Valences of the (a)typical nature – Erik Satie

Roxana-Luiza Moldovan (Bucharest)

"Je suis venu au monde très jeune dans un temps très vieux"¹ Erik Satie

Abstract

The study contains two parts: **I**. *Valences of the atypical nature - Erik Satie*; **II.** *Satie and his personal vocation: procedural type constants.*

I. *Valences of the atypical nature - Erik Satie* is a componistical portrait. Among other things, I talk about the way in which his personal nature exercise the influence at the level of musical parameters.

II. "Satie and his personal vocation: procedural type constants" presents the parameters repeatedly used in the compositions of Erik Satie: disonnances, metric freedom, the agogica parody, the segments technique.

Key words: sold, fragile, trapped, existential, escape, ivory tower, imagination, *I*, hypersensitive, the melanchloyc satyr, precursor, paradox, procedural type constants, the segments technique.

I. Valences of the (a)typical nature – Erik Satie

A fragile soul trapped in existential, marked by the imminent destruction at the lowest daily contact with pragmatism hardness. Here's Erik Satie destiny, whose escape in the ivory tower of imagination, as the universe prefabricated dwelling likeness and image of the sovereign I, shows thus *sine qua non* imperatives.

Hypersensitive par excellence, Erik Satie has forged his own existential manner, engaging his withdrawing from the competition of bitter rules (sociomaterials). Enemy of frivoulous ostentation, he chose a solitary life, removed from the turmoil of the big-events. A small room served him as universe. A universe in which all objects were meticulously arranged, practice so common in the situation of unmarried persons. In the same time, domestic obsessions occupied a place of honor: the cult of handkerchiefs, and the acquisition of similar suits, made at the same velvet, also, the unhampered passion of illustrations - by his death was discovered around about 4000 papers o business card size (perfectly ordered, in turn), loaded with strange drawings and extravagant inscriptions.

This was the world of Satie. A tiny and strange world, but at the same time, serene and cozy, wearing bright reflection of the individuality that forget it. An optimal environment for the compositional activity – the "melanchloyc

¹ Vasile Iliuț, DE LA WAGNER LA CONTEMPORANI, vol. V (București: Ed. U.N.M.B., 2001), p. 13.

satyr" creed of his all existing, Erik the controversial, placed just in epicenter of the abstract paradoxes. Testimony in this regard? His whole creation for piano, bearing the seal of pluralism inspired, targeting both mystical and melancholy living, alongside childhood history ingenue, a cavalcade of frolics covered each time with a roguish smile.

Satie opposed trends in vogue – that actually evolves in parallel – a singular manner of composition, as a reflection of his special character. The "melancholyc satyr" will enrich the palette of sounds specifically for his period – <u>seductive</u>, by the ethereal *Impressionist* print, <u>traditionalist</u>, by the effusions of *Postromantic* ivory inspiring, but also, a powerful <u>investigation</u> and <u>introspection</u>, aiming the probing on the thicket by misterious fantasies of self (defining the *Expressionist* preocupation) – with a creative offer that will be contain *in nuce* a number of definitory elements for the beginning of some artistic movements by later date:

a. <u>repetitive minimalism</u>, advance through sound segments, the proper manner of construction (see *Ogives*, *Gymnopèdii*, *Gnossiennes*, *Pièces froides*, *Chapitres tournès en tous sens*);

b. <u>intersectional art</u>, *Sports et divertissements* by, strategically called "ear and eye composition"², the score shelters a number of texts and illustrations preceding 4 years the *Calligrames* by Apollinaire;

c. <u>concrete music</u>: Erik Satie is the first composer who appeals extramusicals resources (see ballet *Parade*), such as sirens, bottles granted, firecrackers, lottery wheel, gun, and last but not least, typewriter.

d. precursor to <u>ambient music</u>, which is so-called "musique d'amableument".

Stagnation in the germ of the said guidelines, irrevocable and suddently abbandoned, gives a new track in detectind atypical nature of the artist who conceived them. Continuing – like a Conquistador – the exploitation of sound territories that were already in his own possesion, Satie would have ensured a "place of honor in" pantheon of universal composition. But yielding to posterity the greatest honor, he decided to limit his contribution to the entire state of "simple precursor", because, <u>artist</u> par excellence, Erik the paradoxical had only one creed, which he followed - religiously - up at the end: the desire to build by his music, the proper <u>Land</u> for his special nature – the brilliant achievement of finding glory were placed outside of his own concerns or aspirations. Hence the aversion to strict rules of composition, as a result, imposing to promote the unlimited freedom of sound inspiration.

Satie is declared as such for the emancipation of dissonance, counting on inheritance provided by the chords successions of 7 (or 9 + 7) unresolved (for exemple, *Sarabandes* or *Gymnopèdies*), often grounded in a sound framework

² <u>http://lett.ubb.cluj.ro/echinox/arhivo/2000 - 123/07</u> html: *Întâlnire cu excentricitatea teoretică*.

for modal type (or bimodal), devoid of any metric classification, without excluding the rule of powerful pulses (though there are works with claim their membership metric, see the case of *Passacaglia*, *Menuet*, *Nocturnes* or *Sarabande*). And the list goes on with other compositional obsessions, configuration works revealing their propensity for harmonic agregates, and also, the cult for arpeggio and ternary pulsation, agogica parody with a symbolist tint, manifested in atypical profile of indications (see "en y regardant à deux fois", "être visible un moment", "conseillez-vous soigneusement"), fixation of figure 3 (many of piano works are characterized by this numerical group, but they are located outside any kind of symbolic connotation, according to the composer himself), not finally, the predilection for some sound construction methods:

• the elimination of development and contrasts \rightarrow sound profile with a flowing, monolih essence;

• abolition of classical form, not infrequently so-called analysis technique works reveal the "composition of segments", defined by means of melodical-rhytmic stoning basic configurations, which alternate – in directly or processed manner – the entire musical speech;

• quasistereotype distribution of matter sound (see the works for piano): harmonic or arpegiate extras (mainly, left hand) vs. leader trajectory (right hand);

Overall impression? A shortage of some inspiring horizon, the source of virulent and caustic assertions: "Petit geniè de second ordre, à court souffle...³

According to my own views (with all respect for previous comentators), the limitation is expressed in procedural arsenal of psychological reasons, reflecting (in fact) the proposed means for the creation of the illusory Land (that I've already mentioned) – sound personification of the compatibles factors with a human nature so special. And because the compatibility requires affiliation, stability, but also, an implicitly monotony – that manner which is resulting from keeping authentic links (regardless of the character and nature of "exponents") – than it is natural that music of Satie, expression of his protector ivory tower, can be placed into the sign of procedural reiteration.

But, a melancholyc sadness surrounds the sound landscape. Here again a paradox, judging by the status of antidote aforementioned, which seems not to have fulfilled its mission full, his inventor having thus unable to ignore his human limits.

Neutralized in a perpetual bustle of city, Erik Satie, obscure and vulnerable transient, contemplate the kinetic rush of Cronos. Implacable leak raises him a strong melancholy, his paradoxically nature – the <u>biological</u>, mature, and the <u>spiritual</u>, imbued (still) with purity of innocence – manifesting and thereby, his deep and irrevocable split. This is the mobile of his so-called funny melodies, defined by the simplicity of basic lines, which sound converge as songs for

³ Paul Landormy, LA MUSIQUE FRANÇAISE APRÈS DEBUSSY (Paris, Gallimard, 1943).

children), whose satirical paradoxical substrate is not nothing but a mirror image of psychological individualities perfectly distincts: ingenuos / cumming, melancholyc / satyric, innocent / malicious, or in other words, the perfect (mental-bodily) symbiosis of the ignorant, wanton and cheerful child, and the misfit and melancholyc adult, full of metaphysical reflections. In support of this, seems to come his last compositional stage, when we witness the birth of socalled "furniture music", conceived of consciousness (not devoid of regret) of the continous flow of time, and implicitly, the human destiny - the only possibility that remains in this respect being the resigned acceptance, like the reception of furniture music, of which we are asked to make complete abstraction.

This was Erik Satie. So cherish it to his just and true value, that shows, as all we know, "the valences of the (a)typical nature".

II. Satie and his personal vocation: procedural type constants

Supporter of semantic permanence, Erik Satie builds his entire musical trajectory by the coordonates of a trivalent "affect" – mystical, melancholy or satirycal –, option which finds its compositional equivalent, by involving a relatively small share of the staff procedure used. Here's how the paradoxical musician manages to construct a "chameleonic" creative vocation, revealed through various color suggestions, afferent by the releated pillar-parameters of the building sound. Therefore proposes to continue, pointing out some compositional constants, and their variants detected during the processing of piano works.

1. Dissonance, expression factor

Located outside of the traditional approach, the compositional arsenal by "master from Arcueil" can be characterized by the supremacy of his own suggestions and creative reasoning. Thus, without ignoring the prodigious dowry of tono-modal, the artist reinterprets – from a very personal perspective – the classical procedural core, giving him an ingenuos and unusual alternative. Specific sound structures roughness usually dissonant (emboided on his creations by the frequencie of sequences given by chords of 7 or 9 + 7), now receive the metamorphosis of sweet affects, materializes (for example) by a sharp melodicity, impregnated with a strong nostalgic flavour.

Made (except the last melody, which has a mixed structure: arpegiatechord) through the inheritance granted by chords of 7 or 9 + 7 (often chained after the principle of functional conversion), ex:



the triptych of *Sarabandes* ("voici 3 courtes pièces issues d'une esthetique toute nouvelle, instaurant une atmosphere particulière, un magie sonore absolutement originale"⁴) can be characterised by a melodic virtuosity of harmonic parameter, the sequence of dissonance thus dissolved in the fluidic sound of building complex.

First song by the *Gymnopèdie* cycle illustrates – during the first 19 measures – the alternance of two following chords of 7:



In this case, the alleviate of dissonance may be explained by a double method, which consists in:

A. functional conversion apply at the first interval of 7 (*fa*#) \rightarrow equivalent of the 3 by following chord;

B. resolution \uparrow of the second interval of 7 (do#), by the return of the originally chord sequence (*sol-si-re-fa*#).

Far from being monotonous, the chordic ballance of iambic structure, favors the development theme, likely a binomial expressive semantic: the nostalgy of passing time (see right hand) vs. his impassive drain (see left hand).

Depiction of a new chain of dissonance used this time in a hilarious and playful context, firmly anchored by the entire semantic consensus, takes place during the triptych of *Embryons dessèchès*. Invested with an initiatic function, dissonances (together with other components of musical speech) are designed to introduce us to the universe of parody, inexhaustible source of musical "narrations", full of joy and ... real cause.

2. Metric freedom – real or appearance?

With a quasiimprovisatoric character, subordinated of the psihedelic type sensations determined by the miraculous action of creation, the music of Erik Satie often suggestes the anihilation of the metric framework, without excluding thereby the prescriptions of the pulsating nature, which continues to enjoy a well-defined shape, or <u>alternatively</u>, as if the first part from the *Ogives* cycle, subordinate – altough in absence by an actual measure – of 3+3+4 metric

⁴ Paul Collaere, LA MUSIQUE MODERNE (Paris/Bruxelles: Elsevier, 1955), p. 155.

scheme stroke, ex.:



or <u>constantly</u>, such as *Idylle* (first pice from *Avant-dernières pensèes*), marking the permanent pulsing of 2-stroke, ex.:



or "d'Edriophtalma" (second piece from "Embryons Dessèchès" cycle), defined by a pulse of 4/4. ex.:



3. The agogica parody

Detached from the conventional field, the agogic profile reveals agogic satirical intentions of the eccentric creator, oriented of the symbolist era beliefs.

In the plan of discourse, parody finds its equivalent into a range of expression indices. Their defining attribute, determined by the oscillations of the correspondence: "agogica syntagma – validity in interpretative plan", give rise of following division:

A. Compatibles indices with sound expression;

B. Abstract character of indices, impossible to reveal into interpretation plan:

A Compatibles indices with sound expression							
"Questionnez"	Gnossienne I						
"Avec une lègère intimitè", "Sans orgueil"	Gnossienne II						
"Plus intimement"	Gnossienne II						
"Tres perdu"	Gnossienne III						

Avec conviction et avec une tristesse rigoreuse,	Gnossienne VI
"Savamment"	
"D'une manière très particulière", "Fatigue"	Pièces froides: Airs à faire fuir I
"Important", "Se fixer", "Pur", "Enigmatique"	Airs à faire fuir I
"Ne pas se tourmenter"	Idem
"Dans le profund silence", "Modestement"	Airs à faire fuir II
"Cumulativement"	Airs à faire fuir III
"Blanc"	Danses de travers I
"Sans bruit", "Très loin"	Danses de travers III
"Retenez, je vous prie"	Aperçus dèsagrèables: I Pastorale
"Large de vue"	Aperçus dèsagrèables: II Choral
"Très chantè" – "Mieux" – "Encore"	Idem
"Non vite", "Avec plaisir", "Naturellement"	Aperçus dèsagrèables: III Fugue
"Droit", "Sans mèchancetè"	Idem
"Modèrè, je vous prie"	Avant-dernières pensèes: I Idylle
"La basse lièe, n'est-ce pas?"	Idem
"Pas vite", "Lèger, mais decent"	Avant-dernières pensèes: II Aubade
"Lèger, comme devant"	Idem
"Chantez serieusement. Très terre à terre: sans luisant"	Idem
"En blanc et immobile", "Pâle et hieratique"	Les fils des ètoiles-Prelude du 1 ^{er} Acte
"Comme une douce demande"	Idem
"Haut", "Sans s'irriter", "De même"	Idem – Prelude du 3 ^{er} Acte
"Calme et profondement doux", "Sans orgueil"	Prèlude de la Porte hèröique du Ciel
"Avec dèfèrence", "En une timide piètè"	Idem
"Très sincerement silencieux"	Idem

B. Abstract character of indices	, impossible to reveal into interpretation plan
"Du bout de la pensèe",	Gnossienne I
"Sur la langue"	
"Postulez en vous-même", "Pas à pas"	Idem
"Ne sortez pas", "Dans une grand bonze"	Gnossienne II
"Ouvrez la tête"	Idem
"Conseillez-vous soigneusement", "Seul pendant un instant"	Gnossienne III
"Munissez-vous de clarvoyance"	Idem
"Dans une saine supèrioritè","Hâve de corps"	Gnossienne VI
"Allez"	Gnossienne VII
"Obeir", "Tout entier", "Descendre", "Dans le	Pièces froides: Airs à faire fuir I
fond"	
"A sucer"	Idem: Airs à faire fuir II
"S'inviter", "Ne pas trop manger",	Idem: Airs à faire fuir III
"Voyez","Dernièrement", "Bien"	
"En y regardant à deux fois", "Se le dire",	Danses de travers I
"Toujours", "Seul"	
"Passer", "Etre visible un moment"	Danses de travers II
"Encore", "Très bien", "Parfait",	Danses de travers III
"Merveilleusement"	
"Voyez"	Aperçus dèsagrèables: I Pastorale
"Grattez", "Ne tournez pas"	Idem: II Choral
"Souriez", "Depuis", "Veritable", "Ne parlez	Idem: III Fugue
pas", "Regardez", "A voir","En face","Visible"	
"Dans la tête", "Montant", "Toujours", "Tomber	Les fils des ètoiles – Prèlude du 2 ^e Acte
jusqu'à l'affaiblissement"	
"Ignorer sa propre presence", "Montant", "Finir	Idem – Prèlude du 3 ^{er} Acte
pour soi", "Sans trop fremir", "Etre plus près"	
"Superstitieusement", "Rideau",	Prèlude de la Porte hèröique du Ciel
"Obligeamment"	
"Peniblement et par à coups", "Entraînant les	Chapitres tournes en tous sens - II. Le Porteur

jambes"	De Grosses Pierres
"Apparent", "Dehors"	Idem – III. Regrets Des Enfermès

Sometimes, agogica-parody is correlated to the traditional agogica (see *Aperçus dèsagrèables*, *Avant-dernières pensèes*, *Gnossiene*, *Airs à faire fuir*). Also we are noted the case of melodies exclusively characterised by the traditional agogica, such as - for exemple -, the 4 *Ogives*, the triptychs of *Gymnopèdies* or *Sarabandes*, *Menuet*, *Passacaglia*, *Nocturne*, *En habit de cheval*, *Poudre d'Or*).

4. The segments technique

Sound material division in lapidary segments – alternating in directly or processed way over the entire musical speech – reflects the favourite compositional option of the controversial Erik. Pre-minimalist compositional technique, this method also carries a number of repercurssions on the traditional type of formal joint, Satie's creations borrowing thereby the "similarity" and "face" of the fluidic monoliths. Progressively (see the meaning of trajectory procedure, with a simple-complex origin), vs. <u>chameleon</u> (see the specific combinatorial multitude of complex organisations) – this are the key-parameters of the procedural type that will result, in further analytical approach, the selection of 7 at the variants of the composer models used on this occasion, as follows:

4.1Simplicity

Defining sample - <u>Ogives I</u> (marked a perfect similarity of procedural parameters over the entire cycle): sound construction made by a double segment, with a "question & answer" character, ex.:



subsequently subjected to a horizontal development (with a chord structure), the route of melody always keeping the same (except the 2 opposite transpositions, targeting intervals of $8p\uparrow$, and double $8p\downarrow$). Also, the exploatation of the horizontal plan determine the augmentation of the sound mass, the beginning unison thus converted in horizontal structures by 8 (2 or 4 system), respectively 5+6 sounds (3 system).

4.2 Repetition and alternation

Defining sample - *Gnossienne I*, begin with 3 segments, with the same melodycal-rhytmic roots:



marking an interrogative-conclusive type structure: <u>A</u> (question) + <u>A¹</u> (answer) $\rightarrow \underline{A}^2$, rhetorical conclusion, because the \downarrow continuity of <u>A</u>, played almost entirely (see the absence of the fifth note - si¹ -).

B segment:
C:
$$\underbrace{D}$$
 is by itself, while the duo
reveals a new question

and answer structure.

	The full sequence of segments												
Α	A ¹	A^2	Α	A ¹	\mathbf{A}^{2}	В	B	C	D	С	D	B	B
Α	A ¹	Α	A ¹	B	В	С	D	С	D	В	B		

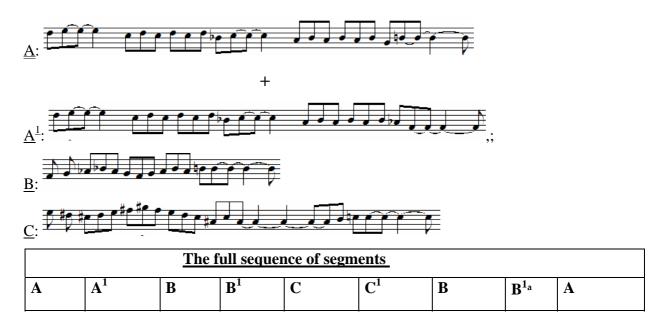
Carried out without any processing, the full sequence of segments determines the composition of the following 2 structures:

 A, A^1, A^2 – the triad onset + the abreviated version: A, A^1 ;

BB-CD, CD-BB (by recurring invoice), A,A^1 , A,A^1 , **BB-CD**, **CD-BB** \rightarrow alternated and repeated sequence type (because the reiteration of A,A^1 couple).

4.3 Model+working in couple

Defining sample – *Gnossienne II* - 4 basic segments from the same trunck sound:

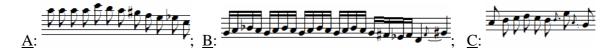


Here is a sample for the propensity of "couple-concatenation", processing segments being preceded by its generator, for example: \mathbb{B} (basic segment) – \mathbb{B}^{1} (its processing); $\mathbb{C} - \mathbb{C}^{1}$; $\mathbb{B} - \mathbb{B}^{1a}$, with 2 exceptions: $\mathbb{A} - \mathbb{A}^{1}$ ($\mathbb{A}^{1} \rightarrow$ part of the group of basic segments); $\mathbb{B} - \mathbb{B}^{1a}$ ($\mathbb{B}^{1a} \rightarrow$ derived from \mathbb{B} , representating by its turn, the processing of the initial \mathbb{B} version).

 \underline{A} segment placed at the beginning and end of both chaining, assign it a symmetrical character. Also noted at the same time, the using of variational process, as a mean of generating segments processing.

4.4Tandem of repeated segments

Defining sample: Gnossienne IV - 3 basic segments:



The full sequence of segments										
Α	Α	В	В	С	C ¹	Α	C ^{1a}	C ^{1a}		

Largely, segments are showing a reiterated sequencial type (see A - A, B - B, $C^{1a} - C^{1a}$). In terms of processing model, variation still has the primacy.

4.5 Double section

Defining sample - *Gnossienne VI*: This time, the material sound is divided into 9 basic segments:



processed only in trasnspository manner.

	The full sequence of segments														
Α	B	C	D	E	F	G	Η	Ι	Α	A tr.	B tr.	H tr.	C tr.	D tr.	A tr. ¹
B t	r. ¹	F t	r. ¹	Ηt	$r.^1$	Gt	t r.	Dt	tr. ¹	\mathbf{C} tr. ¹		•			

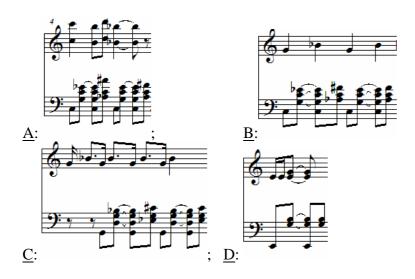
Segments reveals a double string section:

I. the section of the basic segment (symmetric, because <u>A</u>'s return at the end of the sequence) \rightarrow directly proportional with the order of appearence;

II. the processing section (with a character exclusively based on transposition), randomly ordered (we mention the absence of \underline{E} and \underline{I} segments, removed thereby, any type of processing).

4.6 Succesion and diversity

Defining sample - Airs á faire fuir, n° . 1 - Considerably augmented, the number of segments is extended to 17.









On par with the number of basic segments, complex processing is configured via the 2 options (type transposition or varied) used by the composer.

	The full sequence of segments											
Α	В	A tr.	B tr.	С	D	Ε	C tr.					
D tr.	F	G	Н	G	F	G tr.	I					
J	H tr.	G tr.	K	L	М	Ν	0					
01	N ¹	0	\mathbf{O}^2	Р	Q	Ι	J					
E tr.	F tr.	G tr.	H tr.	G tr.	M tr.	\mathbf{N}^2	G					

Full listing of segments propose the combination of the random or aleatory chains, as follows:

I. <u>Succesively</u> (with 3 modes of presentation):

a. <u>basic segments & processing:</u>

- A, B, A tr, B tr;

- C, D, E, C tr, D tr;

b. only basic segments:

- F, G, H;
- I, J
- K, L, M, N, O;
- P,Q;

c. only processing:

- E tr, F tr, G tr, H tr.

II. <u>Random & sequence</u>:

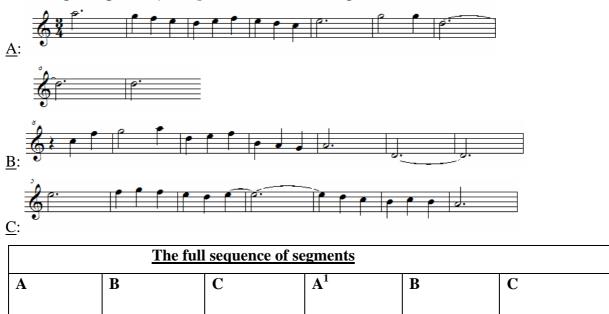
 \rightarrow P,Q – I,J (random order appers between Q – I segments).

III. <u>Random</u>:

- G tr, M tr, N^2 , G; - O¹, N¹, O.

4.7(Re)exposing:

Defining sample - Gymnopèdie III: 3 basic segments



After a first exposure, the basic segments (\underline{A} , \underline{B} , \underline{C}) are repeated again, with the exception of \underline{A} , reiterated in processed version.

We record for the final, the cohabitation of sound segments with stoning free form structures, developed in 2 ways:

A. or by the arpegiate harmonies, see:

- the beginning and the ending of *Gymnopèdies*;

- the ending of the second piece of Airs à faire fuir tripthyc;

B. or by the type of alternations "segment – free zone with the pedal function": see *Gymnopèdie I*: segment $\underline{A} \rightarrow$ free zone under the 4 measures \rightarrow segment $\underline{A}^{1} \rightarrow$ free zone under the 3 measures; this type of alternating can be also detected in other pieces, like *Gnossienne IV*, or *Gnossienne VII*.

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