

Using the word *music* to outline the poetics of Giorgio Griffa can lead to many *intermittences du Coeur*: in other words, to emotional, intellectual, aesthetic, and cultural short-circuits. This is certainly not due to its justifiable if nauseating usefulness (the trite idiom *Ut Pictura...*), but it is, above all, due to what we might call the sensory characteristics of the work, quite apart from Giorgio's genuine attraction to the art of sounds, to his recognition of music's privileged position in, as he says, "following Orpheus's path of knowledge of the unknown and the inexpressible".

To deal at length with these short-circuits would be a useless repetition of the critique to which this essay is simply a prelude. I will, then, try to pinpoint just some of the possible places where my experience as a musician intersects the career of the painter Giorgio Griffa. These are personal notes, aesthetic-anthropological conjectures about a far vaster relationship between art and music.

Griffa's painting dwells in the world of marks and comes up against – and not just tangentially – the wholly musical problem of deciphering those marks. Noble marks but, above all in his early painting, purposely humbled, and without that *romantic* aura that works of art use to define themselves. Raw-boned marks, stripped of any kind of mnemonic frills, and thus unlike, in music, a *Bagatelle* by Webern or – in recent aphoristic works by Kurtág - memory-filled "arias sung in one breath". They are more like certain radical experiments by Cage or Feldman or, if you will excuse my presumption, my own *Apax* for wind quintet dating from 1984-85, the Greek title of which, when followed by the suffix *legòmenon*, means "never newly coined again, never repeated again". Composed in the '80s at a time when we were still unused to writing music with a computer, I notated it down almost maniacally by hand, perhaps also because the composition was the musical rereading of a strongly "marked" painting – almost a twist of fate. In this way the score could have its own graphic self-sufficiency. And so I discovered my fetish for a well-written page to be related to a more noble and precious fetish: the naked canvas on which the artist leaves his mark. A radical and extreme idea, just like the canvases by Giorgio some fifteen years earlier which, in the great self-reference of the vertical, horizontal, or diagonal marks, gave little or no satisfaction to perceptual succulence or the enjoyment of form and colour – just as I, at the beginning of my career as a composer, rejected repetition in music and thus the recognizability of the object (in musical terms: motif, theme, and harmony). Griffa was then to pass, as he himself has admitted, from his "Calvinist" period to a "Mediterranean" one. Just like me (*Apax*, was never again to be repeated). And, I believe, like many others. As in my own case and that of others, this passage meant for him a gradual recuperation of memory. In the meantime, however, the rite of deciphering or not the mark has by now loaded Griffa's work with the esoteric value belonging to music: "The artist is entrusted with the knowledge of what cannot be known". And, almost as though to twist the knife in the wound, he continues by making his own the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, Gödel's incompleteness theorems, and Pound's poetic-existential dizziness. In his *Treatise on Harmony*, Pound explained with inspired clarity the problem of harmony's non-verticality: each chord can be perceived only if it persists in time, even if only for a moment. Music identifies itself and establishes its hierarchies in time: in the past we spoke about tonality (certain people still comfortably compose in this way), but today we talk about polarization, harmonic fields...). Experience helps to mature the need for a deeper research into the meaning of art work, and the relationship between "filling" the canvas and the completion of the pictorial gesture by way of marks has yet another musical correlation in the relationship between the executive gesture (the best... possible) and the search for Schumann's *innere Stimme*, the interior voice that is written on the staff but *may also not be* executed. Griffa himself has spoken of his "... wish to pass from an imitation of nature using external lines to one using internal lines". Not by chance then! The alternative of playing something or not (*otherwise, ad libitum, optional ritornellos...*), and, in general, all the variables linked to the interpretation of a musical work, bring to my mind another particular aspect of Giorgio Griffa's poetics summarised once again in a recurrent observation in his writings, a statement of his passivity in the face of material: "To construct a work of art with the marks made by the hands of anybody". An extremely human, intimate way of considering Deleuze's deterritorialization which, I must admit, upsets my musical ego: a disturbing attraction to artistic anonymity, a subtle inclination towards the *cupio dissolvi*. I also share with Griffa the need to debunk the romantic idea that the artist/musician must necessarily feel himself the repository of truth

(which is, when it comes down to it, nothing other than a specific form of sagacity) and that, instead, he should not claim to impose his truth on others: a decidedly secular attitude. Perhaps we can interpret in this sense too the lack of a need for a canvas support as a metaphor/metonym of such claims.

But suddenly, and by contrast, a new theme appears on the horizon, almost as though to revive the paternal right, the *authority*, over the work: it is the artist's work, his daily work, very like that of a composer or musical interpreter, something which is far more down-to-earth than non-experts like to believe. For example, by working with such materials as watercolours – “which bring me near to the Mediterranean tradition” – which permit the process of a *marriage* between them. And what is this marriage in music if not the so-called “impasto of colours” as it is defined in handbooks for scoring and orchestrating? Obviously this definition has been taken over virtually intact from the sphere of painting. And this marriage, in other words the absorption of one colour into another, comes about on the canvas on its own account. Griffa has said, “I watched, like a careful and involved spectator, an action that was not carried out by me”. This is rather like a composer who, when not playing himself, entrusts himself to *his* interpreter: so the composer is the listener/spectator of his own work. Yet again, the artist mysteriously lays down his weapons and trusts in the autogenesis of the work. During a recent conversation, Giorgio spoke to me about the “intelligence of material”: once again, an apt and true expression, applicable to many artists as well as being apt for composing music. I would also add: the generous capacity of material to accumulate information and vectorial potential... Generous because it is able to absorb and metabolise even dross - in other words tensions, suffering - and to translate re-creatively deconstructive/destructive urges.

A further fascinating aspect is the numerological one. And, inevitably, there is yet another allusion to music. For Griffa numbers are the same as the golden section. A combinatorial art par excellence, music makes use of numbers, the Fibonacci series, and the golden section both in its analysis of physical-acoustic assumptions and in compositional procedures. Numbers are structurally inherent in music-making. And here too we find allusions to an esoteric aspect: isn't it perhaps the irrationality of numbers the measure of their fascination? Certainly, the mathematical expression denoting the golden section and the “numbers that never end” stimulate the artist's and the musician's thoughts and increase their ambitious aim of reaching the heart of numbers' peculiar precision. On the other hand, this precision, which does not exist due to the irrational character of numbers, transforms this ambitious aim into a utopian plan with all the consequences that derive from it. (1.618033... I must confess, my dear Giorgio, that I myself “play about” with it when composing, using it though (!) only as a carpenter uses one of his many tools...).

Not to mention the “Bartok case”. The musicologist Ernò Landvai analysed Bartok's music by pinpointing the golden section as the way of understanding the formal organisation of his approach to composing (the proportions of the numbers of bars, the relationship between intervals etc.). And yet – and this is curious and significant – neither from his writings nor from any firsthand testimony does it result that Bartok ever hinted at the use of the golden section when composing. That's the whole story. So, then, it is legitimate to deduce that, at least in Bartok's case, the formal evidence, what we might call the *musical phenomenology* of the golden section – because Lendvai's researches show this is what it is – persists as a legacy that, if not genetic, is at least cultural rather than anything planned or the result of some theory.

“I don't represent anything; I paint”. This statement brings Griffa near to Stravinsky's *Poétique Musicale* (“Music by its very nature is not adapted to expressing anything...”). Once again we find the fertile ambiguity of relationships between marks as the vehicle, or otherwise, of sense.

Being deeply convinced that Giorgio Griffa's poetics and art making have much in common with the world of music, I am particularly pleased that the 2000 & Novecento gallery has thought of associating my own music with his art, and to do so concretely with a live performance, its natural way of being “consumed”. And, as a subtle tribute to the recuperation of memory as an additional value in art, characteristic of Griffa's years of production, I have decided to present my *Swallows*; it is here being heard for the first time in its final form of six pieces for clarinet plus two for basset horn, together with

– and not by chance – the *Three Pieces* by Igor Stravinsky: a giant of the last century whose poetics could not exist without the concept of memory and which, along its ramifications, arrived at the very matrix of musical memory through the neutral timbres of Mozart’s *Glasbarmonica*, the ancient Musical Glasses. And the chords of Mozart’s *Minuet* K355 lie behind the “multi-phonic” treatment for basset horn in the finale of *Swallows*. As though to close the circle, modernity and tradition once again attempt to rediscover each other by reciprocally feeding and gratifying themselves, as well as by reactivating the short-circuit that comes about each time that there is a re-creative contact between mystery and knowledge. Just as, I hope, Giorgio would like: “...one step more than summing up, so painting is one step more than drawing an apple”.

Luigi Abbate.