition of the conditions of progression, a theodicy of victory over dissonance by the systematic reiteration of the consonance guaranteed by the fundamental bass line. Thus, autonomy guarantees, at the same time, the unity of the work, the coherence of form and the directionality of cumulative time with its memory, with its regulated process. Autonomy guarantees "unity, coherence, development" or perhaps "unity and coherence as a condition for development". Which would be no different for a self-legislation principle, for an idea that will also provide the basis for the notion of moral autonomy. For moral autonomy presupposes the consistent regularity of behavior and its unity through the extensive use of uniform norms.

It should be noted that there is here a certain cunning of the identity inherent in this first emergence of the autonomous form. The emergence of a system that is the preparation and resolution of dissonances allows the exercise of a second-degree identity principle, as a principle that does not call into question the production of meaning in the face of the requirements of integration of the heterogeneous, of the discordant, of what provokes rejection. It is no coincidence that the composer responsible for the first consequent systematization of the tonal system has, as one of his greatest works, an opera celebrating the expansionist horizons, such as *Les indes galantes*. Opera that has, in one of its best known moments, "savages" singing:

*Forêt paisibles,
Jamais un vain désir ne trouble ici nos coeurs.
S'ils sont sensibles,
Fortune, ce n'est pas au prix de tes faveurs.*

There is something of the affirmation of the tonal system through the voice of these "savages" who sing hearts that are never tormented by desires driven by fortune. As if it were a case of remembering that, even where the heterogeneous sings, it is the safe restoration of calm forests that is all about. The "savages" will sing in court music time, as if we were at a Lully ball.

Dialectic Between Control and Lack of Control

Let us keep dialectic maneuver in mind when we see, centuries later, Pierre Boulez affirming, at a major moment in the reconfiguration of the relationship between form

and meaning in musical aesthetics: "the era of Rameau and his 'natural' principles is definitively abolished"²⁸. For one has to go more slowly in adhering to the peremptory character of this sentence. Boulez makes this statement and then says: "To those who will object to me that, starting from the concrete phenomenon, they obey nature, the laws of nature, I will answer, always according to Rougier: 'we give the name of laws of nature to formulas which symbolize the routine of experience'"²⁹. However, we could remember that the criticism of the naturalization of the principles of consonance and dissonance inherent to the tonal system does not imply criticism of the tacit adherence to the idea of a deep relationship between "coherent" form and meaning sustained even in Boulez's own serial thought³⁰. The gesture, typical to Rameau, of appealing to the constructiveness of mathematical thinking, is still there in statements such as

When studying the thinking of mathematicians or physicists of our time about structures (logical thinking, mathematics, physical theory...), one can clearly see the immense path that musicians still have to cross before arriving to the cohesion of a general synthesis³¹.

In other words, in this ode to the structure, we see how we are still facing a certain notion of unity, of coherence, of articulation that expresses a concept of "composition", of "creation", which will not change. It would be interesting to ask yourself what is done when a work of art try to decompose the structure³².

But let us note the major tension of Rameau's gesture, for this tension can lead us to a kind of subterranean tendency of the autonomous aesthetic form. This trend, when radicalized, removes the aesthetic form from the limits established by moral autonomy and its dependence on what we call theology of the coherent form and its generating principle linked to the self-legislation of form. Though this trend will become radicalized, it will also be gradually boosted and remain our own.

What is born with Rameau is not just autonomy as self-legislation based on self-referential principles. Certainly, the mimetic principle so dear to Rousseau is broken so that a functional totality can be built from the strict observance of rules of harmonic progression. With that, a constructive coherence is born. But there is another side to the idea of the emergence of a system whose major principle is the regulation of the heterogeneous. Already in the 18th century, Chabanon realized something of this nature when he tried to describe what would be the "new language" produced by Rameau's music that gave him the impression of being a "foreigner among his countrymen, as if he had been born a thousand centuries from here"³³. A characteristic of a new language clearly assumed by Rameau, when he

says guided by the “Descartes method” in his search for an Archimedean point capable of reconstructing musical rationality beyond the simple repetition of traditions and habits. That is why, in this search for clarification about fundamental sound, harmonic sound and the differences between sound and noise, Rameau will say:

I placed myself as exact as I could in the state of a man who would neither have sung nor heard the singing, promising me to resort to foreign experiences whenever I had the impression that the habit of a state contrary to this one in which I supposed would take me, in spite of myself, beyond supposition³⁴.

The state of someone who would never have sung or heard the singing: as if it were possible to open an empty space in which new constructive principles would unfold. As if the initial aesthetic production were the production of an empty space.

Such production will allow for structural redefinitions. First, the subjection of *melos* to the musical idea arising from the harmonic construction freed music from its subjection to the organicity of what is placed as a natural order, as the musical motif will not be the result of a mimetic “painting” of the order. The affirmation of the listening initially takes place against its colonization by the mode of disposition of vision, as if a thought metaphysically formed by the visuality present in a term like *θεωρία*, found its point of deposition in music. That is why Chabanon will say, regarding Rameau's musical motives: “No subject inspires and takes his ideas, it is unknown where he takes them, he does something from nothing, it is a creation in itself”. This horizon of a certain *ex nihilo* creation appears to belong to something that Chabanon is not afraid to describe as a “revolution”. What could not be different if we accept that: “when we listen to purely symphonic music, the spirit is not prevented by any idea, and the heart by any feeling, the disorder must arise entirely from the force of the sounds”³⁵. This freedom allowed music to arrange arias in a dynamic of expressions and characters hitherto unknown, forcing a process of expression release in relation to a grammar typified by emotions. Diderot had understood the impact of such a liberation when he writes in Rameau's Nephew, about the uncle in question:

He's the nephew of that famous musician who rescued us from Lully's plainchant, which we'd been droning out for over a hundred years; who wrote such reams of incomprehensible visions and apocalyptic verities on the theory of music, of which neither he nor anyone else ever understood a word, and

who left us with a number of operas where we can enjoy various harmonies, unfinished songs, unrelated ideas, uproars, flights triumphal fanfares, spears, ennoblements, seditious whisperings, endless victories; he also left us dance tunes that will live forever; he buried the Florentine, and will in his turn be buried by the Italian virtuosi³⁶.

It is not without irony to see how someone responsible for a system capable of guaranteeing a fundamental principle of unity is seen by his contemporaries as also someone responsible for music composed with “unrelated ideas” and “unfinished songs”. For the liberation of the constructive principle from its mimetic subjection through the primacy of the melos would bring, in a short time, a trembling of the sensible that Diderot already feels. He feels so much that he makes Rameau’s nephew defend a perspective that seeks to base musical rationality on an extra-musical dimension, linked to the mimesis of passions and prosody. Diderot sees how the change operated by Rameau would transform musical rationality, as we will see later, into a principle of deformation of form.

For, within this path, the regulation of the heterogeneity produced by tonal harmony will end up revealing a de-regulation of the homogeneous. What could not be different, since, as Rousseau had clearly understood, a music no longer based on mimesis opens up to an immanent unfolding process. It imposes a continuous processuality.

Thus, there will be a contradiction within the experience of autonomy, which could not be different since autonomous art will be facing an ascending capitalist social reality where the maximum distance from the world would be, paradoxically, the realization of a purified order with which social reification has always dreamed of. Adorno already pointed to such a risk when he criticized the hypostasis of serial thinking through the topic of “series fetishism”: the last stage of an impasse that risks reverse autonomy in its opposite, namely, in servitude. However, in the eagerness to block circulation within an order that it radically criticizes, the autonomous work needs to compose with what shakes the order, with what decomposes the current grammar of our sensibility. And what trembles is contagious, decomposes, takes us to an increasingly refractory horizon. For this reason, it does not “purify” the sensibility, but shakes it, causing it to continually confront what is a figure of dissociation and discord.

Thus, through the paths of the irreducibility of dissonance, that is, through its progressive emancipation in relation to an anticipation-resolution system, through the paths of silence that breaks the baroque’s fear of emptiness (and we note, for example, how silence enters the scene of Castor and Pollux in the prelude “Tristres

apprêts”), or even through ruptures, sudden changes and breaks, the theology of coherent form will find its limits. As Hanns Eisler will remind us, it is no coincidence that: “The history of music is the history of dissonance”³⁷. For its story will be the story of a reversal of order and the liberation of what disorganizes sensibility.

This allows us to state that autonomous will be the form capable of confronting what destabilizes itself leading itself to abandoning its own constructive principle. If tonalism would not be an internally unstable system, it would never produce its own negation. That is, and this is perhaps Rameau's most important contribution to the emergence of musical autonomy: autonomous is not simply the form that asserts itself beyond mimesis. Autonomous is the form that produces a trembling of the sensible for being able to operate, in its maximum strength, with what the sensibility had been separated from, what is not sung, what there is no possible identity, which expresses discord and disharmony. This process will gain irreversible strength when it would be associated with what erodes all representation, as the sublime and the liberation of expression in relation to the phenomenal determination of affections.

Let us note an important point here. Aesthetic experience can appear as a fundamental axis of the social experience of freedom because it accomplishes what we could call the affective conditions for emancipation. There are structures of affects that block every possible form of emancipation and at the heart of such structures is fear, with its procession of separation, immunization, defense and paralysis. What the aesthetic form allows is exactly the relationship with what is placed in deep heteronomy in relation to our self-preservation regimes. Thus, it prepares us for the social experience of a heteronomy without servitude.

By making what had been defined as “irrational” a moment of its own productivity and the affirmation of the coherent sense of form, musical logos put sensibility in front of what shakes it. And through those trembling pathways, regimes of polymorphic recomposition can emerge. This makes explicit a fundamental political dimension of aesthetic autonomy. If we can speak of a “political dimension” in this case, it is because such trembling allows for a gradual disidentification with the system of organization of material reproduction of the present time, thus opening the space to the possibility of other forms of configuration of experience and determination. This gradual disidentification will need a long path where it will be the case of not only achieving the emancipation from dissonance, but also the liberation in relation to order, unity, hierarchy, functionality. Therefore, autonomous is the form that walks safely towards its own dissolution. A bit like those organisms that, according to Sigmund Freud, try to die on their own terms.

Some may see in this theme of a gradual “long journey” the expression of a certain philosophy of history guiding, under the sign of the progress, this narrative of music towards the liberation of the form in relation to the theological-moral horizon. We would thus have a philosophy of musical history that operates by deepening contradictions to a revolutionary mutation of the potentialities of form. Yes, there is no reason to hide what has no reason for it to be hidden: there is here the presupposition of a historical process that organizes itself as a self-fulfillment due to an immanent contradiction in itself. Therefore, the musical experience is not simply the sound tracing of the aspirations of the rising capitalism and its bourgeois class. As it is the expression of a contradiction that social life seeks to deny with all its strength, the musical experience may be the fundamental axis for a certain social experience of emergence from what denies order. For those who are surprised by an alleged over-dimensioning of music, let us remember that there is no ordering concept in the field of the common (such as territory, community, state, nation, polis) that does not have its limits musically traced; a reminder from Plato who already knew very well.

In fact, this experience of promised social emancipation, described through a certain historical process inherent to musical aesthetics in the West, is not the only one possible, nor would it need to be considered as such in order to have its interest and relevance. It is linked to a certain horizon of experience that constitutes us, although it is not the only horizon of experience to constitute us. However, it is worth remembering that the recognition of other possible paths does not eliminate the interest in accurately describing specific paths.

There are at least two ways for critical thinking to move: the first is by confronting different matrices of thought in order to show the relativity of what we have hitherto taken to be universal and irrefutable. Such a strategy can and should be used in the reflection on aesthetic experience. But there is still another way for critical thinking to work, and it involves the systematic exploration of the self-critical turns of a specific matrix. In other words, it is about understanding how a matrix denies itself, how it confronts its own limits until it explodes, thus opening space for possible resonances with other erased matrices. Or rather, how it denies itself until realizing itself through the explosion of itself, which is one of the most unique forms of self-realization.

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Notes

- ¹ Weber, Max; *The rational and social foundations of music*, Southern Illinois University Press, 1958, p. 40
- ² "In the original Greek concept of mousiké, the universe and the soul - κοσμος and ψυχη - were linked in a unity, in a harmony that was not mystical but mathematical, an unity that λογος, that is, the Greek concept of 'language', formulates and, at the same time, it is" (LOHMANN, Johannes; *Mousike et logos: contributions à la philosophie et à la théorie musicale grecques*, Mauvezin: Trans-Europe-Repress, 1989, p. 13)
- ³ We find in Adorno the understanding of the necessary reversal between rationalization and domination in this Weberian interpretive model. It will not be for another reason that Adorno must state: "There is no doubt that the history of music is a progressive rationalization (...) Nevertheless, rationalization is only one of its social aspects, as well as rationality itself. "Aufklärung" is just a moment in the history of society, which remains irrational, still stuck in "natural" forms. Within the total evolution of which it participated through progressive rationality, the music was also, and always, the voice of that was left behind in the path of this rationality, or that was a victim" (ADORNO, Theodor; "Ideen zur Musiksoziologie" In *Musikalische Schriften I*, Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 2001, p. 32).
- ⁴ See Hollander, John; *The untuning of the Sky: Ideas of music in english poetry 1500-1700*, Nova York: Norton, 1970
- ⁵ As we see in Foucault, Michel; *Les plaisirs de la chair*, Paris: Gallimard, 2017
- ⁶ Hegel, G.W.F.; *Aesthetics: lectures on fine arts vol. II*, Oxford University Press, 1975, p. 892
- ⁷ Rameau, Jean-Philippe; *Treatise on harmony*, New York: Dove, 1971, p. XXV
- ⁸ Hegel; *Ibid.*, p. 897
- ⁹ *Idem*, p. 906
- ¹⁰ Fumaroli (org.), *La querelle des anciens et des modernes*, Paris: Gallimard, p. 270
- ¹¹ Rameau, *Treatise on harmony*, p. XXXIII
- ¹² *Idem*, p. 21
- ¹³ See Batteaux, Charles; *Les beaux arts réduits à un même principe*, Paris, 1747
- ¹⁴ See Lohmann, Johannes; *Mousiké et logos*, op. cit., p. 18)
- ¹⁵ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques; "Letter on french music", In: *Essay on the origin of languages and writings related to music*, University Press of New England, 1998, p. 198
- ¹⁶ See Derrida, Jacques; *Of grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, 1996
- ¹⁷ Rousseau; *Essay on the origin of language*, op. cit., p. 332
- ¹⁸ *Idem*, p. 380
- ¹⁹ Prado Jr., Bento; *A retórica de Rousseau*, São Paulo: Cosac e Naify, 2007, p. 161
- ²⁰ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques; *Examination of Two Principles Advanced by M. Rameau* In: *Essay on the origin of languages and writings related to music*, University Press of New England, 1998, p. 279
- ²¹ Rousseau; *Essays on the origin of language*, op. cit., p. 304
- ²² For this reason, it is impossible to accept perspectives such as those of Juliane Rebentisch, who rely on Rousseau's criticism of theater and the theatricalization of public space, to conclude by saying that: "an anti-theatrical democracy represents, in fact, the end of democracy" (REBENTISCH, Juliane; *The art of freedom: on the dialectics of democratic existence*, Cambridge: Polity, 2016, p. 184). The dependence on representation as a fundamental instrument for the realization of a freedom understood as a tolerant multiplicity of forms of life leads her to refuse the deeply necessary politics

that criticizes representation. For this critique is a fundamental sector of the critique of inequality, since the grammar of representation is never neutral. It decides what is visible and what is not visible, what can be counted and what cannot be counted. It organizes places and hierarchies. Rousseau's assemblist politics, with all the questions it might produce, has at least the merit of making power return to its sovereign foundation in a movement of general destitution of differences and hierarchies, as seen in Pergolese's opera

²³ Let us remember what Hugues Dufour says: "The notion of harmony is amphibiological: it designates at the same time the science of formation and chaining of chords, as well as the system of tensions – that is, the antithetical units – which, from the beginning, governs the conformation of the elements as a whole (...) In this sense, harmony is the power of differences, a rule of dissimilarities, inequality of relations and asymmetry of commensurable terms" (DUFOUR; Hugues, "Les origines grecques du concept de l'harmonie", In Soulez, Antonia et Sebestik, Jan; *Musique, rationalité, langage, l'harmonie : du monde au matériau*, Cahiers de philosophie du langage n°3, L'Harmattan, Paris 1998 p. 18)

²⁴ Tenney, James; *A history of consonance and dissonance*, p. 11. See also MENEZES, Flo: *Apoteose de Schoenberg*, São Paulo: Atelier Editorial, 2002, pp. 395-401

²⁵ Weber, idem, p. 60

²⁶ Schoenberg, Arnold; *Theory of Harmony*, University of California Press, p. 49

²⁷ Marti-Jufresa, Felip; *La possibilité d'une musique moderne*, Paris: L'harmattan, 2010, p. 70

²⁸ Boulez, Pierre; *Penser la musique aujourd'hui*, Paris: Gallimard, 1963, p. 30

²⁹ Idem, p 31

³⁰ See Marti-Jufresa, Felip; op. cit. With his rigorous anarchist aesthetics, Jufresa was the first that insisted on Boulez's conservatism.

³¹ Boulez, idem, p. 28

³² This theology of coherence will be present on Schonberg. Let's remember statements as: "The chief requirements for the creation of a comprehensible form are logic and coherence. The presentation development and interconnexion of ideas must be based on relationships. Ideas must be differentiated according to their importance and function (...) A composer does not, of course, add bit by bit, as a child does in building with wooden blocks. He conceives an entire composition as a spontaneous vision. Then he proceeds, like Michelangelo who chiseled his Moises out of the marble without sketches, complete in every detail, thus directly forming his material" (Schoenberg, *Foundations of musical composition*, London : Faber and Faber, 1967, p. 2)

³³ Chabanon, Michel de; *Éloge de Rameau*, Paris: Hachette livre, p. 13

³⁴ Rameau, Jean-Phillipe; *Démonstration du principe de l'harmonie (1750)*, Paris: Hachette Livre/BNF, p. 11

³⁵ Chabanon, idem, p. 23. Chabanon's perspective will be seen by Lévi-Strauss as a precursor of a structuralist understanding of the process of meaning production: "In France, in the middle of the 18th century, the principles on which Saussure will found structural linguistics are clearly stated, but with regard to music, by an author who has an idea analogous to that which we currently owe to phonology" (Lèvi-Strauss; *Regarder, écouter, lire*, Paris: Plon, 1993, p. 95). This association aims to show how the musical fact seems to anticipate an eminently relational and autonomous determination of meaning.

³⁶ Diderot, Denis; *Rameau's nephew*, Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 5

³⁷ Eisler, Hanns; *Musique et société*, Paris: Editions de Maison des sciences de l'homme, 1998, p. 32