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Apollinaire's music

Abstract: There is a peculiar paradox in Apollinaire's attitude to music. On the one hand, he took little apparent interest in the music of his (or any) time; he clearly did not appreciate it much, and his enjoyment of concerts was at best ambiguous. On the other hand, music as an abstract concept (including what he calls, in his poems, "le chant") stands, in his writing, for the very essence of art: there is no higher praise for a poem or a painting, in Apollinaire's vocabulary, than to say it is, or is analogous to, music. This essay seeks to explain why actual works of music, of specific audible music, have such a low position in Apollinaire's value system, while the concept of music has such a dominant one. The answer is to be found in the relationship between art and the dynamics of representation, as Apollinaire understood them. Works of art, for him, are born of a struggle between reality and creativity. In that struggle, music, which never represents reality, stands for the purely creative pole; hence, it figures the goal of all truly modern art, which refuses simply to imitate what exists. However, actual successful works of music are difficult for Apollinaire to imagine, precisely because the struggle with reality seems to him absent from music. The result is an aesthetic system in

which the highest value can never be realised in a work, and a poetics in which unrealistic ambition is as essential as frustration.

Keywords: Apollinaire, music, word and music studies, cubism, Savinio, *Calligrammes*, *Soirées de Paris*

Academic interest in Apollinaire's attitude to music goes back half a century. It seems to have been sparked off by an article entitled "Apollinaire et la musique", published in 1952 by Georges Auric. Auric was doubtless one of the two composers who knew Apollinaire best (more of the other shortly). He describes an Apollinaire whose knowledge of and interest in music were strictly limited (limited, indeed, almost entirely to short songs), and who showed no desire to know more; "pourquoi aurait-il feint la connaissance et l'amour d'un art dont il ne niait point la grandeur, mais auquel il était insensible?"¹ James Lawler, writing in 1956,² Jacqueline Bellas, in 1969,³ and Catherine Miller, in 2003,⁴ all cite Auric's article, and see it as quite plausible. Michel Décaudin, in 1967, agreed: "c'est un fait qu'il n'était pas mélomane, ni même très sensible aux séductions de l'art musical".⁵ But all five are also sensitive to a strange contradiction at work in Apollinaire's attitude to music. On the one hand, he generally professed both to know little about music, and to have little interest in it. It was, he maintained, an art that had

remained behind the times, taking no part in the great artistic revolution of the 20th century, whose most visible achievement was cubism. And yet at the same time, he defined the very nature of that great artistic revolution as musical. Cubism was, he suggested, more musical than previous types of painting. His own poetry he presented constantly as musical. Orpheus was the patron saint of Apollinaire's artistic time. The new art, it seemed, *was* music. But music had little value as art. How could this add up?

James Lawler's answer to this question is contained in a lapidary sentence: "a writer's sense of music may (on occasion) be in inverse proportion to his capacity for enjoying concerts".⁶ Apollinaire, then, did not enjoy concerts; yet his "sense of music" was strong. Why should this be? What, exactly, if not the kind of music one hears in concerts, was the music of which he had a strong sense? An answer is suggested, but not developed, by Jacqueline Bellas, who cites a letter of 1916 in which Apollinaire, still a soldier at the front, wrote: "Je me suis ennuyé à *Parsifaal* [*sic*] parce que je ne supporte pas longtemps la musique sans que mon esprit divague au loin et que je m'obstinais à être attentif [...]".⁷ This, as Bellas points out, does not mean that he does not like music. Between Apollinaire and music, the problem, rather, is one of proximity. When he has to pay close attention, he finds it intolerable. He needs a certain distance: space for his spirit to wander "au loin". Why? What is the nature of this distance, and why is it necessary? Those are the questions which this essay will seek to answer.

Apollinaire certainly did not shrink from proclaiming his indifference to music in general. “La musique n’a pas le moindre attrait pour moi et je la tiens en peu d’estime”, he is reported to have said in 1918 (p. 994);⁸ “la musique”, he wrote to the critic Louis Dimier in the same year, “m’est étrangère” (p. 880). Before the war, he hardly ever admitted to being interested in any of the art music performed in Paris. With one exception (to which we shall return), he has very little to say about it in his published work, and certainly nothing positive. In 1914, he condemned the programme of Diaghilev’s “Ballets russes”:

nous jugeons à propos de reprocher ici à M. de Diaghilev le peu d’intérêt que sa récente *saison* à l’Opéra suscita parmi nous. Sauf les décors de Mme de Gontcharova, trop de fadaïses! (p. 812)

The ballet that Apollinaire found so uninteresting in 1914 was doubtless Rimsky-Korsakoff’s *Le Coq d’or*. But how could he be so dismissive, one is tempted to exclaim, of the troupe that only one year earlier had dared to present Debussy’s *Jeux*, and astonished Paris with Stravinsky’s *Sacre du Printemps*? Apollinaire never mentions those, or Stravinsky’s other revolutionary ballets, performed in the preceding years.

When he is writing as a critic of the visual arts, Apollinaire’s judgements are always careful, well-informed, and thoroughly

contextualised, drawing on his quite encyclopaedic knowledge of contemporary painting. It seems all the more extraordinary, on the face of it, that he should condemn out of hand the music of his time, a sphere of artistic endeavour of which he knew so little. Might one suspect that the condemnation is powered, not by what he knew of the actual musical life of Paris at the time, but rather by an aesthetic principle that tended to the refusal of *any* actual musical life? The suspicion is confirmed, I think, by the content and context of the one extended essay he published on music, “Musique nouvelle”, and by the type of music to which, in that essay, he seems to be attracted.

“Musique nouvelle” was published in *Paris-Journal* on 24 May 1914. Its main aim seems at first to be to publicise a concert to be given that evening, “dans les bureaux des *Soirées de Paris*,⁹ ce dimanche 24 mai” (p. 723) – though Apollinaire gives neither the time, nor the address of the venue; as if he were not really trying to drum up an audience. But before the puff for the concert, Apollinaire spends three paragraphs deploring, with an apparent lassitude that reflects what he had to say about the “Ballets russes”, the state of contemporary music – or is it the state of music in general?

Si pauvre est la musique d’aujourd’hui, et si mince est le rôle qu’elle joue parmi les autres arts, que bien des fois j’ai entendu dire

que la faute en était à la musique elle-même plutôt qu'aux musiciens.

(p. 723)

Who might have told Apollinaire that there was a problem with music itself, rather than simply with contemporary musicians? One plausible answer to the latter question is: Albert Savinio.

Albert Savinio¹⁰ is little remembered, today, as a musician; he is better known for his activities as a writer and painter. However, he is the only composer whose music is described in any detail in Apollinaire's published work. It is his contribution to the forthcoming concert that is the focus of Apollinaire's article; and it seems to me more than likely that what Apollinaire has to say, here, about music in general, is strongly influenced by Savinio.

A month earlier, Savinio had published an article in *Les Soirées de Paris*¹¹ entitled "Le drame et la musique". His argument concerning the current state of music is forceful, and his starting point uncompromising: "il m'est avis que modernement on ne saurait construire une œuvre *seulement* musicale". The reason for this is simple: music as it was known in his time was defined formally, by specific "formules protocolaires [...] échafaudant autour du *sens musical* tout un support de formes artificielles et hétérogènes". Any such formal definition of any art was, to him, essentially anti-artistic. Therefore, the music of his time, as it was universally defined, was actually

“*antimusical*”.¹² This fits with Apollinaire’s general principle, which he affirms in “Musique nouvelle”, that only art that is truly new can be truly art, and that contemporary music is not really new; therefore, it is not art.

According to Apollinaire as, it would seem, to Savinio, the musicians of their time have failed (unlike painters and poets) to escape from the dead hand of academic tradition, of pre-defined aesthetics, of:

ces orgies de bon goût auxquelles les musiciens soi-disant modernes nous avaient habitués jusqu’ici et qui font que les plus avancés d’entre eux ne s’élèvent pas au-dessus d’un art que l’on pourrait comparer, pour une part, à celui de M. Maurice Rostand et, d’autre part, à celui des peintres de la Nationale. (p. 724)

I do not know if either Claude Debussy or Erik Satie ever read this article; but if they did, they would have been quite disgusted by it. Their most fundamental aesthetic principle had been, for the previous quarter of a century at least, precisely such a rejection of the academic tradition. They had sought the new; they had been frequently condemned by traditionalists for doing so; and Apollinaire, like Savinio, was simply dismissing their efforts. Was this out of pure ignorance? Certainly, Apollinaire had heard of both. Satie (with whom his relationship was marked, as Ornella Volta writes, by “le malentendu”¹³) was well known to many in the circle of *Les Soirées de*

Paris, including to Michel-Dimitri Calvocoressi, who was the composer of most of the works listed in the programme of the concert on 24 May 1914 (though Apollinaire does not mention him). Calvocoressi certainly thought of Satie as a great musical revolutionary. Apollinaire, on the other hand, has only this to say of Satie in his article:

Je ne parle pas, bien entendu, de musiciens comme Erik Satie ou William Molnard¹⁴ qui, s'ils n'ont pas indiqué de voie nouvelle, ont du moins contribué à détruire dans l'esprit de la jeunesse ce bon goût plein de tristesse qui la faisait dégénérer. (p. 724)

At least there is, here, some recognition of Satie's refusal of "bon goût". However, Apollinaire clearly thinks that for one seeking the new music of the future, Savinio is a more interesting case than Satie. Why? I will give an answer which at first will seem strange: it is because Savinio's music is received by Apollinaire as destructive of all audible music.

We have seen how Savinio, in his article, states that all music composed according to the rules of music is antimusical. If music itself cannot suffice to guide the musician, can words help? Apparently not. A

large part of the article is taken up with what was, by 1914, quite a well-worn condemnation of the Wagnerian alliance between words and music. Savinio rejects absolutely “cette chose horripilante appelée jusqu’à maintenant la *musique dramatique*”;¹⁵ all “conceptions wagnériennes” belong to the past, and can have no influence on “l’art moderne”.¹⁶ Music, for Savinio, simply ceases to be music if it attempts to follow, describe, or support words. Indeed, it must not follow, describe, or support anything. He condemns, for this reason, the contemporary Viennese school: though their musical language may seem new, it is, he says, at the service of the tired old principle that music should be illustrative or descriptive, “car elle s’emploie à décrire des *états d’âme*. Et comment pourrait-il en être autrement alors que la production de ces musiciens se compose surtout de *chants* écrits sur des paroles?”¹⁷ Savinio seeks a music which would not be “tenue à *illustrer* des phénomènes indépendants d’elle-même”. This obviously links back to the concept of “musique pure”¹⁸ as it had existed since the middle of the nineteenth century. But whereas half a century earlier, many had thought this pure music existed, for example in the quartets of Beethoven, Savinio clearly believes that it does not exist. For the reasons given above, no music that is merely music can be music. Nor can any music that supports words be music. What is needed is a music that relates to words, more specifically to drama, but without that relationship being one of support, illustration,

expression, or translation. Is such a music possible? Savinio seems to dream of it:

j'ai la conception d'une œuvre constituée à la fois d'éléments dramatiques et musicaux, mais où ces éléments – contrairement aux méthodes usées – ne se soutiendraient par aucune dépendance mutuelle.¹⁹

However, he never tells us what the relationship between music and drama in such a work might be (would it be a simple unmotivated juxtaposition? that hardly seems satisfactory, since it would, again, leave music fatally dependent on its own devices); he never suggests that such a work does or even could actually exist, or that his own work satisfies these criteria. It is hard to avoid the impression that like Apollinaire, Albert Savinio had an abstract notion of what new music ought to be like, but was unable to find it in any sounding reality.

What, then, of Savinio's music itself? The question is certainly worth asking, and it could be answered to some extent, for the work has not vanished without trace. *Les Chants de la Mi-Mort*, which were performed at the concert announced by Apollinaire, are available on CD, and the text was published by *Les Soirées de Paris* in July 1914; as we shall see, it has a profound fraternal echo in Apollinaire's work. But there is no space to

address that question here, and, fortunately, I think, no need to. What matters to us is Apollinaire's reaction. The sole aspect of Savinio's work that caught his attention was its destructiveness. He had already expressed, in the article which he published before the concert, his approval of the extraordinary violence with which Savinio attacked the piano. In a brief note written after the concert, that destructiveness is the only quality of Savinio's performance which he sees fit to record:

j'étais charmé et étonné à la fois, car il maltraitait si fort l'instrument qu'il touchait qu'après chaque morceau de musique on enlevait les morceaux du piano droit qu'il avait brisé pour lui en apporter un autre, qu'il brisait incontinent. Et j'estime qu'avant deux ans il aura ainsi brisé tous les pianos existants à Paris, après quoi il pourra partir à travers le monde et briser tous les pianos existants dans l'univers. Ce qui sera peut-être un bon débarras.²⁰

“Bon débarras”, the destruction of all pianos? Apollinaire seems here to be taking to its logical conclusion the idea expressed by Savinio and echoed in Apollinaire's own “Musique nouvelle”: there is a problem with music itself, to which no solution has been found. If all music is unsatisfactory, then why not get rid of it?

But at this point, a *distinguo* must be introduced. All the music that Apollinaire heard may have seemed to him, in 1914, unsatisfactory, and most attractive when it tended to the destruction of the means by which it made itself heard. But whereas he was happy to see Savinio destroy pianos, he was equally happy to see musical instruments survive in art – provided they remained silent.

In the number of *Les Soirées de Paris* which published Albert Savinio's essay, there are black and white reproductions of eight paintings. All are cubist works by Georges Braque. The first is entitled "Portrait de femme". It takes some effort to distinguish the figure of the woman in the painting; what is most readily apparent, in figurative terms, is not the woman, but a fragmented guitar, whose strings, sound-hole, and curvature are immediately visible. One or more of these features of the guitar, as well as parts of violins, musical staves, and other musical elements, may be found in all of the other seven paintings (all entitled "Nature morte").

Apollinaire has relatively little to say about the reasons for the figurative motifs in Braque's cubist paintings. However, he has a great deal to say about the relationship between those paintings, and music. Indeed, it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that for him, just as poets in the

previous century had sought to “reprendre à la musique leur bien”, so Picasso and Braque, in the years of their collaboration, revolutionised their art by making it, precisely, musical. In that context, it is more than tempting to see Braque’s guitars, violins, and staves as a materialisation of the character of the new art. In *Méditations esthétiques. Les Peintres cubistes*, published in 1913, Apollinaire had written:

On s’achemine ainsi vers un art entièrement nouveau, qui sera à la peinture, telle qu’on l’avait envisagée jusqu’ici, ce que la musique est à la littérature.

Ce sera de la peinture pure, de même que la musique est de la littérature pure. (p. 9)

What is the quality of music that allows it thus to symbolise purity in art? Apollinaire’s answer is traditional enough: music is not an art of reproduction. The purity of music lies in the fact that it is not received as imitation of anything that exists outside it. Hence it stands for the nature of all art whose value is not one of reproduction. This function of music (not of *heard* music, but of the *concept of* music), so close to Savinio’s dream, was already apparent in the preface which Apollinaire had written for Braque’s exhibition at the Galerie Kahnweiler in 1908:

Puisant en lui-même les éléments des motifs synthétiques qu'il représente, il est devenu un créateur.

Il ne doit plus rien à ce qui l'entoure. Son esprit a provoqué volontairement le crépuscule de la réalité et voici que s'élabore plastiquement en lui-même et hors de lui-même une renaissance universelle. [...]

Un lyrisme coloré et dont les exemples sont trop rares l'emplit d'un enthousiasme harmonieux et ses instruments de musique, sainte Cécile même les fait sonner. (p. 112)

Sainte Cécile, the “Musicienne du silence” of Mallarmé’s famous poem “Sainte”, is alone able to sound the instruments of Braque’s music. It is a music that cannot be heard, because it exists as a pure concept, which can never take the form of a concretely existing work.

The cubist painting, as Apollinaire describes it, becomes a work in the moment of the “voici que”, as reality enters its “crépuscule” and Braque’s creative force emerges. But music, music as it must be defined for this dynamic to be articulated, cannot know that moment, cannot appear in the form of a work born from the “crépuscule de la réalité”, because, for Apollinaire, it was never attached to “la réalité” in the first place. Painting certainly had been attached to reality, by the traditional dynamics of reproduction; cubism can therefore be a struggle against those dynamics,

and in that struggle, the artist's creativity appears. Music, however, never having been an art of reproduction, cannot follow this trajectory.²¹

In other words: each work of art can only operate as a process, somewhere between two positions that it cannot occupy: the reproduction of reality; and pure creation. Reproduction is not art; pure creation cannot be appreciated by human eyes or ears, for we have no means to understand the absolutely new, with the result that all attempts to create a purely non-reproductive art founder either in incomprehension, or in that formalism which Savinio was concerned to reject. The work of art lives only in movement between the two poles, of reproduction and creation; without both, without the tension between them, it has no place. Music, lacking one of those poles, it seems, can produce no works.

In practice, then, poets and painters would have an easier task than musicians. The temptation to be purely creative, to create purely, to create pure art, is constant, and a threat for artists in all media. But there is a means to contain that threat within the poem or the painting. It is to stage creativity's triumph over reality, and to portray the result: a "crépuscule", a twilight, a *Götterdämmerung*, a dramatic death of the real. It is perhaps too comfortable to conceive of a cubist painting as a reconfiguration of the object. Perhaps the true force of cubism lies in the way its creativity threatens the representation of objects; perhaps that is what Apollinaire's music invites us to see. That same threat to representation clearly haunts

Apollinaire's own poetry, as both its source of value and its ever-impending death. If Orpheus is such an obsessive presence in Apollinaire's aesthetics, it is not only because he was a musician whose music we can never hear; it is also because he killed the thing he loved.

That is why, in Apollinaire's poetry, music is ever present: not in the form of musical works, of music whose sound we can imagine, but of music whose sound we cannot imagine, music that stands for a purity that can never strike human ears. Hence the distance that his spirit needs, as we saw, from music as it is heard in concerts. Savinio condemned the Viennese composers of his time because their music, expressive of "des états d'âme", consisted largely of songs with words: music, to him, had to be divorced from words. Apollinaire accomplishes that divorce not by getting rid of the words, but by rendering the music in his poetry inaudible.

It is no exaggeration to say that most of the poems in the collection *Calligrammes*²² contain some reference to music. Many contain references to instrumental music. But it is song that predominates. The verb "chanter" is one of the commonest in the book.²³ Of course, the idea that the poet sings is as old as poetry itself. However, in the traditional concept of sung poetry, the tune to which the poem was sung actually existed; this is the music that Savinio calls "barbare", whose reign ran, it would seem, from prehistory to "les conceptions wagnériennes", and survives in Vienna – after all, Schoenberg, like Wagner, associates words with audible music. What

distinguishes the tunes of Apollinaire's poetry is that, like the music of Mallarmé's *Saint Cecilia*, they cannot be heard. We cannot even imagine that we could hear them, as reproducible sound.²⁴

Two of the poems in *Calligrammes* have music as their central theme: "Le musicien de Saint-Merry" and "Un fantôme de nuées". They were written in 1913 and 1914; "Le musicien de Saint-Merry" was first published in *Les Soirées de Paris* in February 1914.²⁵ The first occurrence of the verb "chanter" in the text is in the fifth line:

Je ne chante pas ce monde ni les autres astres
Je chante toutes les possibilités de moi-même hors de ce monde et
des astres
Je chante la joie d'errer et le plaisir d'en mourir

The next line begins a narration which is clearly situated in contemporary Paris:

Le 21 du mois de mai 1913

How does this precisely dated and localised narration relate to the exordium in which Apollinaire had maintained he sings, not this world, but the possibilities of himself out of this world? The only possible answer is that

the words of the poem are not synonymous with the “chant” he has evoked. Poetry begins from the earth-bound concrete. But song was always, from the beginning, elsewhere. Clearly, then, song is not the same as poetry; rather, it behaves like music. And this is indeed confirmed in the course of the poem.

A few lines later, a man appears, “sans yeux sans nez et sans oreilles” – logically, then, unable to read or hear music. He is, nonetheless, playing the flute:

Jouant l’air que je chante et que j’ai inventé

What is this “air” that the poet invented and sang? To begin with: this is further confirmation that “chanter”, here, is not merely a conventional term for what poets do with words. There is clearly a tune here, a tune that can exist independently of words, independently enough to be played on a flute. But did that the tune actually exist? should we try to find it? There is indeed a temptation to do so. Apollinaire said more than once that when composing verse, he did have tunes in his head, quite simple ones, which Max Jacob noted down. Did he actually sing his poems to these tunes? In December 1913, he recorded three of his poems, for a project entitled “Les Archives de la parole”. The recordings still exist. Five months later, “une audition” took place at the Sorbonne of “*poèmes symbolistes dits par les poètes*”

eux-mêmes et enregistrés aux Archives". Apollinaire was there, and heard two of his own poems, read by him, played back. He commented:

D'ailleurs, comme je fais mes poèmes en les chantant sur des rythmes qu'a notés mon ami Max Jacob, j'aurais dû les chanter comme fit René Ghil, qui fut avec Verhaeren le véritable triomphateur de cette séance.²⁶

Should he, or could he, have sung his poems to his little tunes? The answer is clearly no. As Margaret Davies shows,²⁷ it simply is not possible, if only for prosodic reasons: the little tunes do not fit most of his poems. And in any case, if one re-reads the passage carefully, Apollinaire is not saying that he should have sung his poems to the "rythmes qu'a notés mon ami Max Jacob". He is saying that he should have sung them "comme fit René Ghil". But Ghil certainly did not sing them to a tune, to any tune that a flute could play. Here is Apollinaire's description of Ghil's performance:

Le chant vertigineux de René Ghil, on eût dit des harpes éoliennes vibrant dans un jardin d'Italie, ou encore que l'Aurore touchait la statue de Memnon et surtout l'hymne télégraphique que les fils et les poteaux ne cessent d'entonner sur les grandes routes.

What “air”, then, should we imagine being played by the flute-player in “Le musicien de Saint-Merry”? The little tunes noted by Max Jacob? Or something more like the hymn of telegraph wires? Listening to Apollinaire’s recordings, one certainly hears what one might call a sing-song quality (they are, indeed, peculiarly haunting); but there is nothing recognisable as a tune, nothing that would make any sense transposed to a flute; any more than would René Ghil’s “chant”. The “air” invented by Guillaume Apollinaire and played on a fictional flute by a man with no eyes, nose, or ears remains impossible to materialise.

Within the poem, this unmaterialised tune works rather like that of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, except that the procession that forms behind the flute-player is not of rats or of children, but of women. They enter an old, abandoned house in the rue de la Verrerie, then disappear:

Sans regretter ce qu’elles ont laissé

Ce qu’elles ont abandonné

Sans regretter le jour la vie et la mémoire

They have left, it seems, their lives, for that which Apollinaire had told us he sings. Music leads out of this world. And in the process, it dies itself, before it can be recorded. The flute-player disappears with the women, and the poem ends thus:

O nuit

Toi ma douleur et mon attente vaine

J'entends mourir le son d'une flûte lointaine

“Un fantôme de nuées”²⁸ similarly gives us a narration precisely dated (“c’était la veille du quatorze juillet”) and localised in Paris; and it, too, ends with a disappearance. This time, however, the inaudibility of the music that causes the disappearance is more openly marked; for there is, in the poem, a contrast between two musics: one of which we can imagine having heard, the other not. The audible music is that of an “orgue de Barbarie”. It precedes the performance of a troupe of “saltimbanques”. When they decide to begin their “séance”:

De dessous l’orgue sortit un tout petit saltimbanque habillé de rose
pulmonaire

This little “saltimbanque” then performs. As he does so, he becomes a music, a “musique des formes”, which clearly has no audible substance, and destroys both humanity, and the audible music of the “orgue mécanique”:

Et quand il marcha sur une boule

Son corps mince devint une musique si délicate que nul parmi les
spectateurs n'y fut insensible

Un petit esprit sans aucune humanité

Pensa chacun

Et cette musique des formes

Détruisit celle de l'orgue mécanique

The music of forms is not of this world, not of humanity, and the child
disappears like the women following the flute:

Musique angélique des arbres

Disparition de l'enfant

And like the poet who, having seen the women disappear, looks only for
what he knows he cannot find on earth, but is only to be located in “les
possibilités de moi-même hors de ce monde et des astres”, so the spectators
seek the child:

chaque spectateur cherchait en soi l'enfant miraculeux

Siècle ô siècle des nuages

Albert Savinio smashing pianos, like the child destroying the music of the mechanical “orgue de Barbarie” in “Un fantôme de nuées”, seems to symbolise, for Apollinaire, the sheer poverty of all music that can be heard, and the superiority of imagined music over real music. His ears could hear no music worthy of contemporary art.²⁹ Wagnerian music, representative music, he could not listen to without suffering. Pure music, on the other hand, he could not imagine ever being materialised in a work. Between the two, he knew nothing; he saw no musical possibilities. There certainly were musicians in his time – Debussy and Satie, but also Stravinsky – who were similarly exercised by the difficult position of music, between reproduction and purity; but they thought they had been able to create music in that difficult position, by suggesting an always elusive relationship between music and words, a relationship based not on that mutual support which Savinio derided, but on a subtle web of connivences and hostilities, a dynamic of attraction and repulsion, a play on the differences between the two. The music of the time was actually far closer to cubism or to contemporary poetry in its aesthetic development than Apollinaire or Savinio seemed prepared to acknowledge. It is hard to avoid the impression that Apollinaire, in 1914, simply did not want to know, because he wanted to maintain the fiction of music’s absolute, aboriginal, essential, otherworldly purity. He would rather see music destroyed than allow it to lose that privilege.

One episode in Apollinaire's artistic life might suggest he had a change of heart in 1917: his public support for the ballet *Parade*, which was performed by the very "Ballets russes" in which he had shown so little interest three years previously. The décor and costumes were by Picasso; the music, by Satie. Apollinaire wrote the programme note. However, in that note, he only mentions Satie's music once. He presents it as a "transposition" of Cocteau's "poème scénique", and "une musique étonnamment expressive" (p. 865). This might appear to be praise. But expressive music, according to the principles of Apollinaire as of Savinio, is, as we have seen, not really music at all. The very function of music in *Calligrammes* is to stand for the opposite of expression: music does not express, it creates. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that, behind this innocent turn of phrase, Apollinaire is denying to Satie's score the status of true music. And that would explain his quite startling revision, in the following paragraph, of the nineteenth-century ambition to join the arts together. Apollinaire salutes a new relationship between dance and décor, between the plastic arts and choreography - but excludes music from the alliance.

Le peintre cubiste Picasso et le plus audacieux des chorégraphes, Léonide Massine, l'ont réalisé en consommant pour la première fois cette alliance de la peinture et de la danse, de la

plastique et de la mimique qui est le signe de l'avènement d'un art plus complet [...]

De cette alliance nouvelle, car jusqu'ici les décors et les costumes, d'une part, la chorégraphie, d'autre part, n'avaient entre eux qu'un lien factice, il est résulté, dans *Parade*, une sorte de sur-réalisme [...] (p. 865)

This text is most often cited as the first in which the word “sur-réalisme” appears. It is worth noting that this sur-realism is born from an alliance between the arts from which music is conspicuously absent.³⁰

Thus music remains beyond the reach of any reality – even sur-reality. But there is a price to pay for this exclusion of music; a price that both Apollinaire and Savinio had to pay. If “musique pure” stands for the highest form of art, and there can be, in reality, no works of that art, then every creator, the poet as much as the painter or the musician, is condemned eternally to produce works which fall short. The artist should always be conscious that every work of art points to its own inadequacy. Indeed, the more successful the work of art, the more acute and immediate that sense of inadequacy – and of the inadequacy and frustrations of its creator. The title of Savinio's work, performed at the concert Apollinaire attended in 1914, was *Les Chants de la mi-mort*. The last words of that work are exactly the same as the last words of *Calligrammes*, published four years later:

Ayez pitié de moi

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¹ G. Auric, “Apollinaire et la musique”, *Revue musicale* 210 (January 1952), pp. 147-9 (p. 148).

² R. Lawler, “Music and Poetry in Apollinaire”, *French Studies* 10 (1956), pp. 339-346.

³ J. Bellas, “Apollinaire devant la musique et les musiciens”, in: *Guillaume Apollinaire, 8. Colloque Apollinaire à Varsovie*, ed. M. Décaudin (Paris: Revue des Lettres modernes, 1969), pp. 114-38. According to Auric’s account, the dreadful experience of sitting through *Parsifal* put Apollinaire off classical music for life (“Apollinaire et la musique”, p. 148).

⁴ C. Miller, *Cocteau, Apollinaire, Claudel et le Groupe des Six* (Sprimont: Mardaga, 2003).

⁵ M. Décaudin, “Présentation”, in: *Apollinaire et la musique. Actes du colloque Journées Apollinaire, Stavelot, 27-29 août 1965* ed. M. Décaudin (Stavelot: éditions Les Amis de G. Apollinaire, 1967), pp 9-10 (p. 9).

⁶ Lawler, op. cit., p. 339.

⁷ Bellas, op. cit., p. 119.

⁸ All such references in brackets in this essay are to the second of the three volumes of Apollinaire’s *Œuvres en prose complètes* in the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, ed. P. Caizergues and M. Décaudin (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

⁹ *Les Soirées de Paris* was a journal, of small circulation, behind which Apollinaire was the moving literary force. Its central place in the chronicle of Apollinaire’s relations to music in 1914 will become apparent.

¹⁰ 1891-1952. His real name was Andrea de Chirico. He was the brother of the painter Giorgio de Chirico. For further information on him, see: W. Bohn, “Sur la Butte: Apollinaire et Savinio”, *Que Vlo-Ve?*, second series, 13 (1985), pp. 5-9.

¹¹ See *Les Soirées de Paris*, 15 April 1914, pp. 240-4.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 240.

¹³ See E. Satie, *Correspondance presque complète* ed O. Volta (Paris: Fayard / IMEC, 2000), p. 654. Auric confirms this (“Apollinaire et la musique”, p. 149).

¹⁴ The name of Molnard seems to have left no trace in music history.

¹⁵ Savinio, op. cit., p. 240.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 243.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 240.

²⁰ G. Apollinaire, *Œuvres en prose complètes* vol III, ed P. Caizergues and M. Décaudin (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1993), p. 211.

²¹ I am speaking here, I should stress, not of music as it existed at the time for musicians, but of music as it must be conceptualised by Apollinaire, for it to play this role in his description of the development of art.

²² Subtitled “Poèmes de la paix et de la guerre (1913-1916)”, and first published in April 1918, seven months before Apollinaire’s death.

²³ To be precise, it is the seventh commonest, after “être”, “avoir”, “faire”, “aller”, “mourir” and “savoir” – and more frequent than “parler” and “dire” put together. “Musique” is also more than twice as common as “poème” and “poésie” – though “poète” is more frequent than “musicien”. I glean all these facts from: *G. Apollinaire, Calligrammes: Concordance* (Besançon: Centre d’étude du vocabulaire, Larousse, 1967).

²⁴ Philippe Renaud points out this inaudibility of the music in *Calligrammes*: “cette musique s’adresse à [...] cette «musicienne du silence» dont rêva

Mallarmé”. See “‘Ondes’, ou les métamorphoses de la musique”, in:

Apollinaire et la musique, ed. cit., pp. 21-32 (p. 32).

²⁵ Pp. 107-112. See also, for the text of the poem: G. Apollinaire, *Œuvres poétiques* ed M. Adéma and M. Décaudin (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1965), pp. 188-91.

²⁶ *Œuvres en prose complètes* vol III, p. 214.

²⁷ See: M. Davies, “La petite musique d’Apollinaire”, in: *Apollinaire et la musique*, ed.cit., pp. 43-8.

²⁸ *Œuvres poétiques*, pp. 193-6.

²⁹ Certainly, as Auric noted, he was fond of popular tunes; but for him as for Savinio, they could not constitute a “musique nouvelle”, an art for modern times.

³⁰ As Catherine Miller remarks, after an analysis of this passage: “l’attitude d’Apollinaire à l’encontre de la musique n’est donc pas celle du poète prêt à faire collaborer les deux arts, à les unir dans des œuvres de synthèse” (op. cit., p. 141).