

Gérard Grisey, the spectral moment, and its legacy Gérard Grisey, le moment spectral et son héritage

A bilingual colloquium and concerts/Colloque bilingue et concerts

Co-hosted by/Sous l'égide de
Schulich School of Music of McGill University, Université de Montréal, CIRMMT, and/et OICRM
19–21 October/octobre 2014, Montréal

Detailed schedule and presentation abstracts

Sunday, 19 October / Dimanche, 19 octobre

Concert 1

Le Nouvel Ensemble Moderne

Sunday, 19 October, 4:00 / Dimanche, 19 octobre, 16h

Salle Claude-Champagne, Faculté de Musique, Université de Montréal

Gérard Grisey, *Vortex temporum* (1994–96)

Followed by opening reception / Suivi d'une réception de bienvenue

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Monday, 20 October / Lundi, 20 octobre

Colloquium 1

Schulich School of Music of McGill University

New Music Building, 527 Sherbrooke Street West, A-832/33

9:00

Welcome and registration / Accueil et inscription

Session 1

9:30-10:15

Jean-Luc Hervé, *La notion de seuil dans la musique de Gérard Grisey*

La notion de seuil a toujours été importante pour Gérard Grisey. Le spectre, fondement de la musique spectrale, est un seuil. C'est à la fois un système de hauteurs, les fréquences qui constituent un son, et un principe d'orchestration, la manière dont sont associées ces fréquences pour produire un timbre. Il se situe à la limite de l'harmonie et du timbre. Mais l'idée de spectre en tant que modèle acoustique fait aussi référence à la réalité physique du son. Et, en s'inspirant de la nature dans son travail, le compositeur se place sur un autre type de seuil, celui du passage entre deux mondes, le monde objectif des sons concrets qui nous entourent, naturels, et le monde subjectif de l'imagination du compositeur, abstrait, construit. Ce passage établit une relation entre la nature et l'oeuvre.

10:15-11:00

Stephen McAdams, Acoustic and psychoacoustic considerations in spectral music

Spectral music by composers such as Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail, as well as composers of the subsequent generation such as Marc-André Dalbavie and Philippe Hurel, raises a number of issues concerning the conception of sound structures, their perceptual properties and the compositional use of such structures and properties. This presentation will focus on the nature of these conceptions and will examine the perceptual and cognitive processes that underlie their contribution to the evolving experience that constitutes the experience of musical form. In particular, notions will be entertained concerning harmonicity/inharmonicity and its relation to perceptual fusion and sensory dissonance, as well as the sculpting of musical tension over time through variations in these acoustic and psychoacoustic properties.

Break (15 minutes)

11:15-12:00

François-Xavier Féron, Structuration du temps musical et figures de spatialisation dans *Tempus ex machina* (1979) : ce que révèlent les esquisses

La maxime *Tempus ex machina* figure dans le premier texte théorique de Gérard Grisey – « Devenir du son » – rédigé à l’occasion d’une conférence donnée à Darmstadt en juillet 1978. L’année suivante, le compositeur approfondit sa réflexion autour de l’organisation du temps musical à travers la rédaction d’un nouveau texte – qui sera par la suite développé pour devenir « *Tempus ex machina*, réflexions d’un compositeur sur le temps musical » – et surtout, à travers la composition de *Tempus ex machina* – commande de l’université McGill – pour six percussionnistes disposés en cercle. Dans cette œuvre, Grisey ne recourt qu’à des instruments à hauteur indéterminée afin de se concentrer sur la structuration du temps, du rythme et de l’espace. Les esquisses – conservées au sein de la Fondation Paul Sacher à Bâle – révèlent des aspects essentiels du processus créateur, de l’utilisation du plus petit commun multiple des sept premiers nombres entiers pour établir des échelles de durées et tempi à la formalisation de procédures compositionnelles extrêmement précises. Au cours de cette conférence, je m’appuierai donc sur quelques unes de ces esquisses pour expliquer tout d’abord la structure générale de *Tempus ex machina* et me concentrer ensuite sur l’organisation polymétrique dans la première section de l’œuvre et les figures spatiales giratoires dans la troisième section.

Lunch break, 12:00-1:30

Session 2

1:30-2:15

Jonathan Goldman, Grisey and the accordion

The foundations of spectralist musical practice cannot be reduced to a set of theoretical premises gleaned from the programmatic pages of composers’ writings. Studying Grisey’s compositional process as a craft can bring to light strands of compositional activity that can be obscured by either an immanentist approach or a reliance on Grisey’s own verbal descriptions. This paper explores the possibility that the unusual textures of works like the *Espaces acoustiques* owe something to the acoustic properties of Grisey’s principal instrument, the accordion. This proposition becomes plausible when one considers that the accordion produces long, continuous sound with irregular envelopes and prominent combination tones similar to the *temps lisse* textures of Grisey’s music. Relying in part on interviews with accordionist Hugo Noth, who premiered *Partiels* and studied alongside Grisey at the Trossingen Conservatory, this talk will evaluate what role specific instrumental characteristics may have played in Grisey’s craft.

2:15-3:00

Liam Cagney, *Vagues, chemins, le souffle* (1970-72): The Overlooked Opening of Grisey's Mature Aesthetic

The accepted chronology for the emergence of Grisey's mature style (Baillet 2000, Féron 2011) states that the so-called 'spectral' style emerged following Grisey's attending the Darmstadt Ferienkurse in the summer of 1972, where Grisey witnessed a performance of Stockhausen's *Stimmung*, attended seminars by Stockhausen and Ligeti, and thereafter composed the 'oeuvre charnière' *D'eau et de pierre* (1972). This paper suggests that this chronology is inaccurate. It does so by presenting an analytical and historical account of Grisey's last work composed as a student, *Vagues, chemins, le souffle* (1970-72) for orchestra and solo amplified clarinet.

Whilst from a stylistic point of view there is much in *Vagues, chemins, le souffle* uncharacteristic of Grisey's later oeuvre (leading Grisey in 1975 to describe the work as outmoded), also present in *Vagues, chemins, le souffle* are certain key elements developed by Grisey in his subsequent works: compositional dualism (two groups which generate a musical 'drama'); the presentation of a musical figure via successive 'waves' of variation and/or accretion (characteristic, for example, of the respective opening sections of *Partiels* and *Le Temps et l'écume*); and – most notably – the use in 'Le Souffle', the work's last section, of the *spectre harmonique* as an auditory reference point. The presence of this latter, significant element has been established by the author following study of the work's sketches at the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel. The paper opens by presenting the work's historical background: programmed, with Messiaen's help, for the Royan festival in 1972, its premiere was cancelled following a strike by the ORTF, and eventually took place at the Festival d'Automne in Paris in late 1975 to mixed reviews, including the first discussion of Grisey's music in English, by Jonathan Harvey in *The Musical Times* (1976). The paper then proceeds to an analysis of the key elements in *Vagues, chemins, le souffle* which anticipate Grisey's later style. The paper concludes by considering what the proposed revised chronology might mean for our periodization of Grisey's style and for what the author suggests to be a sometimes unhelpful subsumption of that style under the name 'spectral'.

Break (15 minutes)

3:15-4:00

Workshop / Atelier: Philippe Leroux, *Un lieu verdoyant*

Isabelle Boivin, soprano; Florence Garneau, soprano saxophone / saxophone soprano

4:00-4:45

Round table discussion

Concert 2

Live@CIRMMT, McGill Contemporary Music Ensemble

Monday, 20 October, 7:30 / Lundi, 20 octobre, 19h30

Schulich School of Music, McGill University

New Music Building, 527 Sherbrooke Street West, Multimedia Room (MMR)

Gérard Grisey, *Le Temps et l'écume* (1989)

John Rea, *Accident (Tombeau de Grisey)* (2004)

Kaija Saariaho, *Message pour Gérard* (2000)

Chris Goddard, *Janus Turns* (2014)

Tuesday, 21 October / Mardi, 21 octobre

Colloquium 2

Faculté de musique de l'Université de Montréal

200, avenue Vincent-d'Indy, Salle Serge-Garant et Salle Jean-Papineau-Couture

10:00

Welcome and registration / Accueil et inscription

Session 1 (Salle Serge-Garant)

10:30-11:15

Robert Hasegawa, Rhythm and repetition in Grisey's *Vortex temporum*

Gérard Grisey repeatedly drew attention to the central role of time in his music: “For me, spectral music has a temporal origin.” In his compositions, spectrally derived harmonies are a vehicle for the exploration of new kinds of temporal experience. This paper examines Grisey’s approach to musical time in *Vortex Temporum* (1994–96). Grisey’s program note describes an analogy between the work’s use of three different types of spectrum (harmonic, stretched, and compressed) and three different types of time (ordinary, dilated, and contracted). While previous studies have primarily focused on what Grisey called the “skeleton of time” (an abstract precompositional scheme of durations), this paper uses detailed analysis to engage the “flesh of time”: how the work’s deployment of specific musical materials informs and shapes immediate temporal perception. Key theoretical texts include Grisey’s own “Tempus ex Machina” and Christopher Hasty’s theories of rhythmic projection.

11:15-12:00

Marilyn Nonken, Grisey and the spectral piano

The post-1970 conception of a spectral piano is deeply connected to twentieth-century advances in acoustics and psychoacoustics, electronic and computer music, digital technologies, and ecological aesthetics. It also finds precedent in the work and thought of late-Romantic and early-modern composer-virtuosos such as Franz Liszt, Alexander Scriabin, and Claude-Achille Debussy. These composers, who shared fascinations with the physicality of sound, the temporal nature of instrumental timbre, transformation, and psychoacoustics, can be aptly described as protospectralists. From Liszt, Scriabin and Debussy through Olivier Messiaen, to Tristan Murail, Gérard Grisey, and their compositional descendents, one can trace the evolution of contemporary spectral attitudes towards composition, listening, and performance.

Grisey’s most significant writing for piano appears in *Vortex temporum* (1994-96). He wrote no solo works for the instrument. However, he discussed his ideas about the piano with Edmund Campion, an American who studied with him in the late 1980s. Campion’s notes from his time with Grisey detail his mentor’s ideas on the piano and on composing with a spectral attitude in the context of its unique temperament and historical legacy. Grisey’s ideas informed Campion’s two-piano work, *A Complete Wealth of Time* (1990), as well as his subsequent compositions. They also shed light on the creative processes of his colleagues, notably Murail and Dufourt, who have written extensively for piano and continue to do so.

The conception of a spectral piano has inspired a renaissance in its repertoire over the past forty years. Classically spectral attitudes first associated with the Groupe L’Itinéraire influenced a generation of stylistically eclectic composers, including Marc-André Dalbavie, Kaija Saariaho, Jonathan Harvey, Philippe Hurel, and Magnus Lindberg. They continue to shape a third generation, including Joshua

Fineberg, Paul Clift, Jean-Luc Hervé, Anthony Cheung, and Christopher Trapani. Viewed through the lens of the piano, the development of today's post-spectral aesthetic and its implications are clarified, in relation to both the world of ideas and technologies as well as the repertoire of the past.

Lunch break, 12:00-1:30

Session 2 (Salle Serge-Garant [SG] and Salle Jean-Papineau-Couture [JPC])

1:30-2:15

Timothy Sullivan, Frequency or Pitch? Scales, Motives, and Melody in Grisey's *Quatre Chants pour franchir le seuil* [JPC]

In the essay "Did You Say Spectral?" Gérard Grisey noted the following harmonic and timbral consequences of "spectral" thinking:

- More 'ecological' approach to timbres, noises and intervals
- Integration of harmony and timbre within a single entity
- Integration of all sounds (from white noise to sinusoidal sounds)
- Creation of new harmonic functions which include the notions of complementarity (acoustic, not chromatic) and hierarchies of complexity
- Re-establishment, within a broader context, of the ideas of consonance and dissonance as well as modulations
- Breaking out from the tempered system
- Establishing new scales and – over time – a melodic re-invention

Many aspects of the above list are encompassed in two widely discussed spectral concepts, frequential harmony and instrumental fusion/synthesis, but the last entry in Grisey's list is unusual and of particular interest: have these "new scales" and "a melodic re-invention" occurred? A possible answer is found in the way Grisey manipulated harmonic spectra in his late works: "...as the degree of stretching increases, a spectrum is no longer heard as a fused timbre but instead breaks up into a collection of independent pitches." [Hasegawa, p. 354] This collection of independent pitches can now be organized into scalar structures and melodic formations; a particularly vivid example occurs near the end of *L'Îcône paradoxale* (1994), which shows "a very fresh and inventive approach to questions of meter, melody, and polyphony which...had previously proved elusive or remained unexplored." [Anderson, p. 21]

In this paper, I will examine Grisey's *Quatre Chants pour franchir le seuil* (1998), focusing specifically on independent pitches, especially in terms of scalar constructions and melodic/motivic formations. The "source" harmonic spectra for *Quatre Chants* are sufficiently distorted that they are no longer recognizable as an organizing force. I will argue that the spectra are serving instead as a means of providing harmonic functions, generating scalar structures, and most importantly as a source of blurring and redefining the boundaries between consonance and dissonance. Given this philosophical shift, it is perhaps possible and even preferable to think of traditional concepts like pitch, melody, and motive as important features in Grisey's late works.

2:15-3:00

Etienne Kippelen, La place de la mélodie dans la musique spectrale [SG]

« Ecartelée dans la musique sérielle, la ligne a disparu dans la musique spectrale » affirme sans détour le musicologue Jacques Amblard. Il n'est en effet guère contestable que les compositeurs de l'Itinéraire — à l'inverse d'un Claude Vivier, déclarant qu'une « mélodie [pouvait] être à l'origine de toute une oeuvre » — ont longtemps relégué au second plan la dimension mélodique, focalisant leur démarche sur une nouvelle approche de l'harmonie et du timbre. Pour eux, toute mélodie trop saillante faisait courir le risque, outre de connoter avec insistance telle ou telle musique du passé, d'obérer la fusion des textures et des flux et de réintroduire une hiérarchisation des plans sonores qu'ils tentaient d'abolir. Néanmoins, la question de la

place du mélòs, apparemment tranchée sans équivoque, évolue au fil du temps. Durant les années 1990, Grisey témoigne de son intérêt croissant pour la mélodie, écrivant, l'année de sa disparition, qu'il faudra désormais parvenir à « l'établissement de nouvelles échelles et - à terme - de la réintégration mélodique » Peu après, Murail lui emboîte le pas en précisant « réintroduire, non sans hésitations et beaucoup de précautions, des éléments vraiment mélodiques » dans ses pages les plus récentes.

Notre étude interrogera la place de la mélodie dans l'oeuvre spectrale, des conditions de son rejet apparent à sa réintégration parfois hésitante, en s'attachant à mettre en perspective la musique de Grisey avec celle de ses camarades et successeurs. Si le mouvement de l'histoire semble annoncer son retour progressif, une analyse transversale des oeuvres sera privilégiée afin de mettre en lumière prémices et permanences. Du *Prologue* pour alto, où la dimension horizontale s'imposait d'elle-même, aux *Quatre chants pour franchir le seuil*, où la résurgence participe d'une volonté assumée, le chemin parcouru relève d'une forme de syncrétisme esthétique, dépassant le strict cadre du spectralisme, dont les prolongements seront également étudiés chez des compositeurs comme Philippe Hurel et Marc-André Dalbavie, pourtant peu enclins à la saillie mélodique dans leurs premières oeuvres.

Kari Besharse, Reconsidering Texture in French Spectral Music: An Analytical Approach to Density, Spacing, and Interaction of Voices in the Works of Spectral Composers [JPC]

The compositional aesthetic of French composers Gérard Grisey and Tristan Murail is often described as privileging musical timbre, the inner structure of sound, time, and listener perception. However, attention to the important role given to musical texture—the vertical interaction and relation between voices or parts—by these composers is absent from theoretical literature. Previous analyses of spectral music have focused on pitch-centered approaches that emphasize the use of the overtone series, how the composer uses the spectrum of a sound to create spectral harmonies, and how this spectral data is manipulated through additional processes. While these are all important aspects of spectral music, not enough emphasis has been placed on the way individual sounds are grouped together into globally perceived textures, and how these textures are shaped in time. This paper offers an alternative method for understanding the works of French spectral composers by focusing on the analysis of musical texture by paying particular attention to the density, spacing, and interaction of voices.

In French spectral music, the spectrum can be viewed as a blueprint of an object that will be multi-dimensional when brought to life by an instrumental ensemble playing music composed using that spectrum (i.e. a texture). In order to observe the way that texture changes over time, I propose an analytical method which tracks two aspects of texture: 1) the density and spacing of voices, and 2) the interaction of voices, which can also be viewed as the quantitative and qualitative aspects of texture.¹ In this method, texture types are assigned based on score observation and listening, and six concrete aspects of texture are charted at regular timepoints by studying the musical score.

Textural analysis of spectral music can provide much insight into the way spectral music evolves over time and the impact that it has on the listener. The method proposed here can be used as an alternative means to pitch-based analytical systems, or it can be used to complement these analysis in a way that can allow for a much deeper understanding of the formal evolution of recent music.

Break (15 minutes)

3:15-4:00

Tatiana Catanzaro, Une étude épistémologique du modèle cognitif de la musique spectrale face aux apports technoscientifiques [SG]

Notre proposition de communication se fonde sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle le courant spectral, inspiré

des études technoscientifiques et avec le recours de la technologie numérique, résume les expériences du passé en les élevant à une nouvelle rationalité : celle de l'écriture fonctionnelle – systémique, ou synthétique – du son, par l'incorporation des diverses systématisations du phénomène sonore apparus tout au long du XX^e siècle à la forme musicale.

Pour ce faire, après avoir réalisé un bref historique des apports technoscientifiques qui ont favorisé l'avènement de la musique basée sur le son au XX^e siècle, nous exposerons les théories scientifiques et technologiques qui ont particulièrement influencé l'établissement du modèle de la musique spectrale. Cette stratégie nous permettra de montrer que, parmi les esthétiques basées sur l'écriture du son, les seules qui arrivent à obtenir un contrôle de sa structure interne sont celles ayant un contact direct avec la technologie numérique, métamorphosant, de ce fait, la cognition même de l'écriture musicale. La compréhension du son en tant que phénomène dynamique engendré par des solidarités fonctionnelles issue de l'analyse numérique nous permet de dégager l'idée que les musiciens spectraux ont réussi à dépasser le stade d'une écriture structurelle, issue du modèle tonal ou sériel, vers celui d'une écriture dimensionnelle.

Pour clôturer notre intervention, nous réaliserons une courte analyse de l'œuvre pré-spectrale *D'eau et de Pierre* (1972), de Gérard Grisey, révélant sa quête d'un nouveau langage déduit du phénomène sonore qui, peu d'années après, aboutirait à ce qu'on dénomme « musique spectrale ». À travers cette analyse, et sa comparaison avec d'autres œuvres issues de la période spectrale, nous pourrions cerner la direction de ses recherches à l'époque, révélant ainsi les transformations que l'écriture doit encore subir pour parvenir à cette nouvelle esthétique.

Will Mason, Grisey and the Posthuman Voice [JPC]

“Electronic technology,” writes Hugues Dufourt, “has imposed on the music of our time radical mutations. It affects not only the production of sounds but the sensitivity and even categories of musical thought.” (Dufourt 1978) Indeed, advances in technology have dramatically altered not only thought (musical and otherwise) but the very nature of what it means to be a human subject in a technologically mediated world. Auner (2003) writes: “In no aspect of our lives has the penetration of the human by machines been more complete than in music...It is at the level of the voice that we are most aware of this mechanization.” Auner observes that the technological voice is often the locus of expression in modern music, a phenomenon I discuss in the context of Gérard Grisey's 1982 composition *Les Chants de l'Amour*, for voice and tape.

Grisey (1985) describes the piece as follows: “Throughout the piece, different types of relations are encountered between the 12 voices of the choir...and the voice of the machine. The latter, by turns, becomes divine, monstrous, frightening, seducing...It learns to breathe, to sing, to move.” In assigning expressive agency to the machinic voice, Grisey creates a narrative tension between the digital and organic choirs. My analysis explores the relationship of these two choirs, detailing a selection of the compositional processes at work in each. I invoke Don Ihde and Andy Clark's work on the philosophy of technology to expand on the complicated relationship between the spectralists and the natural world detailed in Hasegawa (2009). For the spectralists, technology translates aspects of nature that reach or exceed the limits of human perception (formants, high upper partials, certain psychoacoustic phenomena) into the realm of perceptibility. It is thus a technologically mediated view of nature that informs much of the spectralists' compositional material. This perspective is manifest in *Les Chants de l'Amour*, including the analysis and isolation of very precise vocal formants using the CHANT program. The posthuman critical shift is present both in the pre-compositional vision of late-twentieth century composers (the desire to use new technological developments to expressive ends) and in the imagination of listeners (capable of ascribing emotive and affectual traits to artificial sounds.)

4:00-4:45

Julie Fuchs, *Prologue pour alto seul de Gérard Grisey : expériences et recherches d'une altiste sur la sonorité* [SG]

Prologue de Gérard Grisey pour alto seul (1976) possède une place privilégiée dans le répertoire de cet instrument. Le raffinement de l'écriture du compositeur, l'amplitude de la palette des timbres et la mécanique instrumentale requise (scordatura, sourdine, technique de main gauche et main droite) élargissent le monde sonore du musicien. Côtayant les sueurs de la *Sequenza VI* de Luciano Berio et influençant tout autant les œuvres futures, *Prologue* développe un espace gestuel distinctif. En effet, la virtuosité qu'elle demande réside déjà dans la lecture de sa trace compositionnelle. La minutie de l'écriture de l'œuvre force alors l'altiste à s'ouvrir à un vocabulaire sonore aux exigences inégalées, dévoilant une vitalité sonore incarnée, où le continuum sonore et ses fluctuations requièrent un geste rigoureusement chorégraphié. Comment se coordonne ce contrôle de la création sonore instrumentale (embodied knowledge) ? L'interrogation transdisciplinaire (Alvarez-Péreyre) de la sonorité de l'interprète et l'analyse de l'objet musical (Delalande) que je développe permettent une étude inédite des conduites implicites du musicien (Fernando) et de ses traditions esthétiques (Puchhammer-Sédillot). Puisque les concepts en psychologie et linguistique cognitives le permettent, abordons le sentir et le dire (Dubois) pour comprendre les rouages de l'émotion et du toucher de l'interprète à archet. Ramifiant la méthodologie en phylogénétique du violoniste (Liebman) et les mécanismes émotionnels humains (Sander) je proposerai une modélisation du processus lecture — écoute/pensée musicale — geste chez le musicien, entre culture musicale et science. Altiste, j'illustrerai mes propos sur la sonorité par l'interprétation en direct d'extraits de *Prologue* de Gérard Grisey.

Jason Noble, *Reconsidering Musical Timelessness: Semiotic Time in Messiaen's Quatuor pour la fin du temps and Grisey's Vortex temporum* [JPC]

Composers and theorists frequently claim that music affects our experience of time, and that we must therefore distinguish between time as measured (chronological) and time as felt (phenomenological). Many go so far as to speak of *timelessness* and claim that this is something music can convey. Research into deep listening has found that physiological changes associated with altered time experience can occur in some music listening situations, but that there is no causal relation between this experience and the type or characteristics of the music. Therefore, if we wish to claim that some music better embodies “timelessness” than other music, this cannot be grounded solely in the notion of phenomenological time.

I propose the addition of a third category: time as signified, *semiotic time*, in which musical stimuli relate directly to properties of the psychology of time such as the perceptual present, duration, periodicity, grouping, information density, and expectation. By creating stimuli that play on such properties, composers can signify temporal scales or structures that depart from the normal human experience of time, such as the “end of time” in Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* and the times of whales and birds in Grisey's *Vortex temporum*. I argue that music can signify such alternate temporalities through its internal organization, regardless of whether or not it induces a feeling of timelessness in any given listener. This approach is preferable for the purposes of musical study and discourse because it appeals to intersubjectively available properties of music itself, rather than individually subjective responses to music, while remaining grounded in the human experience of time.

Break (15 minutes)

5:00-5:45

Round table discussion

Concert 3

Sixtrum

**Please note the updated starting time of the Sixtrum concert, which will now begin at 8:00pm
Veillez noter un changement apporté à l'horaire du concert de l'ensemble Sixtrum, qui aura
désormais lieu à 20h au lieu de 18h.**

Tuesday, 21 October, 8:00 / Mardi, 21 octobre, 20h

Salle Claude-Champagne, Faculté de Musique, Université de Montréal

Gérard Grisey, *Tempus ex Machina* (1979)

Nina C. Young, *Etched in Sand* (2013)

Jean-Luc Hervé, *Ralentir/situer* (2009)

Philippe Leroux, *De l'itération* (2012)