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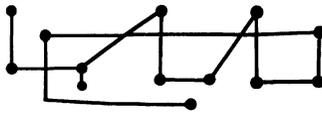
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A BODY WITHOUT ORGANS: THREE APPROACHES—CAGE, BACH, AND MESSIAEN



CHRISTIAN ASPLUND

The full flowering of the Body without Organs is not the “hypochondriac body . . . the paranoid body . . . the schizo body . . . [or] the drugged body,”¹ nor is it even the transcendent state achieved through alienation of the organic strata. It (they) is (are), rather, “Les Corps Glorieux,” the glorified body.

ALLOW ME TO POSIT a traditional four-part division of the self into the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical/sensual. This may be further simplified to a two-part division, one being the spiritual and the other being a trio of the other selves which collectively may be termed the natural self. Sacred activity in this context would be an effort to achieve communion between the spiritual self and other spiritual entities. Such communion would be, in fact, the self’s highest goal and, ultimately, the only one worth all its efforts. True communion with other

beings is only possible on this spiritual level, since the other three are appendages or adjuncts to it and the spiritual self is the seat of will and consciousness. The problem is, spiritual selves are the most mysterious of the four and are hard to define, describe, or circumscribe. Moreover, the spiritual essences of other beings are elusive, and they have a will that cannot be handled, forced, or manipulated. You² cannot force a spiritual communion to take place. There are no formulae, patterns, recipes, spells, or algorithms that work consistently. Mediating through one of the other three selves is possible but haphazard. Analogies of the spiritual are poor substitutes—at best, fumbling, crude representations; and they are very culture specific.

Some of the most elegant spiritual and aesthetic practices do away with the effort to mediate or represent the spiritual altogether. They may instead simply attempt to create an environment in which a spiritual communion can happen according to the wills of the spiritual entities involved if, indeed, they exist. Mathematics and Zen Buddhism come to mind. Zen brackets issues of deities and spirituality altogether. If they do exist, perhaps they are too sacred to discuss or perhaps the act of naming them causes them to flee. Or perhaps they can only be received after preparation that will render the adherent open, hollow, blank. A person so prepared is ideally suited to receiving ineffable communion from a divine source. Through most of his life, John Cage asserted that “the purpose of music is to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences.”³ To use an appropriately ornithological example, if you value the song of a species of wild bird, you might have to put up a certain type of birdhouse, or other appropriate place for them to nest or feed in. Birds are not guaranteed as they have their own will, so the best you can do is provide the most inviting environment for them to inhabit. The only real way to create an environment for a spiritual communion with another autonomous entity is through the use of one of the three lesser selves, selves which constantly compete for attention, selves which, when abstracted, land us on dead ends. You are constantly moving back and forth between the disconnected lesser selves and glimpses of spiritual union. Ironically, you may have to choose one of the lesser selves and use it, isolated from the others, to propel you to a possible path to spiritual communion.

I recently installed a tire swing for my five-year-old daughter. It took quite a while to find a branch that was both strong enough and distant enough from the trunk to prevent collision. The farthest viable branch was not far enough to keep the trunk out of the arc of the swing. However, I found that, far from being a barrier, the trunk became the focal point of her

play. As she swung toward the trunk she would lodge her foot in one of three knots on the trunk, lifting herself and the swing momentarily, releasing the tension on the rope, and then propelling the swing. The kicking was effective in getting and keeping up the momentum, but the lifting part seemed to serve no purpose. It seemed as though she wanted to lift off into another plane, higher than the rope length would allow. It seemed like the desire to launch the swing onto a higher plane was exciting because of its impossibility. Swinging itself is the taunting of the impossible, or the dangerous. When a child swings, he or she often is actually trying either to get the swing to take off into the air, free of the rope or chain, or to loop all the way around the horizontal bar that the ropes or chains of the swing are attached to. When I was a child, I loved to get the swing to its optimal height and then let go, allowing the momentum to carry me off the swing. I would spend hours at this activity, learning at exactly what point I could let go to get the best loft. It was not so much the jumping from a height that exhilarated. It was, rather, the release from repetitiveness, only made possible by cumulative repetitiveness, and the striving of swinging—the striving and pumping to achieve a height that cannot be reached while constrained by ropes or chains to a stationary object. But it was these very ropes or chains and the bar to which they were attached that enabled me to ascend and be set aloft. By letting go just before the apex of the arc, my first sensation was of weightlessness, while moving horizontally a bit. The descent was curved, thus completing the S-shaped wave that began at the other end of the swing's arc.

In Deleuze/Guattari's dissection of the self, what you try to achieve is the Body without Organs. This BwO is a blessed state in which the self is released from the tyranny of the enemy which, in this context, is not the organs themselves but the organism, the fascism within. The "judgment of God" has caused a stratification of the self into at least three strata: the organism, signifiante, and subjectification.⁴ The self constantly "swings between two poles, the surfaces of stratification into which it is recoiled, on which it submits to the judgment, and the plane of consistency in which it unfurls and opens. . . ."⁵ The achievement of the BwO has been attempted through sundry means, including the use of drugs and masochism/asceticism. These attempts usually fail however because the efforts are too violent and impatient. The junkie and the masochist have "emptied themselves of their organs instead of looking for the point at which they could patiently and momentarily dismantle the organization of the organs we call the organism."⁶ They imitate the process, but they do not know the destination. You come to realize that "staying stratified is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse. . . ."⁷ Instead, you

should use these strata as stationary points on which to lodge your foot so that you can push off and hopefully land on “possible lines of flight” which enable you to deterritorialize. The self travels a line to the “plane of consistency,” where the BwO is released from the tyranny of strata, of the striated, and joins the chorus of multiplicity, the smooth, which is the continuous flow of intensities. The self, it turns out, is not really the BwO; “it is not ‘my’ body without organs, instead the ‘me’ is on it, or what remains of me.”⁸

Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, and have a small plot of new land at all times. It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape and bringing forth continuous intensities for a BwO. Connect, conjugate, continue: a whole “diagram,” as opposed to the still signifying and subjective programs . . . gently tip the assemblage, making it pass over to the side of the plane of consistency. It is only there that the BwO reveals itself for what it is: connection of desires, conjunction of flows, continuum of intensities.⁹

The immanent substance of these intensities is desire, desire which is unfulfilled, unfulfillable, libido without release. “*Jouissance* is impossible, but impossible *jouissance* is inscribed in desire. For that, in its very impossibility, is the Ideal, the ‘*manque-à-jouir* that is life.’”¹⁰ The masochist does not seek pain because it is his only means of achieving pleasure. Rather, his suffering is the “price he must pay, not to achieve pleasure but to untie the pseudobond between desire and pleasure as an extrinsic measure.”¹¹ It is simply one “set of practices” imposed externally to achieve a particular end.

Pleasure is in no way something that can be obtained only by a detour through suffering; it is something that must be delayed as long as possible because it interrupts the continuous process of positive desire. There is, in fact, a joy that is immanent to desire as though desire were filled by itself and its contemplations, a joy that implies no lack or impossibility and is not measured by pleasure since it is what distributes intensities of pleasure and prevents them from being suffused by anxiety, shame, and guilt.¹²

Positive desire is something that flows without recourse to binaries, oppositions. The “ $x = x = \text{not } y$ ” is not necessary since “intensity = 0; but there is nothing negative about that zero, there are no negative or opposite intensities.”¹³ This is the round zero that is infinitely divisible without changing its nature or identity but is incapable of dividing anything. This is a kind of bliss that you don’t dare contemplate, a kind of music most composers don’t dare compose, a music without conflict or tension, a music of continuously flowing intensities.

The focus on one stratum only, excluding the others, may be necessary to the reaching of a line of flight. It is an organic alienation, a shutting of superfluous orifices.¹⁴

The question is, as always, what is the purpose of music? For at least three composers it is to enable some kind of spiritual communion between more than one entity. For Cage, a purpose of music is to sober and quiet the mind and thus make it susceptible to divine influence. The mind is used as a vessel that is prepared through a hollowing, an opening. Bach approaches it through an emotional catharsis that leaves the auditor humbled, penitent, grateful. Messiaen approaches it through a sensual *regard* of the beyond—what is beyond time and space. What is beyond time and space are intensities, waves, vibrations, energies. They are best manifested in this realm by the phenomena of sound and color.

Cage wanted to open the mind up to the continuous stream of things that passes through our mind and through the world around us.¹⁵ Chance procedures expose the intellect to the inner workings of nature that we might not otherwise notice as we become collaborators with her.¹⁶ It is through this suppression of the intellect, of the symbol-forming faculties or, rather, through hollowing them, opening them, that divine influences or communion with another are enabled.

Bach wants us to experience an emotional identification with Christ as an individual, and to model a relationship with him as an actual being. Bach breaks down emotional barriers by exposing us to affective extremes on several fronts. Through this catharsis we are released from the emotional self-awareness that prevents us from identifying with another being, to an emotionally neutral state in which we are open to a communion.

Messiaen wants to model for us and perhaps enable a higher experience with “the beyond” in its most vivid sense, the actual fabric of eternal existence, what it feels like to have a *corps glorieux*. In order to achieve this we must overcome the barriers of the body, including the primal survival instinct. He makes this possible through sensual extremes, through the experience of “dazzlement,” much like the dazzlement depicted in

the Apocalypse in which a powerful force, a voice, or a light source will envelope the mortal, thus causing, “in the twinkling of an eye,” both the annihilation of the mortal body and its transformation into the body of glory. The following is from Messiaen’s *Saint Francis*:

Because of [the music’s] unbearable sweetness, my soul nearly left my body. . . . If the Angel had played one more note—if, after down-bowing it had made an up-bow—from unbearable sweetness my soul would have left my body.¹⁷

Within the Deleuze model, the goal of music is to achieve the BwO. As we know, the only way to do this is to reach the plane of consistency through lines of flight, which we are able to land on by pushing off of *one* of the strata. Cage pushes off of the signifiant stratum, Bach the subjective, and Messiaen the organic. The mind is the site of our sign-making faculties, our emotions are concerned with our self-consciousness—our subjectivity, and our organism is what perceives and responds to stimuli, specifically extrinsic sense stimuli, but also to stimuli from the four selves. Though each uses different strata, and, therefore, different lines of flight, they seek the same destination: the plane of consistency, and, thereby, the BwO.

When preparing a Cage chance piece, you must be willing to focus your attention on the mind, the intellectual self, and to tune out the emotional and sensual selves. Obviously you cannot turn them off because you are still an organism until you reach the plane of consistency. Moreover, doing so, if it is possible, risks throwing yourself “into demented or suicidal collapse.” Rather, the emotional and sensual must remain operative to keep the organism functioning while you concentrate on the mind. Ironically, this focus demands that you clear the mind of significances, connections, and open it to the stream of things that naturally passes before it, to “the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of its way. . . .”¹⁸ “The very life we’re living” can only be perceived in the absence of desire, which absence is equivalent to the positive desire, the vibrating, glowing desire that has neither a point of arousal nor a point of fulfillment, beginning nor end, the “*manque-à-jouir* that is life.” In a radio play about ghosts, Cage takes you to a plane of multiplicities in which spirits of dead and living artists and thinkers meet and share mesostics. The manipulation of transparencies, dice, and phonograph cartridges in other pieces causes you to meditate and move over the surface of the minute properties of nature, to commune with her. Such an experience is not possible with your subjectivity in the foreground, for this will yield frustration at

the uncentered authorship of the compositional object. You must also background the sensual in order to overcome the obstacle of boredom. Having suppressed the demands of these two selves, you can use the music and its processes to clear the mind so that it can lead to a state of communion, of release from subjectivity, of the multiple. But it is important to realize that the intellectual/signifiant is used only as a means of reaching the BwO. A purely signifiant experience is a dead end, which is why the mind must be quieted and hollowed through the music and your interaction with it.

Bach's music utilizes the subjective strata in much the same way. He distills the emotional self from the intellectual and sensual, which are still operative but backgrounded. (The signifiant details in Bach's music that can be perceived only through analysis or through the subconscious are well known.) He does not create a purely emotional experience for its own value. This is what sentimental drivel does. Rather, he seeks to establish a line of flight through an emotional purging, characteristic of the Christian search for grace in which the individual approaches God with a broken heart and a contrite spirit, a blank subjectivity which one may call humility. To achieve this humility, this emotional openness, you must pass through extremes of emotion in order to purge them. According to Messiaen, "Bach treated certain areas of Faith, not others[;] the pains of the crucifixion and the joy of the Resurrection,"¹⁹ and, by extension, our own mortality and the fear it engenders as well as the hope of release that follows it. The subjective stratum that Bach utilizes could be effectively, if not exhaustively, divided into three affective categories: first, the combination of peace and awe that accompany the perception of mysteries or, in Messiaen's words, "impossibilities"; second, the fear and trembling that accompany the recognition of the wretchedness of the human condition; and third, an earthy, even violent, jubilation. These affective states may manifest themselves musically as, first, reverential music, in which divine love is felt to be channelled through the music and the temporal quality is usually slow, rhythmically flexible or *rubato*, modeling the temporality of meditation, and peaceful, with a texturally smooth surface (*sanctus*); second, an urgent, even desperate declamatory style, with a more or less halting rhythmic surface and relatively angular contours (*miserere*). Again, we might imagine a *rubato* character, but one modelling the expressiveness and urgency of speech rather than the suppleness of contemplation. The third is the expression of praise, thanksgiving, *hosannas*, *halleluias*, and so forth, often in a jubilant or exultant manner. The textural surface is quite periodic with dense concentrations of energy on small, periodic points (*gloria*). Each of these

three requires an investment in its specific affectivity, one that will be made clear in a composition, a performance, and a reception.

Through an experience of directed emotional intensities, you are able to latch on to lines of flight *from* subjectivity, whereby you “gently tip . . . over to the side of the plane of consistency” and can be in a space where communion is possible.

Messiaen’s chosen stratum is that most closely identified with sensual: the organism. Messiaen uses the experience of sound-complexes (timbres and chords) and color, and their relationship to each other and to time. His chosen modes of organization, which some have called empirical, are in reality sensual. However, according to Messiaen’s theology, when you move through your senses—through sound-colors—to a line of flight, and if you reach the plane of consistency, you will discover that the intensities that pass over you are the very essences that Messiaen has been representing: undifferentiated vibrations, sounds, colors, and, ultimately: impossibilities, desires, loves, knowledges. Messiaen is not content to merely provide an environment in which communion can occur. Rather, he gives an account, an analogue of his own communion, one that may be incomprehensible (as the sound-color relationship is to most auditors) or ecstatic, depending on one’s openness. This openness is only possible if we place our subjective and signifiant selves on hold. We must then allow ourselves to be passive receptacles for sensual resonances. This passivity is better described as submission, the kind of submission that models the Christian’s (“nevertheless, not my will but thine”) willing and ecstatic submission to divinity. One has an awareness of the wondrous “impossibilities” of God and of communion with him.

To fully sense what will be the joy of heaven . . . one must above all understand God, whom we cannot understand in our earthly life and whom we will always understand only imperfectly.²⁰

The impossibility of perfect communion leads to an unquenchable desire, “Desire understood in its highest spiritual sense. . . . The soul is drawn by an irresistible love which reaches a crisis of yearning.”²¹ This love is then consummated into knowledge, though an imperfect knowledge. The only certainty lies in an encounter, a communion with another

being . . . and that implies the leap out of temporal things. . . . Music can prepare us for it, as a picture, as a reflection, as a symbol. In fact, music is a perpetual dialogue between space and time, between sound and color, a dialogue which leads into a unification.

Time is space, sound is color, space is a complex of superimposed times, sound-complexes exist at the same time as complexes of colors.²²

The communion Messiaen models is, again, only facilitated by focusing on the sensual stratum, tuning out the intellectual and subjective. The overwhelming of the senses leads to the smooth space, the plane of consistency. Through sensual saturation “we see nothing; nothing but a stained-glass window all blue, all green, all violet. We do not comprehend, we are dazzled!”²³ There is no recourse to symbols, connections; the colors are unbound by lines, borders. There is no dwelling on affective states. You are lifted from yourself, from subjectivity. Through the dazzlement of vibrational intensities “God dazzles us by an excess of truth; music transports us to God by an absence of truth.”²⁴

What you realize is that the BwO that is momentarily achievable in mortality is but a foretaste of “Les Corps Glorieux” of Messiaen’s organ cycle.

Our resurrected body, notwithstanding its glory, its spirituality, will conserve this same flesh that has clothed us and accompanied us, with the same faculties of seeing and hearing: and we must be able to see and hear well to appreciate all the music and all the colors which are spoken of in the Apocalypse.²⁵

There are three main attributes that distinguish this body from the mortal, corruptible one. They are *subtilité*, mobility, and radiance. *Subtilité*, or perhaps refinement, means that the body has no “earthly needs.” It “no longer ha[s] the abasing necessities of eating and sleeping.”²⁶ Mobility and strength are illustrated by the ability to “walk through walls.” The resurrected body “can transcend material things and can travel” to any distance in an instant. The most important of these attributes, radiance, refers to “the light which radiates from transfigured bodies; they no longer need either sun or stars, they’re their own light.”²⁷ Having achieved these *corps*, you are eternally dazzled because your body is surrounded, quickened, suffused by vibrations—intensities which it radiates in all directions. The resonance of sounding bodies, which were as sacred to Messiaen as complementary colors, models the radiance which then flows from body to body, creating an unbreakable unity.

Deleuze seems to have a fondness toward the masochist. To Deleuze, the masochist is admirable, though deluded. Messiaen expresses a form of masochism, but one very different from that of the Christian ascetic or

hermetic. Messiaen does not engage in or promote any flesh mortifying practices that involve, say, pain, or the deprivation of bodily needs or wants. Rather, he seems to enjoy imagining and modeling experiences that would surely result in the total consumption of the human body or, at the very least, the overwhelming and destruction of one or more of the five senses. Messiaen's descriptions of being dizzied or overwhelmed by physical phenomena often have an element of danger, the danger of death or the separation of the physical from the spiritual or even the destruction of selfness. Perhaps the *corps glorieux* is able to withstand and even enjoy things that would annihilate the mortal body; things such as being in or near stars and supernovas with their poisonous gasses and impossible extremes of heat and cold, incomprehensibly vast distances and times, and blinding light. Perhaps this is why Messiaen was also drawn to the most massive of instruments, the European cathedral organ, and to huge orchestras.

"The deep uttered his voice and lifted up his hands on high." (Habakkuk 3:10) This piece . . . was written high up in the Alps overlooking the gorges of the Infernet and the twisting cascades of the river Romanche, when the composer was overcome with giddiness at the cliffs and chasms and terrified by the abyss. . . . The piece begins and ends with a great *ff* on full organ—the cry from the abyss. In between, the highest and deepest extremes of the range of the organ together provide a sensation of immense space. The deepest are the cries from the abyss rising from the bowels of the earth. . . . Desolation, consolation: both ways, the abyss.²⁸

"And they four had their rings full of eyes round about . . . for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels." (Ezekiel 1:18-20) A tumultuous *ff*, evoking . . . the whirlwind, the fiery cloud, the noise of great waters, the four-sided creatures running and returning like a flash of lightning, the living wheels full of eyes.²⁹

A brutal and savage dance. Violently spinning stars, suns and Saturn with its multicolored rings.³⁰

Let us examine a third trio of concepts: that of Messiaen's classification of sacred music, which is in ascending hierarchic tripartite order. The first was *liturgical music*, which to him meant plainchant. He considered plainchant the only appropriate music to accompany the solemn rites of Catholicism. The second was *religious music*, which includes, among others, most of the sacred musics we are familiar with. The third, and

highest, he called “Sound-color and Dazzlement,”³¹ terms which refer directly to attributes he identified in his own music, and that of a select few others. The ordering may be explained in that liturgical music suffers from being tied to a specific function within the confines of a church. Religious music, on the other hand, can touch people in “all times [and in] all places”³² with much greater freedom and moves in a deeper structural level, that of nature as manifest in the earth and cosmos, as the context in which human beings exist. The music’s dazzlement works on yet a deeper structural level in that it deals with the actual fabric of

eternal life, which is³³ “to *know* Thee, the only true God and Him whom Thou hast sent. . . .” (John 17:3) This *knowledge* will be a perpetual dazzlement, an eternal music of colors, an eternal color of musics.³⁴

Earlier, in discussing Bach, I suggested a different tripartite division of Christian sacred music, based on affect. The emotional impact of a performance of a Bach sacred work, say, one of the passions, is not dependent on the specific beliefs of an audience or performers. One could imagine altering the text of one of these passions to tell a secular story of pathos such as a classical tragedy. Indeed the distinction between sacred and secular is blurred as the things that happen and exist, both human and natural, are perceived as manifestations of deity. Christ is portrayed as a very (albeit unusual) human and physical individual. The strange and supernatural occurrences surrounding the passion are likewise portrayed in a very literal, physical way, often through vivid and idiosyncratic melodic figures and instrumental textures. Perhaps this is why Bach’s sacred music seems so earthy while Messiaen’s seems so unearthly. Moreover, with Bach, each aria or recitative originates from a very centered and distinct subject who expresses sentiment with great candor. Not so with Messiaen whose sacred pieces do not seem to originate from a subject nor do they seem to express sentiment at all.

Different pieces of Bach’s sacred music fit into the three affective categories, but they fit only into the second of Messiaen’s three categories of sacred music. According to Messiaen, Bach’s music is religious music in the best sense, a music which “reaches all times, all places, touches on the material as well as spiritual, and finally finds God everywhere.”³⁵

Fitting Messiaen’s music into these affective categories is more problematic. Messiaen does not seem to want to use the emotions as a means of reaching the spiritual self. In fact, he does not seem to have any regard for rhetoric. His music does not preach or convince. It does not attempt to draw the listener in, either through emotion or reason. It seems,

rather, to “join the life of beings who say Amen with the very fact of their existence.”³⁶ An awareness of and willing resonance with this existential quivering/pulsating/breathing is what constitutes nirvana or blessedness in most religious traditions and, perhaps, the *bliss* of the tradition that Deleuze is drawing from. The Judeo-Christian tradition, except in its mystical manifestations, has been slow to recognize this, perhaps because of its emphasis on the literate and the socially defined. More importantly, much of western thought assumes the binary, the dialectic, and more particularly, the conflict between good and evil. Moreover, cultural productions in this tradition take a rhetorical stance on behalf of one or the other and generate their momentum through the relationship between opposition and overcoming.

The lack of rhetoric, or the lack of a binary-derived principle of construction, may account for the difficulty of analyzing Messiaen’s pieces. Additionally, the strange properties of Messiaen depend on a certain objectivity, one that may seem jarringly naïve. He has described his method as taking a mystery of Christian faith or of the Trinity from scripture or the writings of the Catholic fathers, finding out everything he can about it, and then trying “to translate it into music—not just into notes, not just into sounds and rhythms, but into sound-colors as well, into colors.”³⁷

An art that is concerned wholly with “the beyond,” where, presumably, evil (and thus opposition) does not exist, can move past the binary of good and evil, the necessity of preaching one over the other, or the celebration of the triumph of one over the other. Catharsis is rendered obsolete.

One of the great epiphanies of Messiaen’s life was his first viewing of the stained glass of the Sainte Chapelle as a child. One can’t help but notice parallels with his music. The power of stained glass is in its projections, the way that sunlight shines through it. Stained glass is a unique visual medium in that it emanates (or appears to emanate) light rather than reflecting it as do most objects we look directly at. Similarly, in Judeo-Christian scripture and tradition, glorified personages (angels, deities) have a different appearance from mortals in that they project light from their bodies rather than reflecting it.

A given stained glass can look very different, depending on the time of day, the weather, and where one is standing within a church. Figures on stained glass are often frozen, icy, two-dimensional in their representation though three dimensional in their projection. One does not sense an empathy or warmth from figures on stained glass as one often does with similar figures in paintings—an empathy that causes a deeper sense of self

and humanity (subjectivity). Instead, one is dazzled, mesmerized, and drawn out of a subjective awareness. With some stained glass there are different levels of perception and cognition, depending on one's distance from the glass.

What happens in the stained-glass windows of Bourges, in the great windows of Chartres, in the rose-windows of Notre-Dame in Paris and in the marvelous, the incomparable glasswork of Sainte Chapelle? First of all there is a crowd of characters, great and small, which tell us of the life of Christ, of the Holy Virgin, of the Prophets and of the Saints: it is a sort of catechism by image. This catechism is enclosed in circles, medallions, trefoils, it obeys the symbolism of colors, it opposes, it superimposes, it decorates, it instructs, with a thousand intentions and a thousand details. Now, from a distance, without binoculars, without ladders, without any object to come to the aid of our failing eye, we see nothing; nothing but a stained-glass window all blue, all green, all violet. We do not comprehend, we are dazzled!³⁸

An interesting distinction between Messiaen and Bach as well as Messiaen and the mainstream of twentieth-century composers is that Messiaen wished to express almost exclusively the positive and joyous rather than the tragic and melancholy. Messiaen also went as far as to suggest that

joy is a great deal more difficult to express than pain. . . . If you look at contemporary music, nobody at all expresses joy. There are frightful, sad, sorrowful, black, grey, ominous things, but there's neither joy nor light. That comes with color. . . . I don't belong to my era.³⁹

When pressed to explain his unwillingness to deal honestly with the sorrow and anxiety of the twentieth century in his music, he said,

I only express joy and glory in my music. . . . I'm afraid I've no aptitude for their opposites. . . . On the one hand, there are people whose view of the next world is obstructed by the suffering on earth; there is Job, who is driven by his suffering to reproach God. On the other hand, there are those who, despite suffering, constantly assert afresh their hope of everlasting life.⁴⁰

His manner of objectifying sacred mysteries, topics, and events allows us to escape ourselves, especially our emotions, to ascend, as it were, to

comprehend things that we might not be able to if our receptions were mediated by human emotion. It recalls Brechtian dramaturgy in which arguments are made on a stage to an emotionally detached but intellectually engaged audience. Unencumbered by the need to connect emotionally, the audience has a richer interaction with the material. Almut Rössler describes a rehearsal with Messiaen for the *Trois petites liturgies sur la présence divine*:

The simultaneous mental impressions of a music filled with ecstasy up to the bursting point and its composer's seemingly unmoved facial expression, voided of all personality, are among the key experiences of my whole life.⁴¹

Messiaen's dislike of psychoanalysis suggests a more fundamental avoidance in his music of the subjective orientation that was so characteristic of the second Viennese school. Speaking about his *St. François*, Messiaen said,

I . . . left out the disputes between father and son for a specific reason. I've known many psychoanalysts, even in my family, but I loathe psychoanalysis. I thought that such a scene would give those so inclined a chance to elaborate on an Oedipus-complex theme, and further, that since the admiration I have for my mother is well known, one might seize this opportunity to perpetuate the myth of psychoanalysis. So I kept away from the debate.⁴²

If psychoanalysis represents a delving into the depths of the human psyche, being unafraid of its dark and sticky interiors, then Messiaen instead wants to overcome what is acknowledged to be the carnal nature of the species to reach an elevated understanding of the divine. Rather than delving or diving into a squalid, striated space of darkness within, Messiaen wants to ascend to a smooth, infinite space of light above, an expanding beyond oneself rather than a retraction within.

An affinity with Deleuze is revealed in the title of Deleuze/Guattari's first volume of the *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* series: *Anti-Oedipus*.⁴³ More fundamentally, the shift away from psychology and the accompanying escape from subjectivity are fundamental to the post-structuralist project. However, in the context of a Christian mysticism, the death of the subject loses its bleak and alienating vagueness. Instead of mere negation, Messiaen's escape from subjectivity implies the loss of self awareness through an ecstatic union with the divine.

NOTES

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus—Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, translated by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 150. Hereafter cited as “Deleuze.”
2. In the “BwO” chapter of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze uses the second person, much like a manual or guidebook.
3. He most recently referred to this in a lecture given on 17 April 1990 at Southern Methodist University which first appeared in print in *Southwest Review*, 1991. Taken from “John Cage: An Autobiographical Statement,”

<<http://newalbion.com/artists/cagej/autobiog.html>>.
4. The word “signifiante” is distinct from the related word “significance.” Signifiante refers to the self’s sign-making or intellectual aspect, the subjective refers to the self’s self-conscious or emotional aspect, and the organic refers to the organism or physical aspect.
5. Deleuze, 159.
6. Deleuze, 161.
7. Deleuze, 161.
8. Deleuze, 161.
9. Deleuze, 161.
10. Deleuze, 154. Can be translated (among other ways) as “lack of enjoyment,” and “a lack to be enjoyed,” and “lack of sexual release.”
11. Deleuze, 155.
12. Deleuze, 155.
13. Deleuze, 153.
14. Deleuze, 150.
15. “[S]imply a way of waking up to the very life we’re living, which is so excellent once one gets one’s mind and one’s desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord.” John Cage, *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), 12.

16. Cage said in 1989: "I also found in the writings of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy that the responsibility of the artist is to imitate nature in her manner of operation."

<<http://newalbion.com/artists/cagej/autobiog.html>>.

17. *Olivier Messiaen, Music and Color—Conversations with Claude Samuel*, translated by E. Thomas Glasow (Portland: Amadeus Press, 1994), 231, 234. Hereafter cited as "Samuel." Unless otherwise noted, quotations from this book will be the words of Messiaen.

18. "And what is the purpose of writing music? One is, of course, not dealing with purposes but with sounds. Or the answer must take the form of a paradox: a purposeful purposelessness or a purposeless play. This play, however, is an affirmation of life—not an attempt to bring order out of chaos nor to suggest improvements in creation, but simply a way of waking up to the very life we're living, which is so excellent once one gets one's mind and one's desires out of its way and lets it act of its own accord." From Cage's *Silence* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), as quoted in

<<http://www.gherkin.com/palimpsest/silence.htm>
(not "/html").

19. Almut Rössler, *Contributions to the Spiritual World of Olivier Messiaen with Original Texts by the Composer*, translated from the German by Barbara Dagg and Nancy Poland (Blumenstrass: Gilles & Francke Verlag, 1986), 89. Hereafter referred to as "Rössler." Unless otherwise noted, quotations from this book will be the words of Messiaen himself.
20. Samuel, 232.
21. Samuel, 232.
22. Rössler, 10.
23. Rössler, 64.
24. Samuel, 233.
25. Rössler, 65–66.
26. Rössler, 28.
27. Rössler, 28.

28. From Messiaen's own liner notes for a recording of his *Livre d'orgue*. *Olivier Messiaen: Livre d'Orgue, L'Ascension, Verset pour la fête de la dédicace*, Almut Rössler, organ. Koch Schwann 315 024.
29. Same as above.
30. From liner notes to *Messiaen, Visions de l'Amen*, Katia et Marielle Labeque, Orchestre Philharmonique de L'O.R.T.F., Marius Constant. Erato D 110415.
31. Rössler, 57.
32. Rössler, 78.
33. Note the strange similarity with the Cage quotation in footnote 18: "the very life we're living, which is. . . ."
34. Rössler, 66 (italics mine).
35. Rössler, 78.
36. Rössler, 115.
37. Rössler, 115.
38. Rössler, 64.
39. Rössler, 91.
40. Rössler, 52.
41. Rössler, 20.
42. Samuel, 213.
43. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus—Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, translated by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1972).