

Later jester

for solo contrabass clarinet and electronics

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[12'00]

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The "jester" is at the same time the person who was employed to entertain the King, the buffoon, and corresponds to the bishop piece in chess (the same word "fou du roi" is used in French).

Later jester – or "the later jester" – could be considered as the last jester of a lineage.

In our time when we often wonder about the absurdity of societal and political choices, the idea to place to the front of the (sound) stage such an important character in the Middle Ages and Renaissance courts became self-evident to me. According to times and places, the jester was either a simple passive toy of powerful people (as it is depicted in Velázquez's paintings), or someone expressing a satirical criticism of the power considered as necessary. But he was soon institutionalized and gradually lost his freedom of speech and his subversive dimension to finally disappear from the places of power.

On the contemporary political chessboard, it becomes difficult to underline the distinction between jesters and powerful people whose antics make us want at the same time to laugh and cry.

That is why the sound world of the piece oscillates between grotesque and dread, between sniggering and moaning. The grotesque dimension of what is given to hear and see. We are terror struck before the vacuity and the powerlessness hidden behind the vociferations.

Are we the toys of the jesters, the jesters of these new jesters? Do they control us as they wish or can the voice counter power still be heard?

Derision and helplessness form here an indissoluble couple. A slightly monstrous dimension is expressed through electronic and instrumental sounds being frequently accompanied by the voice (screaming in the instrument). The voice has a different quality in the conclusion of the piece. The jerky sniggering produced in the tube of the instrument reminds us of the ambiguity of laughter. It can be the expression of anxiety as well as of hidden suffering and be made up of a disturbing dimension.

I also had in mind Jack in the box toys. These characters dressed as jesters suddenly spring from their box, eliciting in children an effect of surprise in which fear and hilarity are merged.

A discreet reference to chess is enounced with sixteen repeated notes in opposite registers. Their only mobility is a very fleeting oscillation. They seem to face one another as if the opposite pieces were stuck in their initial positions on the chessboard expecting a game impossible to start.

The conclusion of the piece evokes the exhaustion or the breathlessness of a world, a game in which sound gesticulations have followed one another with no significant possibility of going further.

Clara Maïda, April 2012