Christophe Solioz

Catch your breath

Review essay

Christophe Solioz explores the use of 'Pathétique' from Tchaikovsky's sixth symphony in 1395 days without red, a 2011 film project focused on the Siege of Sarajevo, and locates it in the complex 'age of immunology' in which we now live.[1]

The past, when described, written, filmed or set to music, is familiar to us. At the same time, when a book or film seems to uncover the essentials of our daily lives after the event, it does not do so without arousing some uncanny (*unheimlich*) feelings.

The film project *1395 days without red* by Anri Sala and Šejla Kamerić (2011)[2] brings into the present a past which is composed simultaneously of the first movement of Tchaikovsky's sixth and last symphony (1893), the Siege of Sarajevo (1992-1996) and the multiple crises of the emerging twenty-first century, our age of immunology.[3] Thus, three different layers of time are involved.

The Siege of Sarajevo acts as an advance warning of the now-ubiquitous paradigm demonstrated by immunisation: that societies are becoming increasingly compartmentalised communities that tolerate the 'other', the foreign body, only in small doses. Following the same (or a similar) path, biotechnological manipulations of the human body and the logic of vaccination ought to prevail; in this way biopolitics is becoming a shared frame of reference for an order which is as much political as medical.[4]

This new era, which strangely recalls the previous century's 'age of crowds', is a time when:

> Everybody knows about the superior force of enveloping danger. Still, to overcome it: nobody knows where to locate it, nobody knows from which direction it

1 This essay appears simultaneously in French in *Ligeia, dossiers sur l'art* and in the *SEER Journal*, for which it has been specially translated as well as extended with an English-speaking audience in mind.

2 *1395 Days without Red* is a film project by Šejla Kamerić and Anri Sala in collaboration with Ari Benjamin Meyers, starring Maribel Verdú. Conceived, developed and filmed in Sarajevo as a collaborative project, it resulted in two independent films: Šejla Kamerić's *1395 Days without Red* (2011), single channel video, colour, sound, 65 mins; and Anri Sala in collaboration with Liria Bégéja *1395 Days without Red* (2011), single channel video, colour, sound, 43 mins 46 secs.

3 See A. David Napier (2003) *The Age of Immunology* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

4 See Roberto Esposito (2011) *Immunitas. The Protection and Negation of Life* Cambridge: Polity Press.

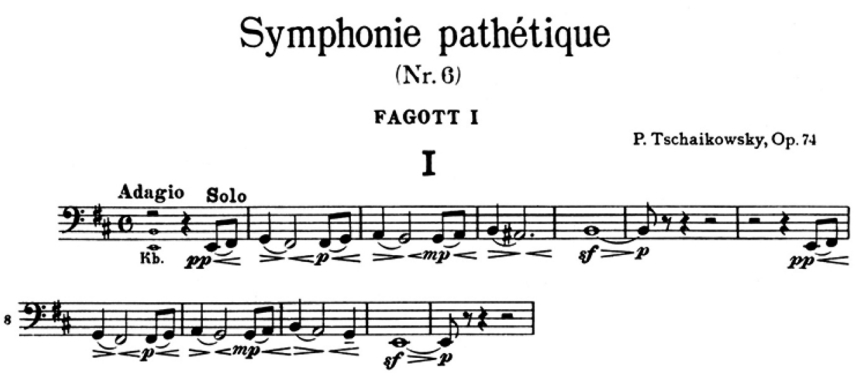
https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2021-1-103, am 12.10.2024, 10:19:06
Open Access – (cc) BY-NC-ND – https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

comes, nobody is really able to look it in the face, nobody is able to really oppose the danger.[5]

Hermann Broch here seizes hold of the spirit that is used as much by the totalitarian regimes of yesteryear as the Sarajevo snipers of the 1990s and, today, by computer viruses and the pandemic that has besieged us and put us into lockdown. Each time, the stake is the same: the body, the memory, and also the memory of the body, and, above all, 'life death' – signifying the paradox that the policy of life as its object becomes a policy of death as its outcome.[6] During the Siege of Sarajevo, crossing roads, walking through 'Sniper Alley', was to shake hands with 'life death'.

That the specific context of the Siege is only suggested in the film, together with the absence of any dialogue, heightens the image of a musician crossing Sarajevo to the TV hall at the other end of the city to join her orchestra for a rehearsal. At each crossroads, her progress is interrupted: a moment of silently waiting. In order to escape the sniper fire, you have to wait for the right moment to cross, holding your breath, then grab your chance with both hands and set off. Arriving on the other side, you breathe out and continue on your way. Experiencing the city as a movement over road crossings is structured on several levels by repetition, the fabric of the city joining the phrasing of the musician's score.

The particularity of this movement, the musician's breathing literally producing the sound – her instrument is a bassoon – gradually recovers the memory of the score: what is at first only hummed takes shape and asserts itself, continuing to gain strength and conviction. We then recognise the 'Pathétique' which begins, we should remember, with a bassoon solo drawn from the lower register – a sombre and plaintive *adagio*, a muffled murmur. The theme that follows is taken up in breathtaking fashion in the first movement in the *allegro non troppo*.



5 Herman Broch (1979 [1939]) 'Proposal for the Foundation of a Research Institute for Political Psychology and Study of the Manifestation of Mass Hysteria,' text from early 1939 published as the first chapter of his unfinished work *Massenwahntheorie* Frankfurt: Suhrkamp.

6 See Jacques Derrida (2020) *Life Death* Chicago: University of Chicago Press; and Roberto Esposito (2008) *Bios. Biopolitics and Philosophy* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2021-1-103, am 12.10.2024, 10:19:06
Open Access – (cc) BY-NC-ND - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

The inevitably jolted rhythm, dictated by the fabric of the city and the 'war logic' of the Siege, tears apart the phrases rendered by the bassoonist the melody of which is, nevertheless, being simultaneously preserved by the Sarajevo Philharmonic. The juxtaposition of these two elements within the same score – that is to say, the score hummed by the bassoonist and the one played by the Orchestra – at first dislocated but then gradually brought together, creates a 'singular plural' space[7] in which the bassoonist and the city become one, towing the concert-goer along in its wake.[8] For the bassoonist herself, it is also the city that is catching its breath, its arteries once again pulsating to the rhythm of music – the city which, in defiance of those that would destroy it, comes back to itself and to life.

The key element of the film, the humming produced only for one's self, like 'hearing oneself speak', stems from independent and basic self-experience (auto-affection). Below reflection is a self-awareness: an experience of 'my own', of self; an absolute experience of oneself that is both immediate and contrary to other experiences (for example the experience of 'otherness') that are mediated. In Husserl's view, both breath and voice offer a model for 'an absolutely pure auto-affection'. Furthermore this experience is related to the experience of the 'living present.' But this 'now point' is 'thick' as it includes the immediate memory of the now that has just elapsed and the anticipation of the now that is about to appear (thus creating layers of time).[9]

As the Philharmonic is playing in this same dimension, the bassoonist meets the orchestra long before she joins it. Thus, the film composes this 'singular plural' space that allows an encounter between pure auto-affections without the assistance of any external force: an experience that everyone can reproduce by listening to an interpretation of 'Pathétique' while, at the same time, humming along to it.

The above-mentioned purity of the auto-affection of the voice facilitates self-awareness and tends towards a theme of universality: a process that Hermann Broch sums up as follows:

> What distinguishes this supra-rational universalised knowledge contains *a priori* lived experience, an immediacy and breadth of life which remain, so to speak, inaccessible to rational knowledge.[10]

In one sense, this is about composing along with the city, or recomposing its score, but it is more than just that. To familiarise oneself with the unspeakable, to find again that breath of 'pure differential vibration' evoked by Jacques Derrida:

> You dream, it's unavoidable, about the invention of a language or of a song that would be yours, not the attributes of a 'self', rather the accentuated paraph, that is, the musical signature of your most unreadable history. I'm not talking about a

7 See Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) *Being Singular Plural* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

8 Anri Sala developed this approach in collaboration with Ari Benjamin Meyers in *The Breathing Line* (2012).

9 I refer here to the Husserl phenomenology as presented by Jacques Derrida (2010) *Voice and Phenomenon* Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

10 Herman Broch (2005 [1934]) *Logique d'un monde en ruine* Paris: Éditions de l'éclat, p. 10 – text originally published in 1934 in tribute to Arnold Schönberg.

https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2021-1-103, am 12.10.2024, 10:19:06
Open Access – (cc) BY-NC-ND – https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb

style but an intersection of singularities, habitat, voices, graphism, what moves with you and what your body never leaves.[11]

Neither fiction nor documentary, Anri Sala and Šejla Kamerić's project belongs to the art of the fragment, 'the in-finite explosion of the finite.'[12] They do this by masterfully staging the 'city effect': 'that which the city does and that which makes it – but also that which undoes it', in the process putting it back together.[13] Each city has its words, its language, its writings and also its music. Words, discourse and gesture, writings and graffiti[14] – the scores are all cartographic palimpsests of our urban space.

Christophe Solioz is a political scientist, philosopher and leader of the nomadic MAP (Multiplex Approach) network, based in Geneva. www.christophesolioz.ch.

© Christophe Solioz

11 Jacques Derrida (1995) *Points… Interviews 1974-1994* Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 119.

12 Jean-Luc Nancy (1997) *The Sense of the* World Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 132.

13 See Jean-Christophe Bailly (2013) *La phrase urbaine* Paris: Seuil, p. 8; and Christophe Solioz (2017) 'L'effet ville Sarajevo' in Pierre Courtin, Pierre-Philippe Freymond and Christophe Solioz (Eds) *Sarajevo l'*a*tribu*t de l'art* Paris: Riveneuve éditions, pp. 5-7.

14 See Christophe Solioz (2020) 'Sarajevo à livre ouvert' *Urbanisme* 418, pp. 28-35.

https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2021-1-103, am 12.10.2024, 10:19:06
Open Access – BY-NC-ND - https://www.nomos-elibrary.de/agb