

## ***Symphonie pour un Homme Seul* – de-acousmatized (SPUHS-d)**

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### **Introduction**

In 2010 for the occasion of the *Symphonie pour un homme seul*'s 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary – the most emblematic work of the *musique concrète* – a live version performance of the piece was created in Rio de Janeiro<sup>1</sup>. The version idealized by Rodolfo Caesar was attended by the collaboration of José Augusto Mannis, who transcribed for musical notation and conducted of the *Persona*'s group<sup>2</sup>. Tracking the inverse way of the *musique concrète*, the version deprives from the original version its acousmatic feature. It made the sounds of the *Symphonie* – a piece originally created to be played by loudspeakers in a concert situation – visible by the presence of the musicians and their gestures on stage, playing several musical instruments (guitar, flute, electric guitar, percussion, prepared piano), objects (empty plastic bags, portable pick-ups, toy piano, even an emery) and sound foley elements (vocalized mimics, steps, among others).

### **An opera for the blind: acousmatic version**

The *Symphonie pour un homme seul* (1949-50) is considered the mark of the *musique concrète*<sup>3</sup>. It is an elaboration of the Schaeffer's *Cinq études de bruits* (1948) and the *Suite pour*

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<sup>1</sup> The version of the SPUHS was presented in the Parque Lage, Rio de Janeiro, 16/10/2010 in the series “Ciclo Arte Sonora”.

<sup>2</sup> Caesar has been Pierre Schaeffer's student at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris. He has made a master course in philosophy at UFRJ, and latter fulfill his PhD, under orientation of Denis Smalley in the University of East Anglia (UK). Cf. *Enciclopédia de Itaú Cultural de Arte e Tecnologia*, [www.cibercultura.org.br/tikiwiki/tiki-index.php?page=Rodolfo+Caesar](http://www.cibercultura.org.br/tikiwiki/tiki-index.php?page=Rodolfo+Caesar) (last accessed 09/14).

<sup>3</sup> “*Musique concrète* was a method for producing, recording, and transforming sounds, disconnecting them from the perception of their original sources; it existed at the level of the material only.” (Carlos Palombini, “Pierre Schaeffer, 1953: towards an Experimental Music”, *Music and Letters*, 74(4), 1993, p. 18).

*14 instruments* (1949), “a hybrid between radiophonic drama and *musique concrète*”<sup>4</sup>. It represents the *Zeitgeist* of the postwar period, a wish for new paths for the musical language<sup>5</sup>.

Schaeffer will describe the work as an “opera for the blind”<sup>6</sup>. It is in the absence of the visual contract with the sound source the seed for his idea of acousmatism. The term is therefore described by the *Larousse Dictionary* (1928): “Acousmatic, adjective: it refers to a noise you hearing without knowing its causes”<sup>7</sup>. He defines, so, the acousmatic music as that made from the technologies of sound diffusion. And complement: “[...] an opera for blind, an action without argument, a poem made by notes and noises, shards of texts, spoken or musical”<sup>8</sup>.

The *musique concrète* does not arrive from a score to be performed, being different in relation with the traditional media of the Western music. It was created in the same media that supports its reproduction.

### **An opera for seers: the de-acousmatic version (SPUHS-d)**

What is singular on the version is its extraction of the acousmatic condition, shifting the piece from its original site to the place of the score and the performance by musicians. This process implies on a break with the acousmatic contract, showing how the sound was made through the “live” performance<sup>9</sup>. So, the SPHUS originally conceived as an “opera for blind” became an “opera for the seers”, being de-acousmatized (SPUHS-d)<sup>10</sup>, somehow like a pantomime of the original version created on studio. It resumes the listening experience of the instrumental music

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Alexandre Fenerich, *A Inscrição da Intimidade na Symphonie pour un Homme Seul*, São Paulo, USP (ECA), 2012, p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> “The most radical composers of the immediate postwar period were dedicated to the renewal of musical language from basic principles, and neither the straightforward development nor the ironic usage of previous genres held any immediate attraction. But although Boulez and Stockhausen, the leading figures in the avant-garde, did not even so much as toy with the title ‘symphony’, within the broader boundaries of this movement the symphonic genre was sufficiently entrenched to leave a few traces. Perhaps most extraordinary is the *Symphonie pour un homme seul* by Pierre Schaeffer (with Pierre Henry, 1950, rev. 1953), one of the earliest examples of *musique concrète*; it is, however, a symphony in name only.” Cf. Denis Arnold *et al.*, “symphony, the”, *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Alison Latham (ed), Oxford Music Online, Oxford University Press.

<sup>6</sup> Schaeffer, *La musique concrète*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, collection “Que sais-je ?” n° 1287, 1967, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> “Acousmatique : n.m. (gr. *acousma*, -atos, audition). Philosophie : Nom donné aux disciples de Pythagore qui, pendant cinq années, écoutaient ses leçons cachés derrière un rideau, sans le voir, et en observant le silence le plus rigoureux.” (Larousse, 1928, p. 49; Larousse, 1960, p. 75)

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Schaeffer, *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> “La situation acousmatique, d’une façon générale, nous interdit symboliquement tout rapport avec ce qui est visible, touchable, mesurable. Par ailleurs, entre l’expérience de Pythagore et celle que nous font faire la radio et l’enregistrement, les différences séparant l’écoute directe (à travers une tenture) et l’écoute indirecte (par haut-parleur) deviennent, à la limite, négligeables.” (Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets musicaux*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1966, p. 93.)

<sup>10</sup> Term used by Michel Chion on *Audiovision*: “An inherent quality of the acousmetre is that it can be instantly dispossessed of its mysterious powers (seeing all, omniscience, omnipotence, ubiquity) when it is *de-acousmatized*, when the film reveals the face that is the source of the voice. At this point, through synchronism, the voice finds itself attributed to and confined to a body.” (Michel Chion, *Audio-vision: sound on scree*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, p. 130)

that Denis Smalley calls as “a conditioning founded on years of audiovisual (unconscious) training”<sup>11</sup>.

However, in the live version the piece become different, bringing the marks of the media it was originally produced. Other musical gestures appeared, molded by the techno-graphic marks of the phonographic media, which brought to the musical tissue specific sonorities. The dry cut, the loop, the pitch transposition, even the characteristic noise of the support became part of the performance, as an inverse mediation.

## Perspectives and dialogues of the *musique concrète*

Considering this revisitation, the *Symphonie* literally gets body, gestures and movements to the eyes of the listener. On that way, it also implies an incorporation of a machine-body created the phonography’s manipulation originated by the *musique concrète*’s composition – present in the work – further being imitated by the live performers.

It does not mean that the body wasn’t present in the original version: because of the radio production of the work situation and the strong presence vowel – a superlative made on behalf of the acousmatic voice device that focuses on the perception in their sound, thoroughly captured in the studio – the body is present in minimal vocal nuances that show to listening audience. However, it is precisely this approach that was broken in the de-acousmatized version. It leads to some perspective beyond what called for *musique concrète*, presenting another moment of dialogue with it in a set of diverse compositional practices that establishes dialogues with its precepts. Among those dialogues are, for instance, composers who use the resources as phonographic writing process such as Peter Ablinger and his Phonorealism<sup>12</sup> or even those that imitate some characteristics of media playback technologies<sup>13</sup> like Chico Mello’s performance John Cage at the Beach<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Denis Smalley, “La Spectromorphologie. Une explication des formes du son”, *Ars Sonora*, 8, 1999, p. 77.

<sup>12</sup> The reproduction of “phonographs” by instruments can be compared to photo-realist painting, or – what describes the technical aspect of the “Quadraturen” more precisely – with techniques in the graphic arts that use grids to transform photos into prints.” (Peter Ablinger, *Phonorealism. The reproduction of “Phonographs” by Instruments*, 2005, n.p., [ablinger.mur.at/phonorealism.html](http://ablinger.mur.at/phonorealism.html) (last accessed 09/14).

<sup>13</sup> This process remind the movement that looks for the process digital media in another way as Kelly propose in *Cracked Media* “By not using new technologies, they are, however, indirectly critiquing dominant modes of practice and use. The employment of older technologies in contemporary practice draws our focus in on the materiality of the media and its intended and unintended uses”. (Caleb Kelly, *Cracked Media. The Sound of Malfunction*, Cambridge (MA, USA), The MIT Press, 2009, p. 320).

<sup>14</sup> Giuliano Obici, as article John Cage at the Beach Number 0: the mimetic de-composition of Chico Mello published on magazine NUTIDA Musik number X 2014.

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