

# Toru Takemitsu, Écrits (anthology)

Following one slender work in English (*Confronting Silence*, Berkeley: Fallen Leaf Press, 1995), this volume provides a second and far more substantial anthology of Toru Takemitsu's writings in a Western language, and the first in French. Confided to the direction of Wataru Miyakawa, it "aims to reflect the variety of themes, genres, and formats in which Takemitsu the writer has expressed himself" (pg. 13): concert programmes, homages to a number of artists, articles for musical and generalist magazines, interventions in the daily press, autobiographical essays, literary texts, and interviews, all drawn from the nearly complete corpus published in five posthumous volumes as *Chosakushu* (*Writings*, Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2000).

As Miyakawa explains in his introduction, Takemitsu attached great importance to his literary activity, which he practised throughout his life, though not without a certain unease at times: "I still wonder whether the composer ought to express himself in words", he admits in 1971 (cited pg. 8). The first text included in this anthology ("The Direction of Contemporary Japanese Music", 1949) is the dissertation of a nineteen-year-old high-school student; the last, ("To the Sea!", 1996) precedes the composer's death by bare a month, so that the book covers almost fifty years of writing. The formats are unequal in length, from notices of a few lines to essays, but the two- or three-page article emerges little by little as a favourite, especially for the general press. The texts fall into two periods. The first, that of apprenticeship and early works still in search of a language, displays a *recherché* literary style, often indebted to the Japanese avant-gardes. For Takemitsu, through the interdisciplinary aspect of his work, whether as part of the group Jikken Kobo (Experimental Workshop) or later the Sogetsu Art Center, was influenced by literary and visual arts, and by cinema in which he distinguished himself as a film music composer. The second period, beginning from the 1970s, tends towards simplicity and purification: "His texts are sober", notes the composer's friend Kenzaburo Oe (pg. 1). With the exception of the article "Dream and Number: The Musical Language" (1984), there is no music theory to be found here.

In the corpus of Takemitsu's writings, the interviews occupy a privileged place. Takemitsu serves as both interviewee (notably, in this volume, in three interviews accorded in 1978 on the occasion of a Festival d'automne in Paris devoted to contemporary Japanese music) and interviewer of others, whether composers (Luciano Berio, John Cage, Iannis Xenakis—elsewhere György Ligeti and Luigi Nono), conductors (Simon Rattle, elsewhere Seiji Ozawa), or—not included in this volume—pianists, jazz and rock musicians, traditional Japanese musicians, writers, filmmakers, film critics, architects, even the psychiatrist Kimura Bin. These interviews take the form not of magisterial pronouncements but of dialogues in exact (if incomplete) transcription, down to the most seemingly anodyne moments, which heighten the authenticity of the exchange.

Miyakawa's anthology divides into eight sections: "Something of Myself", "Musical Points of View", "Nature and Culture", "Words on Others", "Literary Pieces", "Interviews", "Interviews Conducted by Takemitsu", and "Commentaries" accompanying the catalogue of works. The musical mind that takes shape can be summarised in three words: nature, sound, water.

In the crisis of contemporary music, whose aesthetic purism corresponds to a decline in artistic emotion, the art of Takemitsu, as he explains, is founded on neither expression nor interiority (as in the Japan of his formative years) nor on a purely functional view of music in a context of single-mindedly arithmetical organisation. Takemitsu concerns himself no more with pleasure or comfort on its own, but rather, beyond consciousness itself, with existence in the world and harmony with nature, in their various manifestations, whether gentle or violent.

This nature is not opposed to the human being: "Nature, for men, is an anonymous

state in which everything is equal and whose scattered elements exist only on condition of being granted a particular denomination. A true relation between men and nature begins only when these elements, given a name, attain a human character. As soon as one considers a tree in this humanised regard, it begins to truly exist. Put otherwise, I have to cultivate, in my universe, a non-natural milieu. This attitude is perfectly *natural*" (pp. 175-6). Takemitsu writes on the tree (associated with Odilon Redon), the rock, sand, so many temporal strata of the Japanese garden whose layered structure music imitates as it runs its course. Nature, as noun or verb, adjective or adverb, "is everything that qualifies the condition of being alive" (pg. 318). The result is a "way of thinking that dynamically affirms human life insofar as life fortuitously encounters the space of nature, as intangible in its movements as the instant" (pg. 142).

For the composer this nature is first and foremost acoustic: "The world, for me, is sound. Sounds pass through me and connect me continually to the world as though in a loop" (pg. 173). It therefore falls to the composer to listen sensitively to the world, to its order and circular time, and to plunge his hands into the flux of sound: "To concentrate first on the simple act of listening. Later, one perceives that which sound bears in it" (pp. 31, 381). As with John Cage, the primary thing is sound, this "continuity that arises in an instant" (pg. 106) and evolves unceasingly in duration; a sound that discloses an entire universe: "In Japan, a single sound is already 'music'. It can contain nature" (pg. 318); a sound so intense, so "condensed" (pg. 347) that it rivals with silence and includes, in line with Japanese tradition, noises of natural origin as well as the "obstacle" (*sawari*) that opposes its emission; a singular sound, a sound of quality, which must be sculpted and extracted from the others, quantitative or inauthentic; a sound with its own resonance, its own morphologic and structural beauty, and not a musical scale; a sound in itself, "palpable" (pg. 47), in naked form, and not in relation to another; a sound "single and multiple" (pg. 49), which it becomes the composer's task to open to the most varied emotions and to the multitude of significations contained in it. This polysemy of sound, whose first master is taken to be Debussy, is also that of the orchestra, not ambiguous but "pan-focal" (pg. 84), and of the potentially plural spaces of the concert hall; or, even more so, of real or imagined geographies: Orient and Occident, neither equal nor mixed, nor reconciled, nor rectified the one by the other, but coexisting even in the Chinese and Korean heritages of the Japanese traditions.

The musical work gives this sound a free form, ephemeral, liquid; it is made in the image of water, that "synthetic form of the dream and of number" (pg. 67), that "source of the poetic imagination itself" (pg. 388), which circulates indefinitely in the universe, whether as rain, lake, river, or ocean. Like sound, water, though inorganic, is perceived as living. "What I strive to create are transformations as progressive as the waves of flux and reflux" (pg. 192). Composing, Takemitsu teaches us, becomes a mere matter of "encompassing" sound (pg. 388).

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04/02/2020

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To quote this article: Laurent Feneyrou, "Toru Takemitsu, Écrits (anthology)", Dictionary of Composer's Writings, Dictéco [online], ed. E. Reibel, last edited: 01/03/2023, <https://preprod.dicteco2.ihrim.fr/anthology/45650>.