

Dear Antoine,

I'd like to focus some more on the question of the name. As you wrote, naming the piece is a way of affirming its existence. It's one of the most vital marks, a way of saying that the piece now has come to exist. I want to ask you about how for you a name functions as negotiator between piece and world.

To me, the name seems to have an interesting double character. In the world, there will generally not have been any prior mark that announces the piece named by the name. In that sense, the name may seem random from the point of view of the world as it is, because it is a mark announcing the arrival of something new, something the world can not so far have known and is unprepared for. On the other hand, in most cases the name will itself not be a new word. Usually the names of our pieces refer to existing terms and ideas that already live in the world. Old words come to name new works.

The name, then, is an interface between piece and world. Names indicate how a piece might function in the world, but also how the world might function in a piece.

Often, in your own works, names seem very significant. In particular I'm now thinking of the proper names that appear in your Tunings series, which invoke richly suggestive names of thinkers and artists that somehow have been important for you, like Badiou, Leopold, Peckinpah, Ockeghem... and the invocation of these names suggests that these people, or perhaps certain ideas that they stand for, somehow are active in the pieces that carry their names – if not in clearly analyzable terms, then at the very least these names will guide interpretation and reception of the works. At the same time, this series of pieces is very concerned with number, each piece being the exploration of the musical possibilities of an ensemble of a very specific number of performers. This suggests that such a combination of a (proper) name and a number might on the one hand be a cause for a piece, and on the other hand might say something about the person the piece is named after, and I find this suggestion highly fascinating.

I wonder if you could say something about what names bring in from the outside world into the piece, either in a general sense or by talking about specific pieces?

Samuel

Dear Samuel,

thanks for your intriguing question, with all its implications and ramifications, which you, luckily for me, already explicate so carefully!

Yes, naming a piece is, i would now say, not *a* way of affirming the existence of a piece, not *a* way of welcoming something new (in our case: a piece of music) into the world: it *is* how we affirm, that something new has come to exist, how we welcome something, which has come to exist, into our world.

There is something solemn and serious about naming, i think. It is more than just labeling something, more than just giving the piece an ID in order to make it unambiguously identifiable.

Names may evoke something about a piece, about its "idea", its "character", about its way of relating to (other things, events, processes taking place in) the world and, last but not least, about how it should be dealt with (by performers, listeners).

In my case names often are highly suggestive quotations or quasi-quotations (from Edmond Jabès, Maurice Blanchot, Friedrich Hölderlin, Emily Dickinson, John Ashbery, Alain Badiou to name a few) that reflect something the piece reveals (at least to me). By finding a name evocative of this "revelation" i express my gratitude for it.

Including proper names by way of dedication ("first, second etc. music for marcia hafif", "routley tunings" etc.) is a way of expressing gratitude, too. It is a way of showing my feeling indebted to their work and my hope that their work is present in my music, without being able to say exactly how.

It may also be a way to support the piece by giving it a "patron".

Let me try to be a bit more specific about the series in which the titles relate a proper name and a number.

monodies pour mallarmé

Characteristic of a solo (of "one") is, i think, its focus on emptiness and silence. Stated differently: the content of a solo is the void. Isn't this very much the world of Mallarmé?

dedekind duos

If "two" is about disjunction, about separation, the idea of "Dedekind cut" is near.

peckinpah trios

"Three" is what is needed to have a story: sharing → inclusion, but also pairing → exclusion and seclusion → solitude is possible. Peckinpah's "The Ballad of Cable Hogue" has it all in touching sensibility.

cantor quartets

After dedicating the duos to Dedekind i felt i had to dedicate the quartets (2<sup>2</sup>) to Cantor. No better reason this time.

kiarostami quintets

In honor of Kiarostami's film "Five", which is also dealing with this number and its implications.

jankélévitch sextets

No specific reason for this combination, part from Jankélévitch's appearance in this series being due.

florenski septets

Same reason.

ockeghem octets

The piece basically is a number of four part double canons. This reminded me of Ockeghem's explorations.

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ashbery tunings for ten

Reflective of Ashbery's love of 10-line stanzas.

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ozu tunings for thirteen

Don't know why, but i felt 13 could be Ozu's number.

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van riel tunings for 15

I made this piece at the time Els van Riel, a Belgian film maker, was showing her film "The remarkable absent", a projection on 5 screens, in Düsseldorf ( $15 = 3 * 5$ ).

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basho tunings for seventeen

Haikus are 3 line poems with a 5-7-5 syllabic structure, adding up to 17 syllables. all these numbers play a role in the composition of this piece.

It seems to me, as if i haven't added a lot to what you already formulated so carefully and beautifully in your question. Be it so.

Antoine

Dear Antoine,

Thank you for the very enjoyable answer, which for me really does enrich the question. I find your invocation of the category of gratitude enlightening; perhaps we can return to that later.

Concerning your description of the series of "n-tets", it strikes me that the element of number is the most clear in the cases 1, 2 and 3. Could it be that with later numbers, the situation becomes so much richer and more complicated in terms of the character of number as such, that increasingly the relation with the title gradually becomes more "historical" than structural?

I don't know if this is true for you. But this observation made me think of the role of number in philosophy, and I was reminded of some quotes from one of my bibles, David Wells' "Penguin Dictionary of Curious and Interesting Numbers":

"The Greeks did not consider 1, or unity, to be a number at all. It was the monad, the indivisible unit from which all other numbers arose. According to Euclid a number is an aggregate composed of units. Not unreasonably, they did not consider 1 to be an aggregate of itself.

As late as 1537, the German Kobel wrote in his book on computation, 'Wherefrom thou understandest that 1 is no number, but it is a generatrix, beginning, and foundation for all other numbers.'

[...]

The number 2 has been exceptional from the earliest times, in many aspects of human life, not just mathematically. It is distinguished in many languages, for example in original Indo-European, Egyptian, Arabic, Hebrew, Sanskrit and Greek, by the presence of dual cases for nouns, used when referring to 2 of the object, rather than 1 or many. A few languages also had trial and quaternal forms.

[...]

The early Greeks were uncertain as to whether 2 was a number at all, observing that it was, as it were, a beginning and an end but no middle.

[...]

3: The first odd number according to the Greeks, who did not consider unity to be a number. To the Pythagoreans, the first number because, unlike 1 and 2, it possesses a beginning, a middle and an end. They also considered 3, and all odd numbers, to be male, in contrast to even numbers which were female."

It seems that monumental things happen in the progression from 1 to 2 to 3: for the Pythagoreans, it's the birth of number as such. Of course the symbolism continues: 4 is "even-even", and, notes

Wells, it's a number signifying harmony and justice for the Pythagoreans (as does 8; the implication is that there is a link between exponentiation and justice, and that again calls to mind Badiou's equation of the Power Set of a set with the State of a situation). Then 5, being the sum of the female and the male number, signifies marriage, etcetera.

But somehow, from both your answer and from Wells, I get the feeling that 1, 2 and 3 are dramatically speaking more primary cases.

Samuel

Dear Samuel,

in my answer I only considered the relation between the name and the number, not the “ontology” of the numbers and the way this is reflected in the piece.

The pieces really are “about” the number, much less about the name.

But you are right, the relation between name and number seems to be denser or deeper in some of the lower numbers.

Anyway, thank you very much for your additional comments. They are exciting and revealing!

Writing this i suddenly remember, that my first motivation to combine a name with a number had to do with the sound.

The first piece i did was the Dedekind Duos and i now remember I had imagined the title before I started thinking about the piece!

After the Dedekind Duos I felt I should write a Cantor piece as well and “Cantor Quartets” was the logical choice from the point of view of assonance!

Then I wrote the *Monodies pour Mallarmé*.

Next piece was the trios. The piece was nearly finished and i didn't have a name yet.

Michael was in Düsseldorf and he told me about a festival in LA with movies by Peckinpah and Fellini. All of a sudden I said “Peckinpah Trios” and we all laughed and were somehow shocked and surprised. I knew about Peckinpah but had never seen a movie by him. Back home I looked up everything I could find about Peckinpah and came across The Ballad of Cable Hogue.

Somehow i managed to find a video copy of this completely neglected movie and it was the perfect fit to what I had been thinking about “being three”.

I think I could continue for a while. This memory didn't occur to me, when I ws writing my first answer to your question.

Thanks for prompting me to think a little more about it!

Bottom line: probably my naming was inspired at least as much by assonance and rhythm as by the ontology of number in its relation to the work of the name's owner.

Antoine