

# **The Polyphony of the Senses: Translating Synesthetic Music of Olivier Messiaen into Sensual Architecture**

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This thesis investigates music's provocation of strong emotions that when translated into architecture provoke similar emotions. According to Kourosh Mavash, "[music is for most people a stronger emotional experience than looking at pictures or scenery. . . . [w]e feel more vulnerable to sound." Historically, comparisons between music and architecture largely ignored the translation of the emotional response from music to architecture, and instead, narrowly examined number, rhythm, notation and proportion.

This thesis seeks to examine the multi-sensual experience of Olivier Messiaen's synesthetic music while translating its formal analytical aspects into a set of rules in architecture. Messiaen, a synesthete, visualized very complex colors when he heard or read music thus creating visual music. A bathhouse was used as a building typology so as to explore the multi-sensual music of Messiaen in the context of the highly sensual and personal experience of bathing. Parc de Bercy was chosen as the site due to its accessibility and proximity to water.

To capture Messiaen's sensual music in the bathhouse, *vingt regards sur l'enfant Jésus*, IVII, *regard du silence* (Twenty contemplations for Infant Jesus, the 17th piece, *Contemplation of Silence*) was first translated into a two dimensional drawing, then a three dimensional conceptual drawing and then a final architectural design. The result allows users to hear what they see by experiencing the bathhouse as a complete architectural translation of Messiaen's music. Silent music is formed by the constant rhythms of light and shadow on the façade, under the water, on the ceiling and on the walls. Like the music, the bathhouse is divided into three parts: an introduction experienced by descending into the bathhouse for the bathing experience, a middle composed of a series of sensual bathhouse experiences and an end experienced by ascending into a reflection/meditation space filled with light. The constant presence of water visually and aurally stimulates the senses. Restoring the vineyard at Parc Bercy in Paris, France, enhances the landscape and allows visitors to walk through the quieting rows of vineyard as a start to experiencing the music.

Polyphonic music can be a guide to the creation of rich polyphonic experiences that combine spatial and aural experiences bathed in rhythms of light--users will be awakened by a building that sings music of the senses.