

Chapter 2

La Fauvette des jardins and the 'Spectral Attitude'

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If location is one aspect of music's world, the life-history of the composer is another.¹

Messiaen used the metaphor of night for compositional and spiritual struggles when both writing and discussing it. The nocturnal 'Stigmata' scene in *Saint François d'Assise* is an example of his most disorientating material, and his earlier, apprehensive view of musical progress in the mid-1950s was famously recounted by Alexander Goehr: 'Gentlemen, we are all in a profound night; I'm as lost as you.'² (The echo of Debussy's Golaud here is striking.)³ Given the countless early mornings the composer spent notating the song of Fauvettes des Jardins (Garden Warblers) outside his summer home at Petichet in the 1960s, it is tempting to imagine him reliving the emergence from his 'experimental' period into his 1950s bird style as the sun rose.⁴ His preoccupation with passing time and the hours of the day was translated into music in the post-experimental solo piano works:

But it's in my *Catalogue d'oiseaux* and in *La Fauvette des jardins* that you'll find my great formal innovation. There, instead of referring to an antique or classical

¹ Arnold Whittall, *Exploring Twentieth-century Music: Tradition and Innovation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 9.

² Goehr's recollection of Messiaen's words to his class in 1956, quoted in Peter Hill and Nigel Simeone, *Olivier Messiaen: Oiseaux Exotiques* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 214.

³ 'Je suis perdu aussi', from Debussy, *Claude Pelléas et Mélisande*, Act I, scene 1, concluding line. Messiaen later identified Golaud's voice (and Boris Godunov's) with that of St Francis.

⁴ On 21 July 1960 he wrote 'réveil des oiseaux' when two Garden Warblers sang together at 5 am. *Réveil des oiseaux* (1953) is widely seen as a turning-point in Messiaen's output, though nuanced versions of this view can be found in, amongst others, Hill and Simeone, *Messiaen: Oiseaux exotiques*, p. 27 and Wai-Ling Cheong, 'Neumes and Greek Rhythms: The Breakthrough in Messiaen's Birdsong', *Acta Musicologica*, 80/1 (2008): pp. 1–32. I am grateful to Peter Hill for allowing me to view reproductions of several unpublished *cahier* pages from the 1960s, where Garden Warblers are featured extensively.

mold, or even to some mold I might have invented, I sought to reproduce in condensed form the vivid course of the hours of day and night.⁵

Attending Messiaen's class the year *La Fauvette des jardins* was composed (1970) were a number of composers, including Tristan Murail and Gérard Grisey, who were on the verge of creating new ways of working with sound by stretching time, seeing it as part of a continuum along with timbre, harmony and rhythm. Could their achievements illuminate Messiaen's 'great formal innovation'? The fluid approach to continuity and form of these pioneering 'spectral' composers is seemingly the polar opposite of Messiaen's in *La Fauvette*, where 'limpid, virtuosic'⁶ Garden Warbler solos alternate with a succession of episodic blocks (other birdcalls and souvenirs of the Dauphiné). My aim in this chapter is to challenge this apparent opposition by referring in particular to Grisey and his seminal article '*Tempus ex Machina: A Composer's Reflection on Musical Time*',⁷ with the intention of moving beyond the notion of *La Fauvette*'s hard-edged form and identifying more organic, 'respirational' processes (Grisey's term) behind the splices. This approach will enable conclusions to be drawn about the nature of the Garden Warbler's song, how Messiaen simulates the passage of time, and ultimately his integration of 'sinusoidal forms'⁸ with a tonal substructure – the principal technical reason for granting the work the exalted status he afforded it.⁹

La Fauvette des jardins is a rich and inspired portrait of a landscape Messiaen knew probably better than any other.¹⁰ If the life-history of a composer is as much an aspect of music's world as location, it should prove instructive to look back through the lens of a movement with which the composer had a discernible affinity, particularly given the extent to which technique was – for him – wrapped up in all other aspects of life. I will steer clear, however, of overstating any kinship or influence between teacher and students, and instead observe how a state of mind (which is

⁵ *Music and Color*, p. 117.

⁶ Messiaen's description in the preface to the score, *La Fauvette des jardins* (Paris: Leduc, 1972).

⁷ Gérard Grisey, '*Tempus ex Machina: A Composer's Reflection on Musical Time*', *Contemporary Music Review*, 2/1 (1987): pp. 239–75.

⁸ This is Murail's description of the waves of sound in *Territoires de l'oubli* ('Realms of oblivion'), the other great 30-minute French piano work of the 1970s alongside *La Fauvette*.

⁹ He does so purely in the context of birdsong composition: 'To them [the birds of the ponds] I've dedicated 'La Rousserolle effarvate' in my *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, a piece I've long considered my greatest success in bird songs, but which I now think has twice been surpassed, by my *Fauvette des jardins* for piano and 'The Sermon to the Birds' from *Saint François d'Assise*', *Music and Color*, p. 92.

¹⁰ The landscape is an idealized one; frogs are completely absent, despite their ubiquity in the Petichet *cahier* pages, tipping the balance of the work towards the more harmonious upper register in contrast to 'La Rousserolle effarvate'.

after all what the practitioners of spectralism professed it to be) can influence an investigation and help to demonstrate Messiaen's command of his resources.

The 'Spectral Attitude'

What are the origins of the expression 'spectral attitude'? No single definition has primacy. Joshua Fineberg identifies Hugues Dufourt as the first to use the 'spectral' epithet (memorably described by Grisey as a 'sticker' in 1996¹¹ – one that he hoped would eventually peel off?); Tristan Murail first issued the qualification in the early 1980s, coining a phrase that has become common currency.¹² Needless to say, this was in part a rebuttal of the emerging notion of a 'school' of composition.

An established modern-day definition of spectralism is 'any music that foregrounds timbre as an important element of structure or musical language'.¹³ Merging musical parameters (most commonly timbre and harmony, but also rhythm) by 'putting a microscope on the sound'¹⁴ is a process that has led to the most celebrated passages in spectral music, such as the 'instrumental synthesis' at the opening of Grisey's *Partiels*, or the modulated bell sounds of Murail's *Gondwana*. More abstract considerations tend to determine how the 'attitude' is struck; the running theme is an 'obsession with organic continuity ... well outside the twentieth-century French tradition of discontinuously juxtaposing *objets sonores*, a characteristic of both Boulez and Murail's teacher Messiaen'.¹⁵ Further observations from the key players range from the pithy to the mildly satirical – and are not always entirely in accordance with each other:

¹¹ Gérard Grisey and David Bündler, 'Gérard Grisey', interview with David Bündler, 18 January 1996, available at www.angelfire.com/music2/davidbundler/grisey.html (March 1996).

¹² It is outlined most extensively, in print, in Tristan Murail's 'Target Practice': 'I do not believe, therefore, that one can speak of a "spectral system" as such, if by that we understand a body of rules that will produce a product of a certain hue. I do believe, however, that one can speak of a "spectral attitude"'. Trans. Joshua Cody, in Joshua Fineberg and Pierre Michel (eds), 'Models and Artifice: The Collected Writings of Tristan Murail', *Contemporary Music Review*, 24/2–3 (April/June 2005): p. 152.

¹³ Istanbul Spectral Music Conference 2003. See, Robert Reigle and Paul Whitehead (eds), *In Spectral World Musics: Proceedings of the Istanbul Spectral Music Conference* (Istanbul: Pan Yayincılık, 2008).

¹⁴ Thereby observing the partials that constitute the sound and using them as the basis for a wide variety of musical procedures. The microscope notion is attributed to Grisey in Joshua Fineberg, *Classical Music, Why Bother? Hearing the World of Contemporary Culture through a Composer's Ears* (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 115.

¹⁵ Julian Anderson, 'In Harmony – Julian Anderson Introduces the Music and Ideas of Tristan Murail', *The Musical Times*, 134/1804 (June 1993): pp. 321–3. Anderson could be having fun at Boulez's expense, given the latter's infamous put-down of Messiaen as a 'juxtaposer'.

- ‘Music is ultimately sound evolving in time’ (Joshua Fineberg).¹⁶
- ‘We are musicians and our model is sound not literature, sound not mathematics, sound not theatre, visual arts, quantum physics, geology, astrology or acupuncture’ (G rard Grisey).¹⁷
- ‘Thinking in terms of continuous, rather than discrete, categories’ (Tristan Murail).¹⁸
- ‘[The] potential for interplay between fusion and continuity, on one side, and diffraction and discontinuity, on the other’ (Grisey again).¹⁹

Grisey acknowledged Messiaen’s importance in opening up spectral realms:

There is music that has been important for me at certain periods. Like the music of Conlon Nancarrow because he deals with music in compressed time – the sort of music written for and by insects or for small animals. Extremely compressed in time. I’m fascinated by that. ... I think there are three composers that have had a strong impression upon me as a young composer. Messiaen, who was my teacher for four years, for the sense of colour and harmony and translucence. Second, I would name Stockhausen for the sense of dramaturgy, the sense of form and time. And Ligeti, as third, for his use of extended time and continuity.²⁰

It is notable that, of the three, Messiaen is not the one credited with being an adept handler of time. Is this anxiety of influence? Perhaps, though unlikely: Grisey was critical of Messiaen’s approach to rhythm in *Tempus ex Machina*.²¹ Though they were pursuing similar rhythmic goals (asymmetry on the one hand and malleable periodicity on the other), differences undoubtedly existed. Nevertheless, as shown below, Grisey’s understanding of musical time illuminates the effects Messiaen was aspiring to create on a large-scale rhythmic basis.

Many composers of the pre-1970 generation could be credited with aspects of a spectral attitude, not least the three cited above (amongst others there are Per

¹⁶ Fineberg, *Classical Music, Why Bother?*, p. 112.

¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 105.

¹⁸ Murail, ‘Target Practice’, p. 152.

¹⁹ The last two quotations are brought together by Sean Ferguson in ‘De-composing Tristan Murail: The Collected Writings, 1980–2000 (Review of ‘Models and Artifice: The Collected Writings of Tristan Murail’, *Contemporary Music Review*, 24/2–3 (April/June 2005)’, *Circuit: Musiques contemporaines*, 17/1 (2007): p. 118. The second of these originates from Grisey’s article, ‘Did you say spectral?’, trans. Joshua Fineberg, *Contemporary Music Review* 19/3 (2000): pp. 1–3.

²⁰ Grisey and B ndler, ‘G rard Grisey’.

²¹ He describes Messiaen’s non-retrogradable rhythms as an ‘avatar’: ‘It shows the level of contempt for or misunderstanding of perception our elders had attained’, Grisey, *Tempus ex Machina*, p. 242.

Nørgård, Giacinto Scelsi and even Paul Hindemith).²² Right from the final bars of the first *Prélude*, 'La colombe', Messiaen demonstrates sensitivity towards resonance as an integral part of his language. The penultimate page of 'Première Communion de la Vierge', the depiction of Christ's heart beating in the Virgin's womb, shares many characteristics with one of the archetypal moments in spectral music, the opening of Grisey's *Partiels*. Grisey often mentioned heartbeats in connection with the 'fuzzy periodicity' of his own rhythms, and the similarities between the two passages are both rhythmic (the manner in which the number of bass notes accumulates: two steps forward, one back, more precisely so in the *Regard*) and harmonic (varying harmonic above a static bass; this time the process is more systematic in *Partiels*).²³

The fact that these memorable sonorities illustrate one of Messiaen's most moving, poetic images enhances their importance and relevance to this discussion.

'Chronotropy'

Returning to *La Fauvette des jardins* and simulation of the hours of the day, Grisey transports the issue to the wider cosmos in his *Le Noir de l'étoile* for six percussionists, tape and pulsar-transmitting radio signal:

When music succeeds in conjuring up time, it finds itself vested with a veritable shamanic power, that of connecting us to the forces that surround us. In bygone civilisations, the lunar or solar rites had a conjuring function. Thanks to them, the seasons could return and the sun rise every day.²⁴

It is hard to imagine Messiaen claiming to possess the powers of a shaman,²⁵ but in *La Fauvette* he invests his avian subject with the opposite power during its immense solos, observing in the preface that 'Its rapid *vocalises*, its tireless virtuosity, the regular flow of its discourse seem to arrest time'; it emulates the Angel of the Apocalypse, no less. So through large parts of the work the passage of time is simulated by the illusory suspension thereof. Grisey describes this kind of texture in more analytical terms in '*Tempus ex Machina*':

If this continuity is maintained throughout the duration of a work it is virtually impossible to memorize anything ... all that emerges is a hazy memory of the

²² Julian Anderson's 'A Provisional History of Spectral Music' (*Contemporary Music Review*, 19/2: pp. 7–22) contains a definitive survey of the prehistory of spectralism.

²³ Julian Anderson remarks on the similarity of the opening of *Partiels* to the trombone and clarinets' 'abyss' in *Couleurs de la Cité céleste*; see Anderson, *ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁴ Liner notes to Gérard Grisey, *Le Noir de l'Etoile*, trans. John Tyler Tuttle, CD Accord 476 1052.

²⁵ Messiaen's student François-Bernard Mâche nonetheless refused to laugh off this idea when it was suggested by the author.

contours of the sound's evolution. Time past is no longer measurable. I would call this process psychotropic or better still chronotropic.²⁶

This aptly describes the effect of the Garden Warbler solos, which are unquestionably long enough for memory of them to start eroding. Messiaen's apparent paradox does not need to be seen as such, however. Time 'stops' on a regular basis (during each solo); all the more opportunity to be aware of it when it begins again, at the key moments in an accumulating musical architecture.

La Fin des Périodes

When it comes to spectralist preoccupation with the merging of parameters, Messiaen's students would surely have been intrigued by his comment to pianists at the foot of p. 7 of *La Fauvette des jardins*, had they reason to notice it: 'Pour les Solos de Fauvette des jardins: bien observer les durées des accords de fin de périodes, pour que les couleurs en soient perceptible.'²⁷ This is perhaps more practical than his direction for the conductor to 'transmit' the colours of *Couleurs de la Cité céleste* to the players, implying that if, but only if, you do what the score says, alchemy will occur. It could be seen as the flip side of works such as *Timbres-durées* and *Chronochromie*, where timbres 'colour' the durations.

What happens if one focuses on these chords in order to see what makes the Garden Warbler tick? As Peter Hill observes, many of them are chords of transposed inversion²⁸ and, in line with Messiaen's common practice, they reflect the world around them: the refrain-like harmonies that elsewhere in *La Fauvette* describe the reflection of the sun in the Lac du Laffrey are complete *renversement transposées* progressions.

Added notes at the top of the chords that end the 'two preliminary trials'²⁹ of the warbler enhance a feature already present in the basic harmony: polarization of black and white notes. There are three black notes above six white in both sonorities; they are the same chord of transposed inversion, the second transposed five semitones lower, though the bass is only three semitones lower (it still doubles the lowest note in the right hand due to the recommended employment of a double-thumb in the first chord, but not the second). Transposition by a perfect interval facilitates the retention of *blanc/noir* duality (though it would still theoretically be

²⁶ Grisey, 'Tempus ex Machina', p. 273.

²⁷ 'For Garden Warbler solos: stay true to the durations of chords at the ends of phrases, in order for the colours to be perceptible.' *La Fauvette des jardins*, plate no. A.L. 24 588 (p. 7).

²⁸ Peter Hill, 'Piano Music II' in Peter Hill (ed.) *The Messiaen Companion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 345–6. Other types, such as chords of contracted resonance, also occur.

²⁹ Messiaen's description in the preface to the score, *La Fauvette des jardins*.

Example 2.1 Concluding chords of the Garden Warbler's 'preliminary trials'

a) Chord of transposed inversion 2A
with added D \sharp



b) Chord of transposed inversion 9A
with added A \sharp



achievable in any other transposition). Literal transposition is avoided (the most inventive birds usually refrain from such activity!). In short, great care – including pianistic care – has been taken in fashioning these sonorities (Example 2.1a and b).

Is there any significance in the notes being distributed this way? It makes for greater pianistic convenience: if one can approach the black keys at an angle with the third, fourth or fifth fingers of either hand, as these chords allow, the chances of landing in the right place are increased, and the resulting confidence can in turn affect both the timbre and the fluency of the song. As David Kopp attests elsewhere in this book, such chords are a prominent feature of *Petites Esquisses d'oiseaux* (1985). Furthermore, Pierre-Laurent Aimard has sagely commented that non-synaesthetic pianists can utilize Messiaen's chord-shapes as a proxy for colours, linking 'feel' and timbre. His extraordinary playing testifies to the effectiveness of this approach.³⁰

How many 'fin des périodes' chords exhibit this black/white polarization throughout the course of the day? Though it is occasionally difficult to tell where phrases begin and end, I have taken my cue from Messiaen's analyses in *Traité V* and extracted all chords with resonance slurs (unless clearly in the middle of a phrase), and/or followed by a rest (Table 2.1, below).

There is nothing deliberate about this pattern, but clearly there is a trend: as morning advances, and exchanges between the Garden Warbler and other birds (particularly the Great Reed Warbler) grow more animated and insistent, there is a much lower proportion of polarized chords.³¹ The percentage then grows again as the day progresses further. The central solos feature some of the most inventive and virtuosic singing of the warbler, in particular the spectacular closing salvo of 121 uninterrupted demisemiquavers that concludes solo 9, the longest solo with no polarized cadential chords. The marathon solo 11 is the most varied cadentially; here the polarized chords are often emphatic and *fortissimo*, and occasionally repeated.

³⁰ An example of a similarly-polarized sonority elsewhere in Messiaen's music is the opening right hand arabesque of 'Première Communion de la Vierge'.

³¹ Solo 4, a relatively short solo, is the only anomaly.

Table 2.1 Cadential chords in the Garden Warbler solos³²

Time of day	Fauvette des jardins solos (with characteristics)	Sequence of 'fin des périodes' [1 = polarized, 0 = not polarized]	%
Dawn	Solo 1 'preliminary trial 1'	1 1	100
	Solo 2 'preliminary trial 2'	1 1	100
	Solo 3	0 1 1 0	50
	Solo 4	0 0	0
5am	Solo 5	1 1 1 0 0	60
	Solo 6 <i>crescendi</i> to high ends of phrases	1 0 0 0 0 0 1 0 0 0 0 1 0	21
Morning advances	Solo 7	1 0 0	33
	Solo 8 closes with imitation of Golden Oriole	0 0 0	0
	Solo 9 extended closing volley (121 notes)	0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0	0
	Solo 10 gradual ascent, last note highest	1 1 0 0 0 0	33
... the most beautiful hours of the afternoon ...	Solo 11 longest (6 pages)	1 0 1 0 1 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 0 1 1 1 0 0 0 1 0 1 0 0 1 0 0	48
Towards nightfall	Solo 12 discursive	1 1 0 0 1	60

How should this all be interpreted? In spite of the prevailing impression of undifferentiated 'chronotropic' time, evolution (of a periodic nature) is slowly taking place. Grisey always places utmost emphasis on the listeners' perception, and at 268 semiquavers per minute there is admittedly little time for an ear to analyse the sounds. Nevertheless, there is a clear sense that the character of the solos changes throughout the day, and all factors must be permitted to account for this, not least harmonic ones. Overall, the warbler's calls seem to reflect the thousand-coloured light of the sun as it changes through the day (just as the lake reflects its hues); the bird sings about what is around it, as happens so often in the *Catalogue*.³³ Its song has a 'respirational' profile: 'sound evolving in time' as the spectralists would

³² In his analysis in the *Traité V:1* (p. 377) Messiaen also counts 12 warbler solos. (I counted 12 before reading his account; we both seem to have counted the 'preliminary trials' as solos in themselves.)

³³ Wai-Ling Cheong made this valuable observation during her paper 'Birdsong, Revelation and Messiaen's *Visions de l'Amen*' at the 2008 Messiaen Centenary Conference, illustrating the point with a delightful quotation from *Traité V:1* (p. 18): 'Les oiseaux sont émus par le beauté des couleurs' [the birds are moved by the beauty of the colours]. Solo 8

Example 2.2 The 'couleurs de couchant' chords

Lent (♩=40) (*contemplation extatique*)

later have it. The calls are more virtuosic towards the height of the day, rising to a peak at the end of solo 10. The relationship between the polarized chords and their surroundings is revealed in the set of four chords Messiaen employs to mark the last moments of sunset (the 'couleurs de couchant') (Example 2.2).

This bar settles on an 11-note polarized chord as the sun disappears; the rotational teleology of the hours of the day is summed up in this progression and elaborated in the warbler solos. There is no colour-correspondence suggested in the seventh volume of the *Traité* for a chord as dense as this. It is notable that while Messiaen is a keen advocate of the double-thumb throughout the warbler solos, sometimes to the point of inconvenience, here he is sparing in its advocacy, recommending it only when strictly necessary in order to keep open all options for varying the balance and timbre. The surrounding page (p. 53) is self-contained harmonically: the 'couleurs de couchant' bar is immediately preceded by the nightingale's 12-note *accord à total chromatique*; and the note F# that begins the 'couleurs de couchant' melody is the pitch class missing from the 11-note chord. F# goes on to function as the Blackcap's recitation tone (and the added note in the A major harmony that underpins its song) in the *following* bar. There is goal-orientation even in the slowest *extatique* music.

In other words, the issues of chromatic saturation and integration of tonality into the surrounding harmonic tapestry are well out in the open on this page. I will now deal with each of these in turn to demonstrate Messiaen's command of his language, and argue that the long-awaited task of portraying his home surroundings inspired him to write particularly extraordinary music.

Chromatic Saturation

There is a feature, unmentioned as yet, that is of great significance to spectral composers: continuous progression to and from white noise, or at least extremely

in Table 2.1 gives an example of the warbler also responding to the bird most redolent of sunlight, the Golden Oriole.

complex noises. This is a key part of the landscape in Grisey's *Prologue* and *Partiels* in particular. In Messiaen's case white noise is commensurable with the densest instances of chromatic saturation, sounds that are more homogenous than the registrally separated *accord à total chromatique* (and they do occur).³⁴ In *La Fauvette de jardins* he lets such a sonority impact upon the dynamism of the music at a structural crux.

For the spectralists, when sounds move between harmonic and inharmonic, rhythm is an integral factor. In his article '*Tempus ex Machina*' Grisey describes five types of rhythmic continuity. He lists them as smooth ('rhythmic silence'), statistical ('unpredictability' [sic] of durations, maximum discontinuity), discontinuous-dynamic ('acceleration or deceleration by stages or elision; statistical acceleration or deceleration'), continuous-dynamic ('continuous acceleration or deceleration') and periodic (including the category of 'fuzzy periodicity').³⁵ In his music relatively harmonious sounds often coincide with periodic rhythms, especially in *Les Espaces acoustiques*.

La Fauvette des jardins evades these classifications much of the time, but there is one notable exception. Peter Hill and Harry Halbreich enthuse, with much justification, about p. 49 of *La Fauvette des jardins*,³⁶ a grand plagal manoeuvre that depicts 'the most beautiful hours of the afternoon' (Messiaen's words in the preface). I will discuss this juncture shortly but the passage that immediately precedes it, the 'grandes spirales' of the Black Kite, is also remarkable. Here chromatic saturation gradually reaches its highest pitch and in doing so sets off by far the most extended example of 'continuous-dynamic' transition in the work (in the shape of a drawn-out *molto rallentando* from ♩ = 132 to ♩ = 50: 'The orbs of its flight contract'). The circular flight of the kite, borne on air currents, precedes a definite temporal arrival point (late afternoon), and is unique in that Messiaen uses its motion to turn the wheel of time in front of our eyes, rather than moving sequentially from one episode to the next.³⁷

After claiming that *accelerandi* cause progressive loss of memory (in the local rather than pathological sense), Grisey goes on to say:

With deceleration, *the listener is pulled backwards* since the arrow of musical time had somehow turned in the opposite direction. But because our listener also perceives that the arrow of his own biological time had not changed course, he

³⁴ It is, nonetheless, still possible to hear the constituent colours, even in the case of a sonority such as the foghorn blast in 'Le Courlis Cendré'. See also Grisey, '*Tempus ex Machina*', p. 249.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

³⁶ Hill, 'Piano Music II', p. 347; Harry Halbreich, *Olivier Messiaen* (Paris: Fayard, 1980), pp. 261–2.

³⁷ This episode is a very substantial development of earlier music of the alders and, more obliquely but also more recently, the undulations of the lake.

will oscillate indefinitely between these two senses of time going in opposite but concomitant directions, in a sort of state of *temporal suspension*.³⁸

He nonetheless later concedes that there are as many realities as there are listeners. What one is unquestionably aware of during the *molto rallentando* is the sensation of being parachuted from the uppermost realms of resonance (the Garden Warbler, though it sings consistently high, is never quite *that* high) as the kite descends, back to the *terra firma* of melody and harmony and a re-established sense of temporal orientation.

The passage proceeds from an average of 11 different pitch classes in each bar to an average of 12,³⁹ as shown in Table 2.2. Complete chromatic saturation occurs at the apparent zenith of the flight at the top of p. 47, the *fortississimo* start of the long *rallentando*. The accumulation is systematic and reminiscent of the *personnages rythmiques* technique: the bars that feature all 12 notes appear in 'groups' of one, then two, then one, three, one, three, one and four. The climactic chords take a similar form to the polarized chords of the Garden Warbler solos (Example 2.3).

Example 2.3 Climactic chords of the Black Kite's spiral flight

The musical score for Example 2.3 consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef and the lower staff is in bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#). The time signature is 4/4. The score begins with a piano part marked *ff* and *cresc.*. Above the piano part, there is a marking *rall. (from 2nd time)* and a bracketed section labeled *15^{ma}*. The piano part contains a series of chords that build up in sonority. The treble clef part contains a series of chords that also build up in sonority. The piano part ends with a marking *(x4)*. The score is marked *(ped. sempre)* at the bottom.

The sustaining pedal is required to be depressed, without release, throughout the 'long' bar and the succeeding four climactic bars, building up an immense sonority from the bottom note of the piano (the accumulated pitches are shown in Example 2.6). It is the closest Messiaen gets to the effects of Murail's *Territoires de l'oubli*, where the pedal is held down for the entire 30 minutes of the work.

The concept of entropy is worth mentioning here, as both Murail and Grisey see entropy as an important aspect of spectral awareness. Murail defines it as 'the passage from order to disorder' and relates it to the progression towards white

³⁸ Grisey, 'Tempus ex Machina', p. 249; emphases in original. I do not take this to mean that time *itself* is suspended.

³⁹ There is a maximum of 20 notes in a bar, apart from the one long bar that occupies the last line and a half of p. 46. Sustaining pedal changes are marked at every barline. 'I happen to use the 12 notes in bundles and they sound absolutely unlike a series or a partial series; they sound like colours' (*Music and Color*, p. 49).

Table 2.2 The flight of the Black Kite

‘Grandes Spirales’ of the Black Kite (bar numbers)	Total number of pitch classes in each bar
p. 44 b. 17 – p. 45 b. 6	11 12 11 11 11 11 11 12 12
p. 45 b. 7 – b. 13	11 12 10 11 12 12 12
p. 45 b. 14 – p. 46 b. 5	10 12 10 11 12 12 12
p. 46 b. 6 – b. 10	11 11 11 11 11
p. 46 b. 11 – p. 47 b. 4	12 LONG BAR 12 12 12 12
p. 47 b. 5 – b. 13	11 11 11 6 7 7 7 6 6

noise. Grisey also associates entropy with the gradual erosion of memory in a ‘chronotropic’ process.⁴⁰ Both of these are at play, as we have now seen, in *La Fauvette des jardins*, and Messiaen’s skilful control of them proves essential given the abundance of material.

The polarized structure of the climactic chords is important.⁴¹ It is not uncommon in Messiaen to find passages of birdsong (or music describing birds) that have great structural force, but remarkable that he should find a way to link colour, time and movement in such a complex work, and create a *rapprochement* between the episodic formal texture of much of *La Fauvette* and its most extended passage of continuously evolving music. Overall, a counterpoint of respirational forms is now beginning to emerge: a full-blown arch form for the Garden Warbler, contrasted with various peaks of chromatic saturation or near-saturation, of which the Black Kite transition is by far the most intense. Smaller peaks include the undulating water of the Lac du Laffrey, the Nightingale, and the ‘couleurs du couchant’ as seen above; the encroaching night on the penultimate page, p. 54, is an atonal, *secco*, strung-out example (see Example 2.7).

Whilst these organic processes are doubtless worth observing, it is also necessary to step outside the spectral mindset to see how Messiaen ingeniously links them up with the tonal backdrop of the work.

Tonality and Large-scale Bass Motion

Pianists with *La Fauvette* in their fingers may have had the experience of playing, and enjoying, the final pages many times over before learning the warbler solos. To do so is to become quickly familiar with the poignant variant of the augmented sixth chord on the final page – an ‘Alpine’ augmented sixth (more French than

⁴⁰ Grisey, ‘*Tempus ex Machina*’, p. 273.

⁴¹ Both between and within each hand there is beauty in the way Messiaen breaks this down gently once the ‘*rall. e dim.*’ takes hold.

Italian or German), perhaps? (Example 2.4). Its root is at the beginning of the work, where acoustic space is opened up for the first time (Example 2.5). The richest bar is bar 4, where the lowest B \flat is first sounded; note the appearance of the first white-on-black music above it.

The two long bass notes (C \sharp and B \flat) are prolonged for much of the day and resolve semitonally, from C \sharp to D in the late afternoon and B \flat to A (the lowest note on the instrument) in the final line of the piece. The result is the large-scale

Example 2.4 Messiaen's augmented sixth chord

Example 2.5 *La Fauvette des jardins* – opening

IV–I described earlier; both p. 49 and the final page, p. 55 (where the resolutions occur), are moments of great beauty, colour and intensity. The two black ‘leading’ notes are prolonged in contrasting ways. The C# is replayed several times, though not heard for much of the work’s central section. The B_b is more covert, largely absent in fact – it can be, because large-scale voice-leading is more explicit when it occurs between the two lowest notes of the instrument.

When all the bass notes in this register are shown (they are irregular enough that each sounding is an event), with their dynamics included, a multi-dimensional view of the work’s voice-leading emerges (Example 2.6).

Example 2.6 *La Fauvette des jardins* – contrapuntal voice-leading in the lowest register

page: 1 1 2 3 7 8 12 18 18 42 42 43

44 46 49 49 54 55 55 55 55

↑
'long bar' (black kite)

There is clear teleology here. The contrapuntal voicing shows a ‘tonal’ strand (C# to D) and a strand that supports altogether more diverse harmonies. The most complex sonority is the ‘long bar’ of the Black Kite’s flight, which, when verticalized, displays its own polarization. There is a splash of brilliant colour at its peak (see also Example 2.3), arguably anticipated by the *fortissimo* polarized chords of the warbler’s preceding solo number 11. The dynamics indicate why the final, nocturnal A, though a clear goal, does not need to be played more forcefully than accented *mezzo-forte* (compare with the devastating shards of ‘solemnité de la nuit’ in ‘La Rousserolle effarvatte’, as angular as the hidden skull in Holbein’s *The Ambassadors*, and always landing on the same bottom A, fortississimo). The plagal motion on pp. 46, 49 and 55 is deliberately shown as the coincidence of two strands. There is no great sense of leverage between the final D and final A,

but this does not adversely affect the architectural sweep of the piece. The warmth and power of the second D on p. 49 is highlighted on Yvonne Loriod's 1973 Erato recording, where she seems to play an additional A (a twelfth above the bass), although the third harmonic could be ringing out with exceptional clarity.⁴² Either way, it is a glorious sonority.

Returning to the 'Alpine' augmented sixth chord on the final page,⁴³ the black-and-white topic has a final part to play here, too. The outer notes, B_♭ and G_♯, are set up by the inexorable motion of night drawing in (Example 2.7).

Example 2.7 'la nuit vient'

Their final sounding as darkness closes in is a dyad that will feel familiar to any pianist who plays 'Scarbo'. The pitches are low and quiet enough to be on the limits of audibility, this being the point that the structural threads draw together, when returning to dusk in the lowest register (Example 2.8).

Example 2.8 *La Fauvette des jardins* end of penultimate line

On the final two pages of the score the augmented sixth interval has therefore been heard in three ways: in a bare contrary motion texture at registral extremes; as part of a lush tonal harmony (receptive to much emotional emphasis); and, finally, as a compact summation of polarized warbler harmonies, the motion of the

⁴² Warner Classics 2564 62162-2.

⁴³ This chord is, intriguingly, an augmented sixth in D rather than A.

water and the Black Kite, the oppressiveness of night, and the waxing and waning musical argument of the whole work.

Conclusions

An attitude, whether compositional or analytical, is only a means to an end; the world of the work itself is usually something bigger. Nevertheless, I would argue that spectral awareness in its many guises can and should increase our understanding of music from the decades, or even centuries, before spectralism's apparent inception.

Viewing *La Fauvette des jardins* in this way reveals much about how Messiaen reacted to his environment in musical terms and the breadth of musical language he used to convey it. He was clearly in possession of a keen spectral sensibility,⁴⁴ and able to integrate this expertly with large-scale tonal processes on a sizable canvas. He simulates the hours of the day in both a single 'breath' (the Garden Warbler's evolving song) and a series of musical events of varying intensity, some organic, some less so. The work's naturalism resides in these contrapuntal impressions: nature's inexorable daily cycle, coupled with the smaller-scale events at which we marvel. These simultaneous threads have their own harmonic/timbral characteristics, a crucial condition for Messiaen in ensuring polyphonic intelligibility. Alexander Goehr again comes to mind, here in his admiration for Messiaen's 'masterly' instrumental counterpoint in *Oiseaux exotiques*.⁴⁵

Of all Grisey's reflections in '*Tempus ex Machina*', it is one not immediately related to music that particularly resonates: a hectic day, experienced quickly, can seem lengthy on reflection; an interminable day free of events, the opposite.⁴⁶ The arrow of time does not fly uniformly, particularly when travelling back and forth through musical forms. In his 1980 monograph Harry Halbreich celebrates the richness of the harmonies in *La Fauvette des jardins*.⁴⁷ One can be equally enraptured by richness of temporal experience, without knowing precisely where one stops and the other begins. In no other work of Messiaen is there more, in Grisey's words, 'interplay between fusion and continuity, on one side, and diffraction and discontinuity, on the other'.⁴⁸ There is little doubt that by the time

⁴⁴ His realization of the timbre of the Garden Warbler's song as a constant stream of harmonies is ample evidence of this.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Hill and Simeone, *Olivier Messiaen: Oiseaux Exotiques*, p. 113.

⁴⁶ Messiaen also makes this observation twice in his reflections on time at the beginning of *Traité I*, on pages 10 and 23. He ascribes the theory to the philosopher Armand Cuvillier.

⁴⁷ Halbreich, *Olivier Messiaen*, p. 262.

⁴⁸ See Ferguson, 'De-composing Tristan Murail', p. 118 and the list of spectral quotations from Fineberg, Grisey and Murail early in this chapter.

he composed *La Fauvette* the anxieties of the 1950s were well behind him, and he was secure in what he sensed was his position, poised between unresonant serialism and an emerging sonic organicism. And given what was to come, he was hardly even in the late afternoon of his career.