THE TRANSLATION OF THE *TRAITÉ DES OBJETS MUSICAUX*

Over the last twenty years, the GRM has felt the need for an English version of the *Traité des objets musicaux*. Schaeffer's ideas keep spreading, and scholars often work on his writings in French or mostly quote sentences and concepts from his work. It was clear from the beginning of the project in 2005 that this task was too long and complex for a single person. This is why, knowing their excellent work in translating Schaeffer's first book on musique concrète,[6] I contacted and met Christine North, former senior lecturer, Middlesex Polytechnic/University, and John Dack, musician and senior lecturer at Middlesex University, to talk about the project and a possible method of work. Furthermore, Christine and John had translated the *Guide des objets sonores*, a wonderful reference book written by Michel Chion in 1977 explaining Schaeffer's concepts and terms.[7] The idea was that they would take on the huge task of making the first translation of the book, and then a group of selected readers concerned with electroacoustic music,

and familiar with Schaeffer's ideas, would read the book and comment on the English terms and sentences and propose a common approach and style to be used throughout the book. The GRM would finance the translation and costs of traveling for the meetings that would be necessary in the process.

The difficulty with the translation of the *Treatise* is the complexity of the language associated with new concepts and terms that already exist in French but that are not used in a musical context. Thus, a reading group was formed including both translators along with Marc Battier, a French composer and professor at the Paris Sorbonne University; Leigh Landy, an American composer and professor at the De Montfort University in Leicester; and myself, a composer and the director of the GRM. A sixth person was added on the second round of amendments: Valérie Vivancos, a musician and English translator who had some previous knowledge about Schaeffer and read the English version of the *Treatise*.

After the reading group had read the first translation, we held a three-day meeting in Paris, in September 2013, where we went through the terms, the style, and the meaning of a number of sentences. I have no hesitation in saying it was a tremendous meeting; we had so much to say and discuss, so many equivalent terms to find, so many sentences to discuss and understand.

Without the initial translation process it would have been chaos! We left with agreements on terms, uses, and sentences that would need to be updated and amended.

We met again in September the following year, after Christine North and John Dack had incorporated many of the committee's suggestions, for a final reading of the book over three days, the committee this time including Valérie Vivancos. It proved to be a highly profitable meeting in which most issues were cleared, and by the end of the meeting we had produced a highly polished version, coherent in language and with an established vocabulary. We also decided to include a series of footnotes, which were needed to explain the origin of some words, to give details on events, or to explain who people named in the book are. Also the English references for the books mentioned by Schaeffer were added. After all our meetings and interesting discussions, one of the words that kept ringing in our ears as we searched for an English equivalent was *trame*, describing a continuous sound with some kind of permanent spectral structure. We translated it as *weft*, conscious that the English word *drone* used today in music also describes this kind of sound, however with a more harmonic perspective. The concept of *trame*,

however, is closer to that of *weft* and retains the all-important imagery. We also took into account the language of the day, when these concepts were only beginning to take root.

The *Treatise* often speaks about technology in a period when computers were a distant dream in sound processing; often technological concepts are used that have to be understood within the technology of that period. There are some images in the book that are sound representations made with the technology of the 1960s; actually, they were very fine images and some of the first successful attempts to visualize sound. Many new ideas and concepts brought much novelty to musical thought and established musical research as a complex technical, philosophic, and semiotic action. The *Treatise on Musical Objects* explores all these domains and creates a coherent framework where disciplines collaborate and blend to propose a new understanding of music and humankind.

My special thanks to all the team who participated in this important work and to all those colleagues who worked with Schaeffer and contributed to the production of his unique work.

Daniel Teruggi