From Intermedial Music to Interactive Multimedia Event: the Performance of Ravel's *Miroirs*

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ABSTRACT: The intermedial interplay between music, image and text in French Impressionist music has the potential to fuel original and innovative multimedia performances, but the contextual and theoretical analysis of the multimedia reformatting of such traditional concert repertoire has yet to be made. Addressing problems of musical ontology and musical hermeneutics which are at the heart of today's contemporary classical music performance culture, I focus on the aesthetic consequences of a move from implicit intermediality to explicit multimediality in the performance of Ravel's collection for piano solo, *Miroirs*. So doing, I seek to redefine the artistic function of the performer and sow the seeds of a theory of the multimedia piano recital.

Keywords: multimedia, performance practice, music, intermedial, Impressionism, Ravel.

RESUMEN: La interacción entre música, imagen y texto en la música impresionista francesa tiene el suficiente potencial para originar representaciones multimedia innovadoras, sin embargo, queda aún por hacer el necesario análisis contextual y teórico del reformateado multimedia de tal repertorio clásico para concierto. Partiendo de cuestiones de ontología y hermenéutica musical que constituyen el eje central de la cultura de la interpretación musical contemporánea, se exploran las consecuencias estéticas de sustituir una intermedialidad implícita por una multimedia explícita en la interpretación de la colección de solos para piano de Ravel, *Miroirs*. De esta manera, se intenta redefinir la función artística del interprete y sentar las bases de una teoría multimedia para los conciertos de piano.

Palabras clave: multimedia, práctica interpretativa musical, intermedialidad, impresionismo, Ravel.

1. Introduction

> When I hear of a director speaking glibly of serving the author, of letting a play speak for itself, my suspicions are aroused, because this is the hardest job of all. If you just let a play speak, it may not make a sound. If what you wish is for a play to be heard, you must conjure its sounds from it.
>
> Peter Brook

The classical piano recital is probably one of the most well-defined artistic events in contemporary performance practice. Very rarely do musicians depart from the traditional formal concert format, i.e. a musical performance in which the pianist is expected to solely play the piano and the audience, to listen intently to the music being played. The darkened confines of a concert hall make it so that the very space of the performance itself is negated. The music, and the music only, is the focus of attention. In this context, «music alone» (Kivy, 1990) reigns supreme, as, in true 19th Century fashion, absolute music, or «abstract concert music» as Cook (1998: vii) will term it, is still widely thought of in terms of being the «purest» form of musical expression there is, when compared to programme or descriptive music, deemed trivial or superficial because relating to *extra*-musical elements. Suzanne K. Langer (1951: 242), for example, considers the titles, which lead the audience to listen imaginatively, as being helpful but non-essential «crutches» for those listeners incapable of enjoying the music as it should be, i.e. for itself and in itself. These extra-musical elements are thus often played down in performance. The titles of the pieces are rarely presented to the audience as part of the performance itself, but merely as adjuncts, written on a programme which nobody can read in the darkness of the concert hall. Similarly, a pre-concert talk is not a multimedia event as such: it is usually marketed as an optional extra, an educational lecture for those who wish to attend an informed presentation about the music, its history, its context and it is usually separate from the performance itself. It has the same role and function as the programme notes. A lecture, even within the context of a lecture-recital alternating speaking and playing, is still not performative in the way a multimedia rendering of the piece would be. Unlike the other traditional per-forming arts, theatre, ballet or opera, which are multimedia in essence, an instrumental recital is not. Indeed, etymologically, the word «multimedia» refers, in a given artwork, to the *concomitant* presence of the different raw materials, or, «media», which are used in each art form. Our attention is thus split between the different media of the work, the acoustic (or musical) medium,

the visual medium and/or the linguistic (or literary) medium, all contributing equally to the effect of the performance as a whole. In a traditional piano recital, the visual is restricted to the physical appearance of the performer on stage and is very much perceived to be secondary to, and distinct from, the music being performed, even though some aspects of the performer's appearance can contribute to the general ambience of the event. The artist's stage presentation, facial expressions and clothing, including concerts performed in period costume in historical locations, could contribute to a (limited) multimedia *mise-en-scène* of the persona or figure of the «musician», but not of the music itself.

This does not mean, however, that the music performed is not potentially multimedia in its own right, if only from its intermedial qualities. Whereas the term «intermediality» describes an implicit cross-pollination or an explicit presence of several media within a work of art (Wolf, 1999: 46-47), the word «multimedia» refers exclusively to a work of art which draws explicitly on multiple media. In such a way, multimedia is necessarily intermedial but intermediality is not always multimedia. Very often, the *matière première* of instrumental music, the musical scores, are not simply pages of musical notation but also contain non-musical elements such as titles, poems and extra-musical references, which give an extra-musical meaning to the music but are often dispensed with in performance, even though such intermedial features are intended to enhance the listener's experience of the music. Much of the French Impressionist piano repertoire, for instance, with its rich and varied literary or pictural associations, would give itself readily to a multimedia performance, but even so, the performance itself of such music has only recently started to become multimedia in its concert presentation, be it a live event or a televised broadcast, with varying degrees of success. Multimedia recitals which engage the audience on a visual plane as well as a purely musical plane within a multidimensional performance space, are the exception rather than the norm, despite the fact that our society is more and more dominated by the visual, and despite the fact that the opportunity and scope for a multimedia reformatting of the traditional piano recital are considerable, in particular when the music itself programmatically draws on intermedial principles.

Surprisingly, no critical analysis of the emerging concept of «multimedia recital» has been attempted and it seems that, very often, these events are initiated as one-off performances by musical practitioners – the concert managers, festival directors, performers and artists – , and have, as yet, to be the focus of a critical analysis by musicologists and philosophers of music. Theoretical studies of the concept of musical multimedia focus, for the most part, on the role of music in film or video, such as Nicholas Cook's (1998) study of «musical multimedia», whilst the widespread study of «intermediality» in music is

concerned primarily with textual analyses of the relations between words and music in vocal scores such as song or opera, and rarely ventures into the domain of the actual performance of these genres. A study and theory of the more problematic multimedia reformatting of performances of the traditional instrumental repertoire has yet to be made.

I propose to analyse the aesthetic modalities of this new performance practice and sow the seeds of a theory of multimedia piano recital. The problems I shall be investigating are central to today's contemporary «classical» music performance culture. Addressing questions of musical ontology as well as musical hermeneutics, I will focus on some aspects of the performance of Maurice Ravel's collection for piano solo, *Miroirs* (Mirrors), in order to redefine the artistic function of the performer so that he/she may better address the realities of an ever-shifting social context which has undergone, in recent times, a dramatic cultural change. I will be looking in particular at the ways one can transform an intermedial piece of music into a multimedia performance.

2. The Context: Multimediality and the Popular Visual Culture

Before we may speak of the actual format of the multimedia instrumental recital, we must ask ourselves what the aesthetic consequences of a move towards a multimedia performance are, by defining more clearly why and how, in today's cultural context, we listen to classical music, and what we expect from a musical performance. Only then will we be able to explore the ways musicians may redefine the modalities of live performance in order to revitalize the music scene and make the live classical music experience more significant in today's society.

The music industry and new technologies have undeniably affected our experience of live classical music today, but this is rarely taken into account in contemporary classical music performance practice. Whereas live «background» music has always existed to a certain point – from the private orchestras providing dinner entertainment in Europe's royal courts to dance music, military music or even fairground music, the advent of the gramophone, record player and now, the all-pervading digital multimedia technologies, make music all the more accessible in more and more varied contexts: from the piped Mozart piano concerto at the local restaurant to the classical music used on film soundtracks, and the portable MP3 players we listen to while we work, we are getting used to continuously hearing music within a multimedia context, when, until very recently, music was meant to be only heard on its own, in recitals and concerts. As a consequence, music is increasingly relegated to a background role,

hovering on the very edge of our conscious minds while we go about our daily activities. The sonic is no longer sufficient to maintain our full attention as its role is now to fill in the underlying silence of our primarily visual lives, becoming a pleasant accompaniment but not a finality in itself. As Hanns Eisler already remarked in 1935, at the very start of the audio-visual revolution,

> the crisis in modern music has been brought about mainly by the growth in technical devices. The radio, gramophone and sound film have created a completely new situation. The concert compared to the sound film is just as old-fashioned as the mailcoach compared with the airplane. Sound film and radio are destroying the old forms of music listening. (Eisler, 1996 [1935]: 167)

And this, even more so, today. This leads us to ask, what place does the traditional classical piano recital have in this cultural context? How can we redefine the concert platform to create music for the eyes as well as the ears? Paradoxically, we rate music according to an «ideology of musical autonomy» (Cook, 1998: vi) even though musical autonomy is no longer viable in today's visual musical culture. As Cook (1998: vii) has pointed out, «the truth is that music is booming: but it is booming outside music theory» – and we may add, outside the traditional concert format –, in the multimedia context of popular culture.

3. The Problem of the Musical Artwork in Performance

Needless to say, to speak of a musical «artwork» is a problem in itself, and one which has elicited many debates as musicologists and musicians have endlessly argued as to what, in fact, is the definitive musical artwork: the silent music of the score (the only token of the usually long-dead composer's intentions), or the audible performance of this score, which can only happen through the bias of a potentially unreliable third party, the performer (Kivy, 2004: 78-93). The question of the ontological status of the musical «artwork» is at the crux of our study.

Only a few listeners have the skills which allow them to silently hear the intricacies of a whole symphony by simply reading the score. For the majority, music is undeniably meant to be heard and therefore, performed, and the interpretative decisions of the performers are, at best, to be tolerated, as they can only approximate the composer's intentions. A catch-22 situation if any: if we dispense with the performer, we cannot hear the music, but if we wish to hear the music, we need the performer. However, one usually speaks of a «good» performance as one which is not only true to the composer's intentions (as they

appear in the first instance in the score, but also in the paratextual evidence, in our knowledge of stylistic trends and historical performance practice, for instance) but still brings the music to life, makes it speak so that it makes sense to us, and ultimately, makes us listen. As such, the *performance* of music is inscribed within a contemporary cultural context, even though the music itself may belong to a different cultural context. The music (and the musical performance) is, after all, destined to be heard by «us», the audience, here and now. The performers have a crucial role in this process as only they are attuned to the contemporary aesthetic dynamics of the collective cultural consciousness of which they themselves are a part. Only they can make «us» listen to the music of the past. The performers find themselves torn between their responsibility towards the score, written at a given moment in time, within a given social context with its own aesthetic conventions, and their responsibility towards an audience whose tastes and expectations vary greatly from decade to decade. It is on this delicate interface between score and performance, composer's intentions and performer's interpretation, that one should question the aesthetics of contemporary multimedia performance practice.

If we are to address the problem of what Tagg (2000: 164) has described as the increasing «petrification» of the traditional piano recital format, the result of an ultra-conservative «institutionalization» of conservatoire training, we need to work out how to move away from the traditional concert presentation of what have become culturally and socially alienated «deep-frozen [...] sacrosanct works» (Tagg, 2000: 165) towards a socially contextualized, up-to-date multimedia re-interpretation of the canon, thus shifting the critical focus away from the musical «text» towards a musical artwork whose essence lies in its performance. In the domain of literary aesthetics, Wolfgang Iser (2001, [1980]: 180) described the literary «work» as situated within a «virtual» space between the author's «text» and the subjective «actualization» or «realization» of this text by the reader. In the case of music, this «virtual» space is undeniably that of the performance itself – a three way interaction between score, performer and audience. The musical «artwork» is eminently «virtual» as it cannot be reduced to a single, simple entity: it is multidimensional and multimedial and it is in constant flux as it evolves on the very threshold between past and present (see Figure 1 below). Only by reinterpreting classical music within a contemporary audience-performance dynamic will the classical music scene live on into the 21st Century.
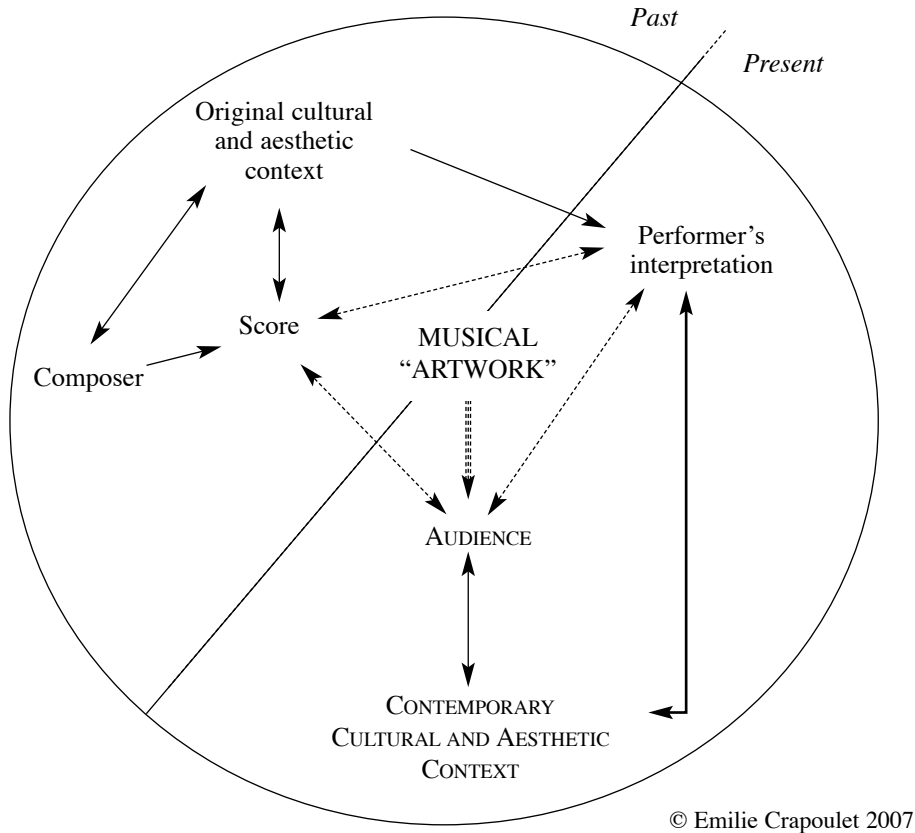
Figure 1. The musical artwork as performance

More often than not, multimedia works are contemporary creations and the result of a collaboration between an artist, a performer and a living composer, the work conceived from the start with a multimedia performance in mind. One such work is HPSCHD, a collaboration between John Cage and Lejaren Hiller, for 7 harpsichords, 51 tapes of computer generated sounds, 5000 slides of abstract designs, and twelve film projections, all «performing» simultaneously (Sitsky, 2002: 208). More problematic is the case when performers seek to bring to life non-musical or programmatic aspects of music which was not conceived in a multimedia way in the first place. The final multimedia result departs necessarily, from the composer's original intentions (especially if the work was composed at a time when the concept of «multimedia performance» hadn't yet come into practice). In the first case, the medial facets are conceived interdependently, collaboratively, with the final effect in mind from the very beginning and the final work would not make sense without the presence of all

its medial facets. In the second case, we are dealing with an association of media which are in themselves not necessarily primarily meant to be performed together and which can be appreciated in their own right on their own, and as such, are dispensable in relation to the original non-multimedia work. Before undertaking a multimedia performance of a non-multimedia work, it is therefore essential to ask ourselves what the role of these associated media is. To complement each other, to reflect on each other, or, as Nicholas Cook (1998, vi) posits, to diverge? And where would the «work» be situated? To «whom» should it be attributed – the original composer or the performers and artists who are, in fact, freely «interpreting» the composer's intentions? In a context of a multimedia performance of a piece written originally for piano solo, for example, it would seem that the pianist's interpretation of the score would therefore be merely one version of the score: medially, the acoustic version. It would rest with a narrator or a visual artist to explicitly bring to light the (implicit) intermedial qualities of the music: their interpretation would thus become a non-acoustic version of the score, be it visual or narrative (linguistic and literary), of the same performative value as that of the pianist. Would we then need to entitle such multimedia events as «Ravel's *Miroirs*, in an interpretation by pianist so-and-so and visual artist so-and-so», in a sort of *mise en abyme* of an increasingly elusive work of art, in constant mutation as we witness multiple, superimposed «versions» of the score: the performer's, the artist's, the musical, the visual, the multimedial, our own? What would be the aesthetic repercussions of such a move?

Undoubtedly, for many composers of programme music, the function of the title was to facilitate an imaginative response to the music, to make the audience hear the pieces in terms of images, scenes and narratives. As such, its function was very much intermedial but the multimedia aspects remained implicit –the music, with or without the title, was enough to create a visual or emotional response to what are in fact, medially, only acoustic phenomena. In today's visual culture however, faced with music only, many would feel lost in a concert situation and would need to be prompted to listen with such imagination. If Eisler (1996 [1935]: 168) could say in 1935, at a moment when film was hardly the mass-produced, easily accessible product it has become today, that «sound film is making the masses unaccustomed to listening to music in the abstract but accustomed to seeing pictures of real life while they hear music», where does that leave us today? Contemporary musical culture is increasingly determined by our cinematographic experiences of music, and influenced by the multimedia presentation of the video clips of most popular music (Aufderheide, 1986; Frith, 2004). It is creating a visually determined culture of musical semiotics. For many, listening to a classical concert today is very much like looking at a film without being given the images – quite absurd, if one thinks of it in those terms.

Indeed, the music known as «programme music» is also called «descriptive» music and as such, is very close to being film music without the film, i.e. music with a non-musical subject, which can suggest a narrative, a scene, an atmosphere. «Programme» music can roughly be defined as music which has a title, a story, a poem, an image, a musical quotation or any other reference in the score itself, or in the author's stated intentions as to that score, to an extra-musical element to be taken as an indication of the meaning or purport of the music, usually in relation to the type of atmosphere, the mood or the scene which the composer was seeking to evoke.

Very often, the extra-musical references in programme music are complex and function on multiple levels which are rarely brought to light in performance and consequently go unnoticed by the audience, even though the performers themselves are well-aware of their aesthetic significance. Such extra-musical elements could, however, easily be the basis of a multimedia performance. Ravel's *Miroirs* and Debussy's *Préludes*, are examples in case. Both books contain pieces with titles and other extra-musical elements which suggest going beyond the musical towards visualizations. Only by starting to question what the intermedial nature of these pieces is, can one start to conceive of a multimedia interpretation of them. We need, in particular, to ask ourselves, what the aesthetic function of the titles is. To whom are the titles, attached poems and extra-musical elements addressed, the performer or the audience? To what extent should the audience be told about the music's visual, narrative or emotional associations indicated by the extra-musical elements; and to what extent should the performer take into account the *intertextual* references of the titles' literary allusions? For example, the title of Debussy's fourth prelude from Book I, «Les sons et les parfums tournent dans l'air du soir» is taken from Baudelaire's poem, «Harmonie du Soir», but the whole poem is not given to us. Should the performer make references to the whole of Baudelaire's poem in this case? On the other hand, Aloysius's Bertrand's poems, «Ondine», «Le Gibet» and «Scarbo», taken from his 1845 collection *Gaspard de la Nuit – Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* are all printed in full alongside Ravel's musical triptych, *Gaspard de la Nuit*. To what extent do these extra-musical elements belong to the performance as does the music itself and to what extent are these simply indications which are intended to help the performers shape their own musical interpretation? In which manner can the extra-musical elements be brought to light in a concert situation? And finally, what is the potential for a *performative* presentation of the extra-musical elements which would suggest to the audience (new) ways of listening to the music rather than telling them how to listen as do the programme notes, pre-concert lectures or lecture-recitals?

4. Through the Looking-glass: from Intermediality to Multimedia Performance in Ravel's *Miroirs*

Maurice Ravel's collection of piano pieces, *Miroirs* (1904-1905), appears at first view to make very good multimedia material. It has the visual, the narrative and the musical elements all already present within the very score. How could these intermedial aspects be brought to light convincingly in a multimedia presentation of the collection?

Miroirs is a collection of five pieces. Programmatically, they are quite unrelated, from the first, «Noctuelles» (Moths), to «Oiseaux Tristes» (Mournful Birds), «Une Barque sur l'Océan» (A Boat on the Ocean), «Alborada del Gracioso» (Morning Song of the Jester), and finally «La Vallée des Cloches» (The Valley of the Bells). Each piece is very distinctive and the music clearly relates to the title. The relation between music and other artistic media was undoubtedly in Ravel's mind as he dedicated the pieces to members of the group of artists known as the «Apaches», including a painter (Paul Sordes), a poet and a writer (Leon-Paul Fargue, Michel de Calvocoressi) and a composer and a pianist (Maurice Delage, Ricardo Viñes). The second piece of the book, «Oiseaux Tristes», which Ravel (1928: 30) thought was the most «typical» of his new style, and the last piece, «La Vallée des Cloches», could both be said to be painting in sound. They both have a particularly distinctive programme based on a musical rendering of (non-musical) sounds: «Oiseaux Tristes» is an evocation of mournful birds, and indeed, the repeated opening arpeggiated right-hand figurations are similar to a pianistic transcription of a melodic, and to our ears, mournful-sounding, bird-song (see figure 2, bars 1-3). One thinks here also of Messiaen's *Catalogue des Oiseaux* (Catalogue of the Birds), composed 1956-58, in which he literally transcribed for piano different existing birdsongs. Ravel's figuration is not as «scientific» in its handling but is nevertheless recognizable as birdsong. In fact, many people would not even need the title to recognize such a reference to birds. In the paratextual material, another extra-musical allusion extends and develops the descriptive indications of the title. Ravel (1928: 30) is indeed known to have said in his recollections that he thought of this piece during a walk through the forest of Fontainebleau, adding that he wished to evoke «birds lost in the torpor of a very sombre forest, during the hottest hours of summertime». The isolation of the birds is emphasized throughout by the repetition of individual song-patterns. The mournfulness and sadness of the atmosphere is furthermore conveyed by musical motifs which are traditionally associated with melancholy and which a musically cultured Western audience would easily identify: minor keys, dissonance, falling minor thirds, chromaticism, etc. The slow tempo and the continuous and quasi-static bass pedal note are suggestive of motionlessness and torpor, and the continuously

alternating seconds in the central voices (figure 2, bars 4-8) create a close breathless atmosphere. In the score itself, Ravel writes of the final chords, *sombre et lointain*, dark and distant, a further indication of the mood he wished the performer to achieve.

Figure 2. Maurice Ravel, «Oiseaux Tristes» (1904-1905, 1986: 49, bars 1 to 9)

«La Vallée des Cloches», on the other hand, takes advantage of the piano's bell-like sound qualities to suggest a counterpoint of bells as they echo and intermingle through the resonant space of a valley whose very space is made «visible» by the fact that some bells sound closer (louder), some more distant (softer), and others echo away from us into what seems like the distant depths of the valley. «Noctuelles» and «Une Barque sur l'Océan» («A Boat on the Ocean») share another typical musical «image» - that of waves: the flight of the moths and the boat bobbing on the swell. Waves are not literally present in the music but they are suggested by traditional musical symbolism and extra-

musical allusions which bring the image of waves to mind, and can be analyzed so as to explain why they resemble a wave: the title, «A Boat on the Ocean», suggests water – we therefore expect to hear wave-like motions in sound, the arabesque on the score visually looks like a wave, and the sounds themselves, ascending and descending arpeggios, mimic the motion of waves. In the case of «Noctuelles», waves of water have become waves of air. Ravel quotes a line above the score from a poem by Léon-Paul Fargue: «Les noctuelles d'un hangar partent, d'un vol gauche, Cravater d'autres poutres» (the moths in a barn take off in awkward flight to cluster round other beams) – and again, the wave-like motion of the flight of the moths, their «perchings» on other beams is suggested by the music, an alternance of quick ascending figurations and sudden periods of stillness and silence. The combination of the descriptive music and the explicit title makes us clearly «see» moths in the music. «Alborada del Gracioso», on the other hand, is strikingly different from the other pieces inasmuch as it draws on yet another medium: the literary. More than simply an evocation of atmosphere, the music tells a story, that of a jester, appearing on the scene and briefly dancing (first section), followed by a moment of calm while he sings his song (central melodic section significantly marked «*expressif en récit*», recited with expression), then dancing off in the third and final section. The syncopated dance rhythms, the «saeta» melody, the castagnettes-sounds and the guitar strumming, all suggest a Spanish background.

So far, we have shown how the music functions on the visual as well as the acoustic level, from a purely intermedial perspective. However, the fact, often overlooked, that Ravel's *Miroirs* are meant to go beyond these representative elements, must, crucially, be taken into account if the multimedia performance of the music is to be convincing, or else the associated medial presentations will remain superficial and simplistic. Indeed, mirrors do not only reflect, they also distort and alter the images, and one may choose to go through the looking-glass into a world of translucent shadows, colours and shapes. The title *Miroirs* thus paradoxically puts into question the more visual aspects of the very music it is referring to. The fascination of most artists at the turn of the XXth Century for reflective surfaces is well-known. Many paintings of the period capture the interesting mirror-effects of water, the most famous of which are Monet's «Water Lilies» series whose focus is less on the realistic representation of waterlilies than on the interplay of the shapes, colours and textures of the reflected clouds, trees and waterlilies, which also serve to make visible the very surface of the water itself and give depth and perspective to the whole painting (figure 3). If one looks at Monet's «Water Lilies» – one may choose to see the water, the lake, the lilies, the trees on the banks and the reflected clouds, but one may also choose to go «through» the looking-glass, and appreciate the patterns of colours, lines and textures. In the same way, music has the ability to be both

descriptive and non-descriptive and Ravel's choice of title, *Miroirs*, mirrors, is particularly revealing: one minute we «see» the moths flying up towards a beam and gently alighting, we feel the swell of the ocean's waves, the loneliness of the birds lost in a forest, the depths of a narrow valley and we are even transported into a sunny Spanish village at dawn. The next however, we hear pure sound, textures and sonic colours and enjoy them for what they are, a fascinating abstract kaleidoscope of sound.
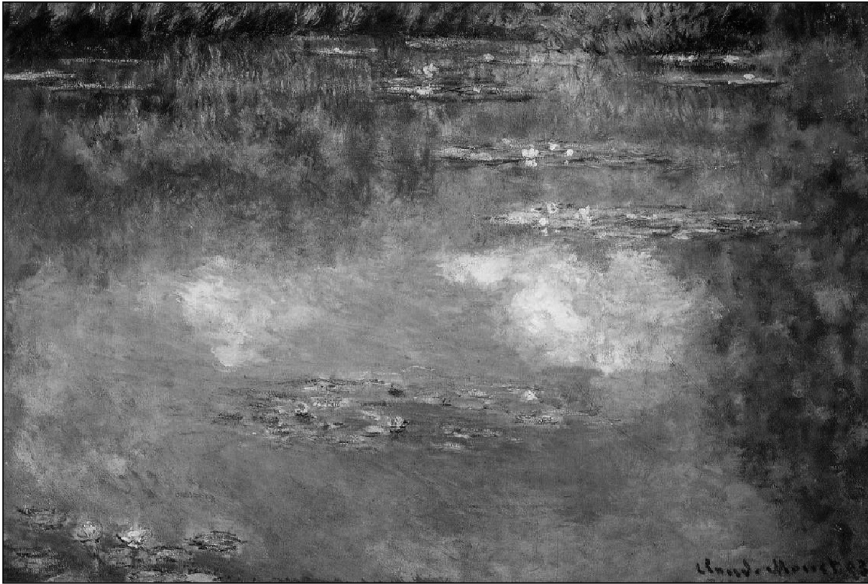

Figure 3. Claude Monet, *Water Lilies (The Clouds)*, 1903; Oil on canvas, 74.6 x 105.3 cm (29 3/8 x 41 7/16 in); Private collection

This duality in Ravel's music between the representative aspects and the abstract qualities of the music is what makes these pieces so special, as we can freely move our attention from the «visible» – the images and the narrative - to the purely musical – the textures, sounds and rhythms - at will. In such a way, a literal translation of the programmatic elements of the music into other media may not be satisfactory as we would be emphasizing the visible over the musical, even though the first, and most obvious way which many performers transform these pieces into multimedia productions, is by playing the music whilst projecting or exhibiting paintings (usually taken from French Impressionism) and reciting (Symbolist) poems. But will not a juxtaposition of paintings/poems and music only serve to emphasize the *representative* aspects of the piece to the detriment of the more abstract sonic qualities of the music? The

visual, in particular when it is representative, because it is obvious, always has a stronger impact on our imaginations than the acoustic, and the danger is of the music becoming the accompaniment for the visual representation.

To test the value and role of the visual in a multimedia performance of French Impressionist piano music, I conducted the following experiment:[1] I performed three pieces of different styles, genres and purport: a Bach «Prelude and Fugue», Chopin's *Fantaisie-Impromptu* in C minor, and Debussy's «Jardins sous la Pluie» (Gardens in the Rain). The first two come from within a tradition of absolute music and the last is quite obviously programme music. I did not tell the audience anything about the pieces, they did not have programmes – they knew neither the composer's names, the styles nor the title, in the case of the Debussy. The audience was then asked to write down their thoughts as to their response to the music. My interest, of course, was in their experience of the Debussy and strangely enough, even though most of the participants were not familiar in any way with this music and did not know the aesthetic and cultural context in which it was composed, they still responded visually, and in some cases actually «saw» waterfalls and rain when listening to the Debussy. Several of them, however, also felt the energy of the piece, the life and vitality of the rhythms, the varied textures and musical colours – in fact, they heard it as absolute music, as pure pattern in sound, to be enjoyed as such. I then gave them the title, the context, the associations, both literary and musical, and I played the piece again. Interestingly, whilst some of those who heard it in terms of abstract patterns could now «see» the water and the narrative elements as well as the abstract qualities, others felt very much constrained by their knowledge of the programme because it literally «deafened» them to the purely musical qualities of the music. As a result, it appears that the performer needs to find a compromise – a way to guide those whose listening experiences come from a culture of hearing film music towards listening with imagination whilst not upsetting the ones who are used to listening to music, and who may do so in a purely aesthetic manner.

1.　This experiment was conducted within the context of the *Learning for a Complex World: Facilitating Enquiry Conference*, 2007, hosted by the University of Surrey SCEPTrE Centre (Surrey Centre for Excellence in Professional Training and Education) with the title: «Music as a stimulus for enquiry, a concert pianist's perspective: A musical experience combining recital with enquiry-rich conversation with an approach to visualise the collective consciousness». I gratefully acknowledge the participation of Dr. David Hay (Kings College, London), who helped with the «concept mapping» which was used to bring to light the response of the audience. Further details of this event can be found on the conference's «wiki»: <www.complexworld.pbwiki.com>.

5. Conclusion

A multimedia recital of French Impressionist piano music would need to emphasize the concrete/abstract duality so that the effect of the whole expresses the very essence of the music. The audience must feel that by going beyond the visual, they are one step closer to an essence hidden behind the appearances, an essence which transcends traditional representation. Why did Ravel write a piece about moths, about birds, about bells or boats? Why did Debussy compose preludes about heather, mist and fireworks? These subjects were taken as mere pretexts, tokens of a reality hidden behind the superficial appearances of our everyday life, a reality which we, as individuals, create in our own imaginations.

A multimedia work should stimulate our imagination by suggesting ways to go beyond the obvious, beyond the appearances, and as a consequence, any visualizations must also go beyond their representative nature to reveal, as the music does, the tension between concrete and abstract – the effable and the ineffable. Music, by its very nature, «suggests» and rarely «shows» whereas the visual «shows» and rarely «suggests». A multimedia production must base itself on this very duality, the revealing *versus* the hiding, the showing *versus* the suggesting. This makes it difficult to give a «recipe» for a successful multimedia interpretation of Ravel's *Miroirs* but I would paradoxically suggest that rather than juxtaposing works of art or literature with musical compositions and calling this a «multimedia» performance, we should reflect instead on how the dynamics of the abstract qualities of the music, rather than the all too overpowering representative aspects, can be enhanced and brought to light with the help of other media in performance. Only then would we be truly able to listen to the music with our ears and our eyes and our imagination.

Wolfgang Iser, in a text about communication in literature, spoke of reading in a way which could be applied to the dynamics of an interactive, multimedia piano recital:

> What is concealed spurs the reader into action, but this action is also controlled by what is revealed; the explicit in its turn is transformed when the implicit has been brought to light. Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence, the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text. (Iser, 2001 [1980]: 182)

Replace «reader» by «audience», and «text» by «multimedia performance», and we have here an aesthetic approach which would involve today's increasingly passive audience in the very act of performance through an interactive imaginative response. As the director and scenographer Robert

Wilson (1996 [1983]: 385) perceptively said, «it's very difficult to see and hear at the same time and mostly we do one or the other. What I try to do in all my work is make a balance between what you hear and what you see, so that perhaps you can do both at the same time».

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