

“Richard Chartier”

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Richard Chartier is a pioneer of a “new school” of electronic minimalism that appeared in the 90’s, time of apogee of fully digitalized music. The temptation was strong to restrict this music, often rhythmic, to the edge of pop music and the ultra minimalist concrete music with a “glitch” label. Clearly Richard Chartier’s work is anchored in deeper roots and, surprisingly, his influences are not so much from the music world. This meticulous American has created a sensitive world, detached from any techno influence that his Asian or European peers have kept like Ryoji Ikeda or the artists from the Raster-Noton label. Richard Chartier materializes sound in giving an almost tactile character to his music, which remains a unique experience.

Richard Chartier, born in 1971, is a multi disciplinarian artist: visual art, sound art and installations show his large palette of influences. Primarily, his education in American Fine Art is in graphic design and painting. He founded the label Line - an under division of 12K - in collaboration with Taylor Deupree, a graphic designer and musician like him, and also published some sound pieces with other pointillist labels: Trente Oiseaux, Spekk, Mutek, DSP, ERS, Fällt... His work doesn’t ask for a standard listening, but a concentrated commitment is requested. This universe of almost imperceptible soft and stifled fragments, of high frequencies, sparkles, static or moving sounds, at the edge of silence, creates a complex field of textures. “ My work shows a progressive and meticulous process of reduction. Like sound instants that are placed under a microscope to be better considered, then they are eventually pruned, immersed in an isolated microsecond. The key element of my compositions is often located in the space that separates sounds more than in the sounds themselves”.

This way, Richard Chartier is constantly seeking a physicality of the sound. He asks a physical engagement of the listener in his/her own perception of the sounds, of the variation and of the relief created by the relation between sounds and silences. “ I’m looking for an involvement in the listening in opposition to the musicality. Permanently, I present ideas of composition without extra elements that would affect the conceptual clarity of each piece.”

His work involves issues of spatiality, focuses on silence, on respiration, and on suspension. “I explore a implicit silence that is not really a silence. The almost unbearable sounds that I use, give the wrong idea of the activity and the energy of the composition itself. I’m looking, rather, to emphasize the rich and structured threshold that exists between silence and sound. Thus, my compositions are fitted for a low volume of listening or for headphones.” Twinkling low frequencies, a desire almost recreational in organizing faint sounds, a strong sensitive character, are some of the many details that make Richard Chartier’s music a kind of canvas in perpetual movement.

From silence to touch

The first appearance of these uncolored, translucent sounds, evolves rapidly in a sound experience, almost tactile, in which the audition is sought in a kind of surgical way, heightened by the work of precision by the artist. “ Even more than the touch, my work is purely about sensation. I have a rather more sculptural approach to the treatment of the sound elements. Each cracking sound or whistle is distinct, and gives an example of sound physicality which is nevertheless close to silence. By being almost transparent, each sound in my work is dependent upon the personal engagement of the listener, in opposition to the regular listening experience.”

This requested active listening, places the listener as an actor in the artist’s work. This way, Richard Chartier reaches his objectives, like a painter or a sculptor, who allows the viewer of their work to feel his/her own emotion, his/her own analysis in front of the exhibited piece. Everyone is invited by Chartier to examine with meticulousness to what he/she is listening, to dissect what he/she is hearing, to discover his/her own capacity for perception and even to be surprised by this capacity. This “sound relief” is created through Richard Chartier’s process of composition—very meticulous and in-depth work. “A low rhythm produces a continuous structural degree to each piece that I compose. This rhythm is progressively fragmented, dematerialized in spectral pieces from the original. Then, some recognizable cycles are developed slowly, but that voluntarily hold the distinction of each sound in the composition, which varies the perception of the listener. By experimenting with a composition stretched in time and a slowed down rhythm, the expected arrival of the following sounds makes even the smallest changes of rhythm, or the slightest introduction of alternative events, as significant as the space of relative silence between the sounds.”

Minimal expressionist

Recently, Richard Chartier developed his work toward a space more “audible” and less “silent” esthetically, after albums at the frontier of the perception, monochrome master pieces close to the ultimate esthetic of Francisco Lopez and Bernhard Günter. Like these artists and a lot more in this art sound field where everything except the silence was completely examined, Richard Chartier, like a photographer, works with the right focal length, creating a sensitive environment, to bring the listener himself to capture a sound. This precise work is a continual reference to Richard Chartier’s artistic background. Its multidisciplinary range of influences like Marcel Duchamp and Yves Klein outlines the importance. “ Because I have education in visual arts, there is, of course, an influence of this approach in my sound work.

I'm applying to my work what inspires some artists like Klein, Duchamp, but also Gyorgy Kepes, Harry Bertoia, Tapies, or Alberto Burri to name only a few." We could add Malevitch for his ultimate experience of the monochrome as a symbol of both infinity and nothingness.

This mix of influences aids in understanding the sometimes monochromatic, sometimes expressionist, and even the mathematic arrangements of Richard Chartier's composition. More than an egocentric unfathomable assembly of clicks and collages, his work is a work of sharing and renovation of perception. We could then situate him as an extroverted Bernhard Günter, offering more nuances and colors, or as the digital equivalent of Steve Roden, one of those close to him in the poetic acceptance of sound minimalist. "My purely musical influences are close to Morton Feldman or Toru Takemitsu, and the sounds that are around me are often ignored because of their every day nature. These are influences shared with the cited artists. For me, minimalism is an auto-referenced work that has to be clear, concise and well-ordered." This conviction being established, Richard Chartier prefers explaining the fundamentals of his personal artistic work, to linking them to any current or theoretical approach. "I try to keep my distance from all theories and precepts in my work. My work speaks only about itself." Richard Chartier develops this way, his own concepts to explain his sound and visual developments. "To summarize, we can say that it's the continued meaning of the reduction and the structure that guide my artistic process, in my first works as much as in my most recent ones. Although different in several aspects, each work is related to the others. My goal is to bring a testimony of the potential interdependence of the sound, the silence and the process of listening itself."

Installations and performances: the sound plastic

This interdependence can be emphasized when Richard Chartier's "music" becomes live performance. It's another way to confront his very intimate sound work with outside perception. The concert becomes a new experience of his work. Hearing it live, the listener can't expect an exclusive perception of his work. He/she must integrate new strains. The artist too. "My live performances are different from my recordings because of an increase in activity and audibility. Sounds that I use are selected in a collection of already prepared sounds from past compositions and unpublished works but carefully selected to fit the space and the situation where they're going to be presented." In this way, a live piece for Richard Chartier, serves to bring sounds in to immediate dynamic relation, creating a drafted composition in which a certain degree of space exists for in situ improvisation. "The performances preferably take place in spaces that encourage the listener to get around others sensations, including visual ones. Without the striking presence of visual signals, and as much as possible, without other sound stimuli that are not part of the performance itself, a live presentation of my work leads listeners to concentrate intentionally on their capacity to listen a sound. A lot of people have told me that they have experienced, during my concerts, a loss of the notion of time, having lost all measure of the length of the performance."

For each of the installations that Richard Chartier creates regularly, the process is a little different, even if it deals as usual, with perception. "As for a performance, an installation re-contextualizes my work in specific and controlled environments. The listener/spectator immerse himself/herself with the sound in relation to their own place in the space. These installations' objective is to redirect the concentration of the listener/spectator, and to have him/her focus on select aspects of the experimentation of the sound." At each installation, the decor is reduced to the minimum. Richard Chartier appropriates the place (the spaces, the furniture). This way, by transforming the restrictions into opportunities or tools, he combines the modification of the perception of the place with the perception of the sounds he offers. In this work, he keeps the obsession of reduction, of the primal sense of minimalism, by removing all possibilities of diversion. "To satisfy my objectives in expressing forms, I try to remove the visual signs from the installation space and to reach as much as I can, a state of "no references" to the work itself. It's an attempt of pure sound rather than a visual art experience that makes sounds. In other words, it's a desire to generate and experience sound that doesn't depend on a visual reference."

In the process of the natural evolution of his work and the constant questioning, Richard Chartier has recently taken part in the idea of the remix by submitting his pieces to the interpretation of other artists with the album Re'post'postfabricated. Of course this approach incorporates a concept other than the remix as we usually know it. "It was a suggestion of Roel Meelkop. With his argument, I thought that the sources of my album Postfabricated could be explored further." The result shows that sounds taken over by other artists, could come out differently and create other levels of perceptions, as the same recipe executed by different chefs would never produce meals with the same flavor.

Richard Chartier doesn't pursue a quest, he tries constantly to create a plastic and physic experience of sound work and perception. The apparent complexity that he offers for listening becomes quickly a familiar world. With his sound creation, Richard Chartier helps the listener to detect in herself/himself, some unknown inner components. By helping everyone to utilize his/her own perception, he opens unexplored intimate territories.

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