

Editorial

Bachelard “silenciaire” or the art of hearing

Gaston Bachelard’s sound environments are inseparable from his life in the Champagne region, punctuated by grape harvests and harvests. As a «philosopher in the fields»¹, he listened to the murmurings of the forest populated by trees and birds, the melody of the stream, or the «speaking air»² giving him philosophical and musical lessons that resonated and resounded in his rhythmic writing, undulating like “the movement of life”. This «audibility of the legible» (Matthieu Guillot) is essential to Bachelard, who advises us to listen to books in order to understand them better, to learn «energy through poems»³, music or paintings, which are all ambient and sonorous environments where we can meditate on «the energy of matter»⁴, a theme common to art and science in the early 20th century.

Although Bachelard never wrote about music, the closeness of his thinking to that of contemporary musicians and artists comes to the fore in this issue dedicated to a musical philosopher whose «ears can hear more deeply than eyes can see»⁵. Tending towards an «over-listening» of sound matter⁶, he hears colors and shapes speak («all flowers speak, sing, even those we draw»⁷) and lets us taste the flavor of words, endowed with singular sonorities and perfumes, in a «polyphony of the senses»⁸, that harmonizes us and helps us better inhabit the world, “poetically”.

¹ Bachelard, G., *The Right to Dream*, Eng. trans. by J.A. Underwood, Dallas, The Dallas Institute Publications, 1989, p. 180; [*Le droit de rêver*, Paris, PUF, 1970].

² Bachelard, G., *Air and Dreams. An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*, Eng. trans. by E. R. Farrell, Dallas, The Dallas Institute Publications, 1988, p. 239, [*L’Air et les songes. Essai sur l’imagination du mouvement*, Paris, José Corti, 1943]. “L’air parlant” appears translated as “word-bearing air” in E. Farrell’s English version of *Air and Dreams* (Dallas Institute Publications, 1988, p 239), but “the speaking air” is more precise.

³ Bachelard, G., *Water and Dreams. An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*, Eng. trans. by E. R. Farrell, Dallas, The Dallas Institute Publications, p. 195, [*L’Eau et les rêves. Essai sur l’imagination de la matière*, Paris, José Corti, 1942].

⁴ Bachelard, G., *The Right to Dream*, cit., p. 27.

⁵ Bachelard, G., *Earth and Réveries of Repose. An Essay on Images of Interiority*, Eng. trans. by M. McAllester Jones, Dallas, The Dallas Institute Publications, 2011, p. 141, [*La Terre et les Réveries du Repos. Essai sur les images de l’intimité*, Paris, José Corti, 1948].

⁶ Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Space* [1964], Eng. trans. by M. Jolas, Boston, Beacon Press, 1994, p. 178, [*La poétique de l’espace*, Paris, PUF, 1957].

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸ Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Réverie. Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, Eng. trans. by D. Russel, Boston, Beacon, 1971, p. 6, [*La poétique de la rêverie*, Paris, PUF, 1960].

Many composers of the 20th and 21st centuries have been inspired by his philosophical and musical poetics, in phase with the new music of the 20th century, conceived from silence as the first sound medium of sound, which has become that space-time in motion which is generator of rhythm, timbre and musical time. But these waves of silence can also be heard in poems whose words need no preamble, at most a «prelude of silence»⁹. For «silence is a world» that seeks to express itself in music as in being¹⁰, giving birth to the first human word. But «before speaking, we must hear»¹¹, says Bachelard (via Novalis), for language is first and foremost a listening to the infinite languages of the universe, as poets and musicians know, rediscovering the attitude of the “infant” and its extreme attention to the slightest sound and movement; to the point of «hearing ourselves see» or «hearing ourselves listen»¹², as in acousmatic music defined by F. Bayle as «a listening of listening»¹³. This «poetics of listening» (M. Guillot) underlies the entire issue.

Heretofore, as Makis Solomos observes, Bachelard’s concern is «not so much with sound as a physical phenomenon, but rather with the process that allows it to exist, that is, “listening”»; an embodied, “situated” listening, revealing the “sonic unity” of a *milieu* (i.e., the set of reciprocal relations established between a subject and its environment) marked by the presence of water. His songs have fascinated philosophers, such as Bachelard and Jankélévitch (two «philosophers of water», according to Jean-Pierre Cléro) and musicians, including Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu (1930-1996), for whom a sound is authentically musical when it can be compared to living water. With a Bachelardian ear, he listened to the trickles of sound and silence he perceived around him or in his dreams, triggering poetically structured musical visions in his music (Ziad Kreidy).

Attentive to the «geology of silence»¹⁴, composer and philosopher Hugues Dufourt (1943) also drew on Bachelardian sources to compose – among other things – a “spectral music” in which the notions of spectrum and resonance are central (Pierre-Albert Castanet) on the basis of Bachelard’s own «philosophical spectrum-analysis» in his scientific work¹⁵. By teaching us to develop an active ear, within ourselves and around us, Bachelard makes us sensitive to the vibrations of sound matter that Debussy, his contemporary (1862-1918), captured in his music. In his quest for «a free, gushing art...in tune with the elements, the wind, the sky, the

⁹ Bachelard, G., *Intuition of the Instant*, Eng. trans. by E. Rizo-Patron, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2013, p. 58, [*L'intuition de l'instant. Étude sur la « Siloë » de Gaston Roupnel* [1931], Paris, Stock, 1992].

¹⁰ Cf. Picard, M., *The World of Silence* [1972], Eng. trans. by S. Godwin, Washington D.C., Gateway Editions, 1988, [*Die Welt des Schweigens* [1948], LOCO, 2009].

¹¹ Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Space*, cit., p. 178.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹³ Bayle, F., *La musique acousmatique : propositions... Positions*, Paris, Buchet-Chastel, 1993, p. 136.

¹⁴ Bachelard, G., *Air and Dreams*, cit., p. 251.

¹⁵ Bachelard, G., *The Philosophy of No*, Eng. trans. by G. C. Waterston, New York, The Orion Press, 1968, p. 40, [*La philosophie du non. Essai d'une philosophie du nouvel esprit scientifique* [1940], Paris, PUF, 2018].

sea!»¹⁶, Debussy lets us hear in his opera (1902) the «great... extraordinary silence» of water («one can hear the water sleep»!¹⁷), which creates «lakes of song» in the landscape¹⁸, hailed by Bachelard, for whom there can be no poetry without silence. This silence is embodied by the character of Mélisande, whose song – barely whispered “at the minimum of the voice” – is but an emanation from that silence; proof that it is possible «to represent musically all that a fine ear perceives in the rhythm of the surrounding world»¹⁹.

By listening to the sounds of water (*La Mer*, 1905) and air (wind, among others), the medium from which sound comes, he freed music from its preconceived forms, the musical grammars and metrical beat to which they were bound, to develop a «musique de plein air»²⁰. Among the beings of this mid-place, situated between heaven and earth, the bird, in its immediate outpouring, embodies a dynamism that frees us from earthly burdens. Emblematic of music – «I am but a listening being»²¹, says Shelley’s lark – and of the “energy” that makes beings “alive”, the bird in flight is a primal beauty that we are able to mimic inwardly. For «there is flight within us»²², and it’s up to poets and musicians alike to make us feel it, by teaching us how to fly with sounds in space that has become music. There is «no space without music, for» there is «no expansion without space»²³. Capturing the dynamism of reality and making it resonate in our imagination is the work of artists, who help us discover the vivacity of its ceaseless movements, similar to those of the animal kingdom according to Bachelard, who describes the Lautréamontian imagination as «animalizing»²⁴.

The bird, whose “rhythmic” life gives itself, with all its intensity, in the very instant of its appearance, shows that «there is identity between the feeling of the present and the feeling of life»²⁵. At once flight and song, wave and corpuscle, it is ambivalent like matter-energy, which is at the origin of a new conception of time, relative to space. But «in what sense is rhythm temporal» asks Pierre Sauvanet, to which Elie During responds by showing that Bachelardian time is in phase with the musical time that Marcus Mota has undertaken to make us hear in his piece *Space Tango*, where he makes us sensitive to this “temporal pluralism” made up of groups of instants.

As the first phonists, birds inspired humankind with «a music of humanity»²⁶; by imitating the voices of the universe, particularly that of water, the “fundamental

¹⁶ Debussy, C., *Monsieur Croche et autres écrits* [1971], Paris, Gallimard, 1987, p. 296.

¹⁷ Debussy, C., *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Opera, 1902, Act I.

¹⁸ Bachelard, G., *Water and Dreams*, cit., p. 193.

¹⁹ Debussy, C., *op. cit.*, p. 289.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 43-44.

²¹ Bachelard, G., *Air and Dreams*, cit., p. 86.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁴ Bachelard, G., *Lautréamont. With Essays by James Hillman and Robert S. Dupree*, Eng. trans. by R. S. Dupree, Dallas, The Dallas Institute Publications, p. 20 ; 27, [*Lautréamont* [1939], Paris, José Corti, 2015].

²⁵ Bachelard, G., *Intuition of the Instant*, cit., p. 20.

²⁶ Bachelard, G., *Water and Dreams*, cit., p. 194.

sound” from which language and music derive, according to Bachelard. Thus, he heard «the lapping of the shores in the nasal cry of aquatic birds, the frog’s croaking in the brook ouzel, the whistling of the reed in the bullfinch, the cry of the tempest in the frigate bird»; while «the trembling, shivering sounds» of the night birds were for him «the repercussion of a subterranean echo in old ruins»²⁷. But the bird is not just an imitator; it is also an inventor, as is «a composer within the human species»²⁸. A bird can also become a privileged messenger of the gods in divination, induced when human beings listen to its songs, as musician François-Bernard Mâche recalls (1935-)²⁹. Initially inspired by birdsong like his master³⁰, composer and ornithologist Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), he turned to the sounds of the elements, so dear to Bachelard. In *Kassandra* (1977), for example, «fire begins to speak», and the buzzing of bees mingles with other voices and instrumental sounds to compose «a natural polyphony»³¹; while in *Amorgos* (1979) we hear «what the sea is saying in the cave», for which he acts as «translator»³². According to him, «a spontaneous animism probably makes us perceive even in the sound-world of wind, sea, storm, etc... “voices” that address us»³³. For «the world speaks to us» and «man is not alone in speaking»³⁴, confirms Bachelard. According to him, philosophical and scientific thought evolves in the opposite direction to artistic thought³⁵, which is oriented towards an “animistic” understanding of the world and its elements, understood as sound energies that exist in a pure state in nature. Twentieth-century composers created their music to make us hear them, born of «the mysterious collaboration of air, the movement of leaves and the fragrance of flowers»³⁶. In the twentieth century, music became a vibrant material, an art of space, just as Debussy had foreseen at the origin of a new era of compositional style, by listening to the sound of the sea, to the wind in the leaves or the cry of a bird, which «deposit in us multiple impressions...expressed in musical languages»³⁷.

Is music really «just a way of hearing»³⁸, or is it also a mode of knowledge in its own right, stating truths in a non-rational, intuitive way? This is what the authors of this issue suggest, by showing the importance, today, of listening (declined as “ouïr”, “écouter”, “entendre” in Bayle) and of cosmo-listening to build an envi-

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Cf. Mâche, F.-B., “La musique chez les oiseaux” in *Comme un oiseau: exposition, Paris, 19 juin-13 octobre 1996*, Fondation Cartier pour l’art contemporain, Paris, Gallimard 1996; Id., *Un demi-siècle de musique...et toujours contemporaine*, Paris, L’Harmattan, 2000, pp. 395-401.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Mâche, F.-B., *Naluan*, op. 27 for ensemble and tape, Paris, Durand, 1974.

³¹ Mâche, F.-B., *Kassandra*, op. 33, radio piece for ensemble and tape, Paris, Durand, 1977

³² Mâche, F.-B., *Amorgos*, op. 38 for ensemble and tape, Paris, Durand, 1979.

³³ Mâche, F.-B., *La nature dans la musique*, Lecture at the University of St. Étienne, January 8, 1997.

³⁴ Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Réverie*, cit, p. 187.

³⁵ Cf. Bachelard, G., *The Philosophy of No*, cit, pp. 15 ; 17.

³⁶ Debussy, C., *op. cit.*, p. 45.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

³⁸ Cf. Mâche, F.-B., *Exposition Paysage sonore urbain*, Actes de Colloque (30-31 mai 1980), Paris, Plan Construction, 1980.

ronment in resonance with our being. For «even inanimate things have their music» asserts Simeon Pease Cheney (1818-1890)³⁹, the first musician to have had the idea of noting down all the sounds he heard in his house surrounded by water and forests, and writing them down on staves: a whole life spent listening⁴⁰, and practicing the “art of hearing things”, as Bachelard invites us to do if we are to recover the world we have lost⁴¹. By relearning to «feel how the birds fly and know the gesture with which the little flowers open in the morning»⁴²; to enter into “muscular sympathy” with beings and things, we will know that music or poetic verse are not feelings but «bodily and motor experiences» (Francesco Spampinato); that it’s not just birds that sing: houses do too. «The bucket where the rain (that) drips and cries under the zinc gutter», or «the droplets of sound from the fizzing fire, the crackling wood or the sudden surge of flames when the log catches fire in the hearth» are music⁴³. When we spend our lives listening (as do the animals whose lives depend on it), the ear eventually perceives, from the hinterland of silence, a music behind the succession of sounds. As Bachelard points out, anticipating the acousmatic music born of radio art (of which he was an ardent defender): «we understand better with eyes closed»⁴⁴.

But all those sounds of birds, wind and rain in buckets, insects crackling, doors slamming – are they all really music? (*Archives* in this issue)

By incorporating all such noises into their music, 20th-century composers made us realize that “we live amidst sounds, not just images”, as Raymond Murray Schafer (1933-2021) testifies in his book *The tuning of the World*⁴⁵, at the origin of sound ecology. When we refuse to consider the world as music, «it’s the wind, it’s the birds, it’s the reeds, it’s the drops of rain on the trees» that we are ultimately rejecting⁴⁶. Bachelard invites us to rediscover this sense of listening, even in the urban environment, where we can also ask ourselves: what sounds and silences do we want to be surrounded by in order to live better and act upon our sound environment today? Debussy showed that music creates atmospheric spaces rather than forms, deliberately blurred in his prelude for piano, *Brouillards*, which when heard «polyphonically» and «muscularly» (F. Spampinato) “tonalizes” us, provoking «an entirely new activity of the creative imagination»⁴⁷. This immediate, multisensory experience of feeling in contact with an atmosphere that affects us, even before we understand it, is that of deep listening, which can give us access to bodily memory

³⁹ Quignard, P., *Dans ce jardin qu'on aimait*, Paris, Grasset, 2017, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Cf. *La musique des oiseaux* in *Archives*.

⁴¹ Cf. Crawford, M. B., *Pourquoi nous avons perdu le monde et comment le retrouver*, Paris, La Découverte, « Cahiers libres », 2016.

⁴² Rilke, R.-M., *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*, Eng. trans. by M. D. Herter Norton, New York, Capricorn Books, 1949, p. 26 [*Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* [1910], Berlin, Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000].

⁴³ Quignard, P., *op. cit.*, p. 63.

⁴⁴ Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Space*, cit., p. 181.

⁴⁵ Schafer, R. M., *The Tuning of the world*, Toronto, Random House Inc., 1977.

⁴⁶ Quignard, P., *op. cit.*, p. 119.

⁴⁷ Bachelard, G., *The Poetics of Rêverie*, cit., p. 191.

(starting from the intra-uterine sounds of the beginning of life in the darkness of a natural environment). Such is the proposal of artist Juliette Kempf, who invites us to plunge into the waters of Memory, with her sound installation *En souvenirs* (2022)⁴⁸, where each person can “dive more deeply” and freely into a sort of “cave”, guided by the breaths and recorded voices of people of all ages. Mixed with the songs of the nine “muses”, these voices take us back to an immemorial memory, before time, when the world was nothing but breath and energy.

Seeking above all to touch the senses before the intellect, Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu conceives of music as “a living”, irrational “material” that we see being born and growing. In deep affinity with Bachelard [«Has poetry ever really been made out of thought»⁴⁹], he has detached himself from the spirit of analysis in favor of a cosmic and spiritual dimension he calls “*Ma*”, a way of understanding the universe as a cosmos⁵⁰. Based on a physiological rhythm, «the unquantifiable *ma* stretched dynamically...silent and out of sound...filled with innumerable sonorities» is at the heart of the arts in Japan⁵¹. It allows us to experiment with another, non-measurable time, opening up “between” things and “between” beings to bring forth a living art. Tending towards a beyond of the sensible, the ear seeks to «see the invisible and listen to the inaudible»⁵², and triggers visions. It is in capturing this “aura” of sound and linking dream visions and “musical” visions that the composer devotes himself, so that the sonorous and the visual merge (Z. Kreidy). On this point, he is close to choreographer Carolyn Carlson⁵³, who, like him, is influenced by the writings of Bachelard and by Japanese culture, from which she takes certain notions such as “*Li*” (which designates, among other things, the transformations of nature and the breath of the wind). «I work from dreams and intuitions», explains Carolyn Carlson, whose poetic and metaphorical thinking is in affinity with Bachelard’s approach. Her bodily listening to the movements of the world and matter is akin to the cosmic listening of peoples who «sing and dance» ideas instead of expressing them in words (Blanca Solares). Likewise, the choreographer’s creations, conceived from her reading of Bachelard, seek to celebrate Mother Earth (despite the planet’s degradation) and to make us aware of our belonging to the living by showing what «energy» means «as an aesthetic»⁵⁴.

⁴⁸ Kempf, J., *En souvenirs. Installation sonore dédiée à la rêverie solitaire*. Compagnie “Le Désert en Ville”. Nantes, 2022; Paris, EAM Anne Bergunion, 2023.

⁴⁹ Bachelard, G., *The Flame of a Candle*, Eng. trans. by J. Caldwell, Dallas, The Dallas Institute Publications, 1988, p. 17, [*La flamme d’une chandelle*, Paris, PUF, 1961].

⁵⁰ Takemitsu, T., Cronin, T., Tann, H., “Afterword”, *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 27, Issue 2, 1989, p. 213.

⁵¹ Takemitsu, T., *Le son incommensurable au silence*, Tokyo, Schinchôsha, 1971, p. 196.

⁵² Takemitsu, T., *Confronting Silence. Selected Writings*, Berkeley, Fallen Leaf Press, 1995, 142.

⁵³ Marked by a childhood spent near water, listening to its movements, and those of all the beings around (trees, hills and wild flowers), C. Carlson, too, developed a deep listening to nature: «I felt life growing in everything... experienced the feeling of innocence of life opening up to the earth and sky» (Carlson, C., «Interview with Hélène Tahouet», in Id., *Ecrits sur l’eau*, Arles, Actes Sud, Roubaix, La Piscine, 2017, p. 26).

⁵⁴ Bachelard, G., *Lautréamont*, cit., p. 66.

While energy has a privileged place in Carlson's work, in connection with the natural elements, her poetic thinking, based on «the musicality of movement», privileges the ear («the ear comes before the visual» she says), which projects «visions»⁵⁵ from an «adherence to the invisible» that is the primary condition of poetry according to Bachelard⁵⁶. The philosopher testifies to this direct, pre-reflexive knowledge through his profound listening, which is in affinity with that of the musicians quoted in this issue, including F.-B. Mâche, who is inclined to think that music is irrational knowledge, belonging more to the realm of dreams (as Debussy thought) and reverie than science. According to this composer, “listening with a musical ear is already making music”, if we understand this word to mean «changing oneself into sound by existing in it»⁵⁷. By «plunging into the consciousness of the elements as they are», Bachelard was able to perform this gesture in order to hear what they have to say, and to “respond to them”: «How many times at the edge of the well, on the old stone covered with wild sorrel and fern, have I whispered the name of distant waters... How many times has the universe suddenly answered me!»⁵⁸, exclaims Bachelard, for whom «lending an ear is wanting to respond»⁵⁹.

Eric Maestri confirms that «music only exists as “interaction”» and that it is conceived in terms of otherness, as a shared space. In support of his argument, he cites composers who have applied the Bachelardian notion of repercussion, seeking to involve the listener in the creation of their work. He underlines the importance of the image (in the Bachelardian sense) and imagination as a compositional tool for a composer like François Bayle, a reader of Bachelard (*L'Air et les Songes* in particular) with whom he feels an affinity in thought. Proof of this is the notion of “i-son” (image-sound) designed to awaken the listener's imagination in radio listening (dear to Bachelard) and acousmatic listening. Similarly, the composer Pauline Oliveiros (1932-2016) believed that listening is the fundamental material that can lead to the “deep listening” our lives lack today: by losing this reciprocal relationship triggered by active listening to our environment, human and non-human, «what is lost... is that inner peace... – a sense of balance and concentration, of new energy and life» (quoted by M. Solomos). By emphasizing the musical, acoustic dimension of the image, all these musicians are renewing Bachelard's philosophy of the imagination, for whom “man is musical”, a sound pipe or an aeolian harp.

By once again becoming “sentient-thinking” (Nietzsche) and “listening” (Bachelard) beings, we would be able to revive the world within us. The members of the *Bachelard Quartet* (interviewed here by Gilles Hiéronimus) set out to awaken this silent, reciprocal dance of our perceptions, echoing the philosopher's thoughts in sound. Their performance affirms the omnipresence of music in Bachelard's

⁵⁵ Bachelard, G., *Water and Dreams*, cit., p. 190.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Poirier, A., *Toru Takemitsu*, Paris, Michel de Maule, 1997, p. 63.

⁵⁸ Bachelard, G., *Air and Dreams*, cit., p. 5.

⁵⁹ Bachelard, G., “Preface to Buber”, in Id., *Adventures in Phenomenology: Gaston Bachelard*, edited by E. Rizo-Patron, E. S. Casey, and J. M. Wirth, Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 2017, p. 274, [Bachelard, G., « Préface », in Buber, M., *Je et tu* [1923], Paris, Aubier, 2012].

work, as the focus of an active reverie for the listener, placed at the heart of a tri-frontal device that involves us (the reader/audience) entirely in the sounds (vocal and instrumental), making us sensitive to the musicality of existence.

Understood in the sense of a listening “attitude”, music gives us the feeling of existing “without the need for thought”, as the philosopher-musician Jean-Jacques Rousseau had already observed in his *Rêveries* caused by the sounds of water. The experience induces a «meditation that renders all reflection useless, inoperative and even harmful», says Mâche⁶⁰. In his *Ville Sonore* project, designed expressly for the new, solitary urban walkers we have become today, he seeks to transform the “alienated attitude of the consumer” and his “random wandering” into an attitude of deep, creative listening, soon to transform him into a “composer” of his own sound environment. In his view, «we need to get people to listen to sounds with a musical ear», which requires education: «It’s in nursery and primary schools that our freedom to listen and the future of sounds are at stake»⁶¹. Let’s listen to what they have to say, alone or through the intermediary of the composer, and we’ll then understand that «music is not a luxury or mass-produced sound product, but a way of hearing and an art of living sound»⁶² in the manner of Bachelard.

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⁶⁰ Mâche, F-B., “Un urbanisme sonore ?” in Id., *Exposition « Paysage sonore urbain »*, cit.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

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