"La vérité est une espèce menacée".
Jérôme Minière's Quest for Meaning
in an Age of 'End Times' Spirituality

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Summary

Jérôme Minière's song "La vérité est une espèce menacée", first released online on January 11, 2018, strikes the listener by its profound interdependence of text, music, and interpretation. Text, music, voice, programming, instruments, editing, mixing, and clip making bear the same name, Jérôme Minière, who has rightly been acclaimed as one of today's particularly promising multitalents. Compared to the parameters of popular music, the song is atypical in that it is not sung but recited. Its floating tonality corresponds with the fragile construction of the text while the video clip underlines the impression of fragmentation and flow perfectly in tune with the rhythm of the music and the spoken word. Altogether the song evokes an existential journey from metaphysical and societal crisis to arrival at a moment of potential becoming, an 'end times' spirituality, relative and ambivalent.

Slavoj Žižek's "end times" are not mentioned explicitly in Jérôme Minière's creative work but they undeniably constitute the foil against which it can and should be discussed. This is especially true for his song "La vérité est une espèce menacée", which is permeated with an 'End Times spirituality' that touches on a number of contemporary existential concerns, among them those articulated by Žižek. His statement that "the global capitalist system is approaching an apocalyptic zero point" (2010, x) is probably one of the most quoted assessments of the beginning twenty-first century. It captures in a nutshell both indistinct flurries of anxiety and tangible threats – Žižek's 'famous four', which are the world's "ecological crisis", the "biogenetic revolution", the "imbalances within the system" and the "growing social divisions" (2010, x). But there is more: In this twenty-first century long-established assumptions about seemingly unambiguous categories like 'human' and 'non-human', 'man' and 'machine' are being challenged, in tune with the fascination *and* discomfort with the digital revolution as a by-product of the current phase of accelerated globalization. Not surprisingly, writers and intellectuals worldwide have responded to this evidence and its perturbing effects and in doing so have discovered 'fragility' as an object

of attention and meditation. As for adequate artistic approaches of the new subject matter, they have found ways and means to creatively experiment with linguistic and other strategies to express the new state of fragility and its concurrent sense of *fragilisation* of all life contexts. Not only that: Speaking of popular music, there are grounds for the assumption that musicians, too, have their share in reflecting (and reflecting *on*) the intellectual, moral, cultural, and economic climate of our age in their creations, as will be demonstrated in the following interdisciplinary analysis of Jérôme Minière's song "La vérité est une espèce menacée", first released online on January 11, 2018 (Apostolou 2018) before it was re-released both on the album *Dans la forêt numérique* (2018) and on its sequel *Une clairière* (2019).[2]

Jérôme Minière, *auteur-compositeur-interprète* and more

Born in Orléans (France) on March 27, 1972, a film student at INSAS in Brussels, Minière moved to Montréal in 1995[3] where he was given the flattering attribute of being "one of Canada's finest imports" ([shawnpt] 2013). In fact, Minière seems to be one of today's particularly promising multitalents, who need not fear comparison with that other great multitalent of the French music scene some three generations ago, Boris Vian. Among his many talents, music is his first vocation: From his early days onward in the 1970s, music has meant for him "a way of living […] adding taste, colors, and moods to reality" in an ambiance he describes as "very peaceful and relax" (Apostolou 2018). Due to his father's interests, Minière became familiar with hippie bands, Brazilian music and French artists alike,[4] he himself mixing "new wave, hardcore punk and funk, all that was reachable" (Apostolou 2018) in his first musical experiments. Minière plays the piano, keyboards and the guitar but he insists that for him, music represents "an inner flow" (Apostolou 2018) rather than a set of notes and rules. By the end of the 1990s, he yields to the fascination of electronic music, which he considers as "poetry of the sounds" allowing the artist "to be free with them" (Rodriguez 2013). Minière's musical answer to the contemporary world is eclectic as is the world itself, and this diversity also accounts for a certain fragility of his œuvre. Music critics unanimously acknowledge that his albums resist labelling and refuse to serve genre clichés ([s.i.] 2008, ad *Cœurs*), they highlight their "thousands of facets" (Malon 2015, ad *Une île*, tr. U.M.) and "multitude of styles" resulting in "a type of popular music difficult to classify" (Pelletier s.i., ad *Forêt*, tr. U.M.). Speaking of the album that concerns us here, Philippe Dumez (2019) adds that "like in his preceding CDs the artist is on his guard not to restrict himself to one single register" (tr. U.M.). The Montreal scene hereby serves him as the most "incredible" biotope, and this "in all genres of music" (Rodriguez 2013).

To this day, Minière has released 13 albums[5] (some of which double) with Lithium (France), La Tribu (Québec) and most recently Objet Disque (France), alongside with his autoproduction *Dans la forêt numérique*. CDs, DVDs, vinyles, Bandcamp and iTunes have served the artist as storage media on which he occasionally juxtaposes vocal and instrumental pieces or experiments with their length.[6] Within his song production, the three

albums dedicated to his fictional alter ego Herri Kopter occupy a special position: Minière invented Herri Kopter as a "pseudonym to create electronic music" and a "medium through which [he] could talk about society in a more precise way than if [he were] singing under [his] own name" (Rodriguez 2013). Different in style and sometimes even described as the Kopter albums' antipodes (2001, 2004, 2013; cf. Papineau 2007), *Petit cosmonaute* (2001) and *Coeurs* (2005) touch a more intimate note, whereas his more recent productions, rich in innovative musical ideas, subtly combine personal observations and sentiments with reflections on the postmodern age – Žižek's 'end times'. As a consequence of the diversity of Minière's musical universe combining "français, pop, électro et arrangements symphoniques" (Manzoni 2019) the artist has been claimed by several song and music traditions, in particular *la nouvelle chanson française*[7] on the one side and (the sometimes more experimental) electro-pop[8] on the other.

But the artist's profile goes beyond this very basic sketch of his talents. Larose and Rondeau, for instance, list Minière in the 'best of' of all Montreal remixers – "la crème des remixeurs montréalais" (2016, 86). He has produced film music and albums for artists like Ngâbo, Frédérick Baron, Grenadine, Tristan Malavoy or Domledo; he has collaborated with such famous names as Pierre Lapointe, Martin Léon, Michel Faubert, Jean-Pierre Ferland, Jim Corcoran, Dumas, Françoiz Breut, Lhasa de Sela, Frannie Holder, and Bïa;[9] he has been awarded renowned prizes (cf. discography), has toured in Quebec, France, and Germany[10], and has collaborated repeatedly with stage director Denis Marleau. *Last but not least*, Minière has reached out to the visual arts, developing his own art of the video clip and working with the visual artist MP Normand, and to literature, to "storytelling" (Apostolou 2018), with a first novel, *L'enfance de l'art*, which was published in 2015.

As to Minière's affinity with literature, critics have paid tribute to the quality of his texts from his earliest productions onward, frequently comparing them to poetry (cf. Popa 2019; Popa on Website 1; Apostolou 2018) and in particular to poetry in the surrealist veine (Bandeàpart). Minière is regarded as a passionate lover of the word, with a predilection for Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon, and Fernando Pessoa (all of whom he has adapted for his own artistic purposes) and stylistic reminiscences of Franz Kafka (cf. Varrod 2019). On the other hand – since most of Minière's texts are unrhymed – he is praised for the 'musicality' (or: the 'natural' poetic quality) of his prose: "Ce qu'on retient surtout, c'est le verbe de Jérôme Minière. Sa langue, tantôt chantée tantôt parlée, qu'il porte par une multitude de styles."[11] (Pelletier s.i.) His prose stands for itself, is self-sufficient, as suggests one of his earliest critics, describing Minière as "an artist who reverses and subverts the conventions of [song-] writing by creating texts in prose, almost all of which can be read without the support of music, and speak directly to us" (Thibeault 1999, 10, tr. U.M.).

The artist himself is more modest and at the same time very clear when talking about his texts. His first "obsession" is to "tell stories" (Apostolou 2018). His second obsession is the effect of spontaneity: "J'aime bien écrire comme si ça sortait d'une personne qui dirait tout haut ses pensées. Au fond, mes textes sont faits de phrases très orales, écrites très rapidement. Comme avec les boucles, c'est le travail de réassemblage qui est très laborieux."[12] (Brunner

1997) His third preoccupation is to acknowledge the impossibility "to have a word that embraces everything" (Popa 2019) for "everything has become more complex and more complex and fragmented" (Popa 2019) in the age of the digital revolution. And it is precisely this loss of faith in the word and its ability to convey meaning by itself that eventually opens the door for the interdisciplinary project of the *auteur-compositeur-interprète* Minière: His songs bear testimony to the fact that meaning can only emerge from the interaction of all arts implied in the process of creation, that is text, music, interpretation/voice, and the visualisation of the song in the video clip. Besides, Minière seeks "a renewed balance between minimalism and complexity", as he states in his interview with Apostolou (2018) regarding his album *Dans la forêt numérique*. How he achieves this double aim in view of the interdisciplinary art of song writing will be shown in the following analysis of "La vérité est une espèce menacée", the creation of which Minière comments as follows:

> This song was finished one year ago, a bit by accident. I have a lot of audio sessions in my computer that will often not end as a song. I was doing a cleanup, listening to these music sketches. "La Vérite..." was one of them, and I instantly felt that there was something to do with it. Except for the piano solo at the end, I didn't work so much on it, every piece of the song was fitting naturally, including the text that was first written for another song. I must admit it's rare that it happens this way. The text is a poem about truth as an endangered species, a conscious flow popping in the head of a metro passenger, mixing a lot of small impressions and metaphors. It's a mental landscape. (Apostolou 2018)

The musical, textual, and interpretative landscapes of "La vérité est une espèce menacée"

The musical landscape

Formal features and harmonic structure are the most important musical elements of Jérôme Minière's "La vérité est une espèce menacée", given the absence of a vocal melody, relatively little instrumental melody, and the track's pervasive, repetitive drum sample (which sounds loosely derived from the generic James Brown "Funky Drummer" loop). Indeed, the song very nearly has the character of *recitativo secco*, insofar as it comprises a fluid, monotonous, speech-like reciting voice over a bed of sound: a relatively simple, spare and static accompaniment. This texture and use of the voice places a clear emphasis on the text, and in particular on its literary/poetic qualities – including the use of homophones, word play, imagery and symbolism – and some of its ideological and philosophical elements, namely what seems to be a critique of contemporary culture and an existential quest for meaning. Listening casually, the song suggests little of interest for musical analysis; however, a more careful consideration of the song's compositional and aesthetic elements – and especially its

music-text relationships – exposes a much richer field, in which the song's apparent musical simplicity reveals itself to be at once complex and ambiguous – clear evidence of Minière's aforementioned desire for a "balance between minimalism and complexity" – and as such intrinsically linked to textual meaning.

Phrase structure and form

What is most aurally striking about "La vérité est une espèce menacée" is its musical phrase structure. The musical phrase in this song is invariably a unit of three measures – the norm in pop music would be a two- or four-measure phrase. What is more, the three-measure phrasing gives rise to larger tripartite structures: The song's two large stanzas are each a unity of three, comprised of a verse bookended by two distinctly different refrains (Refrains A and B). Excluding the brief outro (which repeats the music of Refrain B), the overall structure of the song also consists of three large formal units of roughly the same size: two stanzas (27 measures each), and a long bridge (30 complete measures) (cf. Figure 1).

Intro:
    Refrain A, no text   (1 phrase x 3 measures)

Stanza 1:
    Refrain A   (2 phrases x 3 measures each)
    Verse I   (4 phrases x 3 measures each)   27 measures
    Refrain B   (2 phrases x 3 measures each)

Interlude:
    Refrain A, no text   (1 phrase x3 measures)

Stanza 2:
    Refrain A   (2 phrases x 3 measures each)
    Verse II   (4 phrases x 3 measures each)   27 measures
    Refrain B   (2 phrases x 3 measures each)

Bridge:
    10 phrases x 3 measures each + 1 incomplete measure   @ 30 measures

Outro:
    Refrain B (no text, 2 phrases of 3 measures each)

Figure 1: "La vérité est une espèce menacée". Outline of form and phrase structure

The opening refrain (Refrain A), which is preceded by a three-measure introductory organ motif, consists of two iterations of three measures, accompanying four lines of text. The closing refrain of each stanza (Refrain B) likewise consists of three-measure phrases in groups of two, setting four lines of text. This phrase structure militates against the monotony of the vocal delivery and the musically repetitive, strophic setting by casting Minière's text – consisting of lines of irregular length and varying syllabic density – into duple and quadruple groupings of three-measure phrases, which place the listener slightly off-balance.

Harmony

The harmonic language and structure of "La vérité est une espèce menacée" also invites examination and interpretation. The song can be organized into four main harmonic areas, corresponding roughly to the four main formal parts of the song: Refrain A, the verses, Refrain B, and the Bridge. Overall, the tonality of the song can be characterized as loose, or perhaps floating. This effect is achieved through a certain degree of harmonic stasis, modal use of chords, and through the avoidance of strong cadences and tonal arrival. There is ambiguity from the very outset, as Refrain A begins with a modest contrapuntal organ motif that centres on an E minor sonority, though the simple descending melody contains a Phrygian F-natural, weakening a sense of stable orientation. The verses tilt harmonically towards C major as a centre: a subdominant F major chord moves towards G major and finally completes a perfect cadence, gently but definitively tonicizing C just as most of the instruments drop out. C major is then weakened by Refrain II, which restores E as a pitch centre, but it concludes on a half cadence in C major: a G major chord is heard, but without the expected resolution to C. The pitch G then elides melodically with the start of Refrain A, and becomes part of the E minor sonority of the organ motif.

The strongest harmonic shift occurs with the Bridge, which moves definitively to a C minor chord, then shifts back and forth from tonic to the modal dominant of C minor, with some jazzy flourishes. The song returns to the music of Refrain B for the outro, and ends on that section's half cadence – a G major chord. Again, the overall effect is that of a hazy, modal/tonal harmonic background that rarely stabilizes. When it does stabilize, as in the Bridge, it is also static, rooted primarily on a single embellished chord and continuing to emphasize the sense of hazy, floating harmonies.

The composition of the text

La vérité est une espèce menacée

Refrain A   J'espère que je n'te fais pas la morale
                   Tu sais je n'en sais pas plus que toi
                   J'espère que je ne te sape pas le moral
                   J'raconte juste ce que j'vois

Verse 1   Des bouts de phrases ramassés dans des téléphones
                 Des photos d'amis aphones
                 Le bombardement d'informations
                 Qui s'élancent dans toutes les directions
                 Des pigeons qui s'envolent
                 Un couple qui traverse l'avenue
                 Un camion qui vrombit
                 Des gens qui marchent funambules
                 Sur le fil téléphonique de messages contradictoires
                 Les micromoments de gloire
                 Un message raciste sur un mur soudain devenu si triste

Refrain B   Les écrans qui nous laissent sans refuge
                 Le métro qui sort du tunnel
                 Ma voisine qui sort de sa rêverie
                 Et moi qui sors de ma réserve

Refrain A   J'espère que je n'te fais pas la morale
                 Tu sais je n'en sais pas plus que toi
                 J'espère que je ne te sape pas le moral
                 J'raconte juste ce que j'vois

Verse 2   Le commencement du jour est sans mémoire
                 Il repose sur la table des constellations
                 Une forêt d'un bleu sombre
                 Sur une carte postale sans adresse
                 Le commencement du jour n'est que paresse
                 Qui repose sur le dos de nos ivresses
                 La vérité est une espèce menacée
                 Et toutes les énigmes semblent résolues
                 Dans des concours de popularité

Refrain B   Les écrans qui nous laissent sans refuge
                 Le métro qui sort du tunnel
                 Ma voisine qui sort de sa rêverie
                 Et moi qui sors de ma réserve

                 La vérité (adlib)

As to the text, the impression of floating haziness pervades the whole song although its structure appears to be well defined at first sight. At a closer look, the two unities Refrain

A/Verse/Refrain B prove to be of unequal length comprising 4+11+4 and 4+9+4 lines respectively and this lack of homogeneity also holds true for the individual lines: In classical metrics they would count between 7 and 17 syllables, thus facilitating the flow of Minière's poetic prose or prose poetry as the hybrid forms of fusion between poetry and prose are called. The wish to blur dividing lines is also reflected in Minière's extremely restricted use of the rhyme, which normally marks the end of syntactical or sense units whereas its absence creates floating effects reminiscent of the technique of *enjambement*. In "La vérité est une espèce menacée" there is rhyme in Refrain A (a-b-a-b), absence of rhyme in Refrain B and in Verses 1 and 2 rhyme is introduced parsimoniously only: Apart from the three rhyme pairs *téléphones/ aphones* (a-a), *informations/ directions* (b-b), and *contradictoires/ gloire* (c-c) in Verse 1, Verse 2 comes up with two more instances: on the one hand, three consecutive end rhymes – *adresse/ paresse/ ivresses* (a-a-a) – which account for the acceleration of the rhytmic drive as do repetitive euphonic patterns in rap songs, on the other hand, the fact that the song title itself, which occurs one single time in the whole song (towards the end of Verse 2), is given greater audibility by a rhyme effect – *menacée/ popularité* (a-x-a) – two lines later. An ultimate example of how to structure (or not) the 'story' Minière seeks to tell us is syntax and this syntax is rich in implications: With the exception of Refrain A (where the lyrical 'I' uses full subject-predicate constructions and even some subordinate clauses introduced by *que*) and of Verse 2 (where Minière tentatively juxtaposes 3 linear principal clauses), the text of the song is exclusively built on impressionist nominal constructions loosely knit together and underlining once more the overall impression of a complex and at the same time fragile floating universe where fragmentation and the cautious search for cohesion and harmony compete with each other.

Minière's latest album, *Une clairière*, where "La vérité est une espèce menacée" figures as the first song, has been described as an "intimate and committed radioscopy of our relationship to the world" (Popa 2019) and in fact, every text block has a role to play in this game. Refrain A designates its actors, the lyrical 'I' and the addressee 'you', making it clear from the outset that this is not navel-gazing solipsism but an affair that concerns us all. It functions as a kind of *captatio benevolentiae*, a literary device frequently employed in the theatre, which modestly locates the 'I' in the same boat as his counterpart, both of them disposing of exactly the same 'world knowledge'. The pun with the homonyms *morale/ moral* defines the speaker's position as neither giving a moral lesson nor wishing to discourage his addressee and undermine his morality. The 'I' declares himself a neutral observer of what he 'sees', 'the truth' thus being reduced to the physically, the sensually perceivable, the mental and spiritual implications of which have to be detected and 'unriddled' by the perceiver (in this context, Minière's video clip is of particular significance as will be shown later). The narrator does not close his eyes but at the same time he refuses to actively intervene, preparing for the ensuing descriptive (Verse 1) and reflexive (Verse 2) parts of the song.

Refrain B deviates from Refrain A not only by its syntax and its absence of rhyme or rhyme-like sound effects but also by its final hesitant suggestion of a possible message: on the one hand, the insight that man cannot escape from TV, video, and all other screens

synonymous of the digital revolution and of our exposure to and ambiguous interaction with the machine; on the other hand, on the contrary, a threefold timid assertion of an aperture towards another reality metaphorically represented by the metro train leaving the tunnel – a reality in which the narrator's neighbour leaves behind daydream illusions and the narrator himself his "reserve". The word 'réserve' ('reserve') stands both for 'reticence' and for 'refuge'/'protection area' and insinuates that the 'I' may be ready for the conscious approach of our 'new world'.

As to the two Verses of the song, part 1 clearly responds to Minière's own description of "La vérité est une espèce menacée" as "a conscious flow popping in the head of a metro passenger, mixing a lot of small impressions and metaphors" (Apostolou 2018). In nine lines, stylistically adhering to strict minimalism, the narrator unfolds a complex, interconnected world in front of the listener's eyes. To begin with, reality is perceived through the mediation of technical devices (telephone, camera), as a consequence of which 'immediate' human communication is absent ("amis aphones"), remains fragmentary ("bouts de phrases") or is replaced by the warfare machinery of information ("bombardement [...] s'élancent dans toutes les directions"), the only format of truth available to man. In line 5 of Verse 1, (organic) life comes to the fore for the first time but hesitantly only since the pigeons flee the scene rather than 'inhabit' it, and the promising togetherness of two people in a couple is reduced to the act of crossing the street together in the roaring noise of a truck passing by. In this new world, reality only exists as mediated through the machine, and if there is life, it is far from responding to a holistic vision including body, mind, spirit, and emotions. The subsequent image plays with the surrealistic scenario of people ('man') walking on the tightrope of telephone cables ('machine'), the contradictory messages of which may provide some "mini-moments of glory" but are rapidly overshadowed by a "racist message" that "saddens" the wall (tr. U.M.) – ironically the only 'being' capable of feeling. The invocation of (human?) existence in the face of mass communication in a machine-driven age leaves the listener in a pensive mood, not quite ready yet for the more positive note underlying Refrain B.

In Verse 2, observation seems to give way to a more rational, reflective stance, syntactically underlined by the use of full sentences and focusing on the idea of the beginning day ("le commencement du jour") which is repeated twice as is the verb 'reposer sur' in its immediate textual neighbourhood. This beginning of the day, however, does not present itself triumphantly: It comes in gloomy colours and is compared to a forest in dark blue represented on a postcard without address. It is there, on the table, at the mercy of 'constellations' the artist refuses to specify but which connect with the title of the album, *Dans la forêt numérique*[13], which does not only evoke the dark blue of digital screens but also the difficulty of finding one's way in the 'forest' of our digitalized world. Yet Verse 2 resonates with still another absence apart from "the postcard without address" (tr. U.M.): the absence of memory (Verse 2, line 1) and a few lines later of agentivity ("paresse"). It is against this background of fragile daylight that breaks forth the central phrase of the song, "La vérité est une espèce menacée", and its meaning is ironically reinforced by the bitter afterthought

that in this age of media manipulation 'the truth' is relentlessly exposed to the arbitrariness of populism.

'The truth' eventually forms the text of the Bridge which is repeated *ad libitum* – with an odd splitting of its two parts "la" and "vérité". At the same time this text and sound fragment invites to at least briefly examine Minière's vocal rhetorics.

Vocal rhetorics

The separation of such closely related syntactical elements as article and noun in the Bridge of the song is of interest in two ways: On the one hand, it underscores the relativity of the noun by linguistic means and on the other, it gives rise to a curious sound effect. Article and noun emerge echo-like from different directions and sound sources as if 'the truth' – strangely fragile – were regarded from different angles, with a certain astonishment – or hope? – in the performing persona's voice (cf. Auslander 2014). This voice, however, and even more so Minière's vocal performance in general represent key elements in the artist's quest for meaning, in which the principles of minimalism and complexity fight against each other and blend. There is minimalism in the way Minière refuses variations of volume and pitch while monotonously 'uncoiling' the text; there is minimalism in the absence of pauses, which results in a breathless flow of words, a "parlé-phrasé" (Dumez 2019), a "talk-sing" (Popa 2019) or "talk-over" (Varrod 2019) as has rightly been observed by Minière's critics. The artist eventually prefers the mode of reciting[14] to that of singing, taking up the old French tradition of the *diseur/diseuse*, and he does so in a blank, neutral voice, devoid of emotion, almost unreal, which brings to mind the off-voice technique of cinema (cf. Manzoni 2019). At the same time this "horizontal rap" (Dumez 2019, tr. U.M.) does not lack in complexity. Manzoni correctly affirms that the impression of spontaneous sound production is in fact "scansion […] au millimètre" (Manzoni 2019) and this false spontaneity concurs with a false neutrality at certain points. Thus – as will be argued later – Minière's voice in the Bridge comes close to the mode of singing and conveys a touch of emotion and additional meaning to the text. Complexity finally arises from the general habitus of the artist's 'vocal rhetorics', a concept developed by Céline Chabot-Canet in three steps or *réseaux tendanciels*, the third of which coincides with Minière's vocal performance and has been characterized as a habitus of "surimpression, ambiguïté, second degré" (Chabot-Canet 2013, 781), i.e. of overlapping layers of meaning, ambiguity, and subtle undertones.

In fact, Minière's performance persona explores and exploits what Chabot-Canet[15] has described as an esthetics of connotation and polyphony in the vein of George Brassens and others, basically aiming at *dire autre chose* and at creating a secret connivance with another 'I', seducing the latter imperceptibly without the didactic intention of assimilation. In this particular type of vocal rhetorics, Chabot-Canet identifies signs of vulnerability behind the avowed neutrality of the performance persona and with regard to the artist, she spots a subversive bias. In the case of Minière, the refusal of didacticism is clearly expressed in Refrain A – "J'espère que je n'te fais pas la morale / […] / J'espère que je n'te fais pas la morale") – as

is his pretense at neutrality – "Tu sais je n'en sais pas plus que toi/ […] / J'raconte juste ce que j'vois"). And yet, the unsaid becomes palpable as a kind of underlying hesitation, doubt, insecurity and eventually, perhaps, a faint shimmer of hope.

A first assessment of "La vérité est une espèce menacée"

A first assessment of the musical, textual, and interpretative landscapes Minière unfolds in his song strikes in various ways. Compared to the parameters of popular music, "La vérité est une espèce menacée" is atypical in that it is not sung but recited, and in a very particular way at that. It has two refrains instead of one and a number of singular musical features such as a three measure phrase structure, a floating tonality and a notable harmonic shift in the Bridge. Like the music, the text remains a fragile construction: it is characterised by the juxtaposition of impressionist nominal phrases, verse lines of unequal length, a limited use of rhyme and – on the content level – a constant overlapping of different modes of existence: man, animal and the machine, all three of them lost in the 'digital forest' of the contemporary world. What strikes most, however, is the profound interdependence of text, music, and interpretation which already becomes apparent in the individual and separate analysis of the three artistic domains concerned. The final chapter will bring them together in an interdisciplinary perspective and focus on particularly interesting examples of interplay.

The interplay of all artistic levels concerned or: Some music and text correspondences

An 'end times' spirituality

Minière is right in his assumption that "[e]very piece of the song [is] fitting naturally" (Apostolou 2018) as can be seen in our first example taken from the beginning of the song, which comprises the music of Refrain A. In fact, "La vérité est une espèce menacée" opens with an organ motif. The sound of the organ is an immediate invocation of the sacred, and the text of Refrain A also hints at this, with three of its four lines beginning with the same word: "Je". This anaphora calls to mind the poetic structure of a psalm characterised by the ample use of parallelisms on all levels of linguistic analysis (phonetic, morphological, syntactical, and figurative).[16] This, coupled with the irregular three-measure phrasing – groupings of three are symbolic of the sacred – reinforces the notion of a possible spiritual theme to the song. But beware: Minière's is not a religious but an 'end times' spirituality. If the biblical psalm is an invocation of God in the form of praise or lament, the 'end times' psalm lacks confidence in that same God that would protect and deliver his people. In the contemporary times of trouble, man is thrown back on himself and on what he can 'see', on how he redefines his position in the face of digital and other revolutions and eventually recovers agentivity by quitting his "réserve".

Disconnection and lack of orientation

On Minière's website, the artist's project *Dans la forêt numérique* is presented as an obstinate quest for meaning "dans un monde hyperconnecté, toujours plus chaotique et fragmenté, qui nous laisse désorientés"[17]. In fact, the song's harmonic vagaries and discontinuity map broadly on to the thematic content of the lyrics, which suggest dislocation, disconnection, and alienation and force the narrator, a "cyber Tom Thumb", to "lay a trail of pebbles in the numeric forest" (Website 1, tr. U.M.) of 2.0 reality. The tonal/modal ambiguity – the play of major and minor chords and modal melodic inflections – likewise supports a poetic narrative that offers a kind of disembodied, detached observation of the world. At the same time, Minière's vocal rhetorics of disembodiment does not exclude subtle undertones allowing the listener to sense the underlying vulnerability of the cyber subject.

Absences

Minière's text is marked with absences: silent photos of friends, a day that begins without memories, postcards without addresses, and presumably the truth itself, which is "an endangered species" (tr. U.M.) Absence is symbolized in the song in part through the dropping out of the music in the middle of each verse. But there is more to it: The absence, or perhaps better the dislocation of the truth itself is emphasized in "La vérité est une espèce menacée" through the song's harmonic structure, namely the use of C minor as a tonal area for the Bridge. In the Bridge, Minière repeats "La… vérité" over what sounds like a jazz lounge vamp in C minor. If a C major tonality is implied through the verses, then the Bridge is in a parallel minor key – a region that is tonally close but still different.

Apropos: Minière does not use the title of the song as a refrain; it appears just once towards the end of the second stanza and it is not until the Bridge that we finally hear "the truth" invoked repeatedly. For Minière, evidently, the truth is something that is missing, or at least is hard to find, not just in the world: It also lives apart from the words and music of the body of the song, in its own formal space and in its own mode. The ultimate appearance of "la vérité" is not assertive but rather is heard hesitantly, as a fragment. But "la vérité" are also the only words in the entire song that approach being sung rather than recited, and as such they are imbued with extra meaning and are linked to feeling: They are delivered in a mildly lyrical manner, and so are subtly different from the cool, monotonic detachment of the stanzas.

The suggestion of an arrival

The harmonic ambiguity of the song, and ultimate arrival at the stable region of C minor at the Bridge finally achieves another important goal: underscoring the song's philosophical narrative. "La vérité est une espèce menacée" seems to imply a sort of existential journey, a movement from spiritual crisis and detached observations of society in a state of alienation

to arrival at a moment of potential becoming. Minière sings "Et moi qui sors de ma réserve" near the end of the second stanza – in Refrain B, the part of the song that is not coincidentally given the most musical/melodic interest – suggesting the possibility of emergence from the passive emotional and psychological state that the song's text establishes and the music reinforces through its stasis. As Minière seems poised at this point of the song to come out of his "reserve" – just as his neighbour, in the preceding line, has come out of her dream – so the song is poised, harmonically, at this tipping point of arrival. However, Refrain B ends on an inconclusive half cadence, a G major chord sounding like it wants to resolve to a C major chord – perhaps the elusive tonic of the song – but never does. At the end of the second stanza, however, with Minière on the brink of emergence for the second time, the song makes its decisive tonal shift to the C minor Bridge, along with the text "La...vérité", at last suggesting an arrival at a truth that is, at best, tentative, gradually dissolving into the song's musical texture.

An afterthought or: Visualisation with the timid promise of beauty at the horizon

In his interview with Apostolou (2018), Minière notes that he recently "chose to go back to [his] roots, to the DIY philosophy and to a renewed balance between minimalism and complexity". Text, music, voice, programming, instruments, editing, mixing, and clip making in "La vérité est une espèce menacée" therefore bear the same name, Jérôme Minière, who has rightly been acclaimed as "artiste entier et total" by Didier Varrod (2019). The following final observations try to blend the essence of the preceding analysis and some rudimentary observations concerning Minière's visual art.

When watching the video clip of "La vérité est une espèce menacée", the first impression is one of fragmentation and flow, of broken pictures and their constant travelling across the screen, in tune with the rhythm of the music and the spoken word. The emotional response to this *perpetuum mobile* is the feeling of absence of any resting point or visual anchor for the perceiver's eye. The second impression is the absence of colour: According to Minière's poetics of minimalism the clip is confined to the mere interaction of black and white, of darkness and light. However, the artist's second benchmark, complexity, comes in with additional shades of grey and the use of 'negatives' in which light appears as darkness and darkness as light. The same ambivalent overlap of minimalism and complexity lies in the concentration on a limited number of repetitively reproduced images (or parts of images) on the one hand and an outright explosion of different styles of pictorial representations on the other, including photographs, drawings, sketches, cartoons, matchstick figures or simply graphic elements which dissolve into dots, lines, circles, etc. In Minière's 'digital forest' meaningful and meaningless signs (and representations) exist side by side and visually reinforce the impression of blurred division lines and floating concepts so characteristic of the song: How and where can we arrive? What is 'the truth'?

Blurred division lines also determine the clip's content which conveys the complex relationships between man, animal, and the machine and the transgression of borders: human beings flee like herds of animals, animals – the cat – are represented in a humanlike emotional pose, whereas the screen of the cellphone transforms itself into a frame for the human face. Jean-Paul Sartre's distinction of *pour-soi* and *en-soi* seems obsolete as – possibly – does his concept of responsibility. The same floating effects determine the evocation of the locations in which the 'new' life takes place, from scenes of urbanity crowded with skyscrapers and metro trains to blurry glimpses of a terrorist attack at a bus station. Nature is present through images of the sky, through clouds and light effects, whereas the 'forest' so clearly alluded to in the album's title remains 'numeric' and a metaphor: an impenetrable thicket of signs, sparks of light, houses, etc., with a few elements only transcending the thicket.

One of them is the written word which appears at irregular intervals as an illustration of the "bouts de phrases" in the text of the song and acquires significance in two cases: Not surprisingly, "La vérité" runs through the picture in the form of an enlarged and stylized handwriting which suggests that the song's core question is of concern to every human being. The other 'writing on the wall', this time described in the text itself, remains visible slightly longer – a hesitant freeze of an unmistakeable message: "Les sales dehors" ("The dirty ones out!" Tr. U.M.) – and raises the question of the artist's commitment to sociopolitical issues.

This leads to one further observation: One of the recurrent pictorial components of Minière's clip is the representation of the artist's world. The keyboard(s) of the organ and the piano[18], the movements of the playing hands, the back view of the/an artist playing, the mixing desk, etc., they all concur to establish art as one of the central themes, at least of the video clip. Significantly, at the very beginning of the clip, the visualisation of the keyboard precedes even that of the song's title and of man. Keyboards and images referring to music (and art in general) occur each time the 'I' quits his reserve, they occur in Verse 2 alongside with "the beginning of the day" and in the Bridge where they create a final reflexive momentum. Basically, they suggest two possible interpretations: Either Minière wishes to insinuate that the citizen-artist leaves and has to leave his reserve – art – in order to reach out to the world, or he goes one step further by inferring that the artist-citizen gives up and has to give up his fundamental reticence against the world and bring art and world together.

This latter interpretation shows the clip's ending in a new light. The mysterious "commencement du jour" at the mercy of unnamed constellations visually coincides with the representation of a dark screen, gradually getting cloudy and sprinkled with dots which transform into the lights of an urban landscape with high-rise buildings, the common denominator of the picture sequence being sparkles and light games which at the very end of the song leave us with the image of a tiny man in the midst of a rain of falling stars, reaching out to them with his hands and standing on what could be the surface of the globe. This picture, although surrounded and crossed by 'digital' lightnings and even by reminiscences of the terrorist scene, inevitably brings to mind Saint-Exupéry's "Little Prince", his loneli-

ness, his quest for sense and for beauty. The music has long faded away before the last lights gradually die.

There is a faint shimmer of hope in this ending but there are no answers. And there is beauty in the clip and in the text – relative, ambivalent, not more not less than that 'available' in the digital age. In his presentation of his latest album *La clairière*, Minière even states that the time has come for him to search for it (cf. Varrod 2019). This said, "La vérité est une espèce menacée", the song the artist sings both on *Dans la forêt numérique* and on *La clairière*, is an excellent example of how music, text, vocal rhetorics, and visualisation can contribute to transform a simple song into a space of "playful creation and resistance", "un terrain de jeux et espace de résistance" (Popa on Website 1, tr. U.M.).

Endnotes

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2 *Dans la forêt numérique* was released on December 7, 2018 on all internet platforms and on December 11, 2018 in a limited CD edition on Bandcamp. "La vérité est une espèce menacée" also figures as opening song – this time orchestrated with "cordes spectrales" (cf. https://jeromeminiere.tumblr.com/, last access 29.08.2019) – on Minière's album *Une clairière*, released on June 14, 2019. 2   For reliable biographical data cf. the artist's website https://jeromeminiere.tumblr.com [=Website 1] (last access 28.08.2019); SOCAN 2012.

3 For reliable biographical data cf. the artist's website https://jeromeminiere.tumblr.com [=Website 1] (last access 28.08.2019); SOCAN 2012.

4 For Minière's broad musical culture, cf. Apostolou 2018; Rodriguez 2013.

5 The CD *Du pic au cœur* has been included in the list.

6 In Minière's double album *La nuit éclaire le jour qui suit* (1998), for instance, CD 2 is instrumental and serves as a counterpoint to CD 1 (cf. Brunner 1997; Thibeault 1999). Popa (2019) draws attention to *Une clairière* and its "30 minutes of exploratory tracks like 'La Beauté', which lasts 9 minutes and 25 seconds".

7 As to *la nouvelle chanson française*, cf. Obergöker/Enderlein 2008; Perrier 2002; Perrin 2005; Rio 2005.

8 As to this binarism, cf. Malon (2015), who observes that Minière is not always 'pure' in his choices, e.g. when he combines acoustical and electronic sounds in the same album as he does in *Une île*.

9 Cf. the most recent edition of Website 1 (last access 11.09.2019).

10 As to the rôle of the German label Le POP, cf. [s.i.] 2004; SOCAN 2012.

11 "What will remain above all, is Jérôme Minière's Word. His language – sometimes sung, sometimes spoken – 'dipped' into a multitude of styles." (Tr. U.M.)

12 "I like to write as if it all came out of a person who thinks aloud. Basically, my texts are made of genuine oral phrases, quickly jotted down. And just like with loops: what is tedious is the work of reassemblage." (Tr. U.M.)

13 Minière's title strangely resonates with "La fôret numérique", an artistic project developed by the multidisciplinary collective Parsi Parla in 2016 and created in Rouyn-Noranda in 2018. Its core piece is an interactive nightly journey through the Kiwanis forest, bringing numeric sound and light installations to the natural ecosystem. Its intention is to make visible the invisible and to demonstrate that the numeric and the natural can cohabitate in harmony.

14 "My obsession is to tell stories, and I never felt like a great singer." (Minière quoted in Apostolou 2018)

15 Cf. Chabot-Canet 2013, 721-788 (and in particular 780-782). She distinguishes three *réseaux tendanciels* in vocal rhetorics, the first of which corresponds to an esthetics of 'interpretative emphasis' or dramatisation (e.g. Jacques Brel), the second to an esthetics of 'interpretative euphemisme' or redundant cohesion (e.g. Charles Trenet), and the third to an esthetics of 'interpretative antiphrasis' or contrasting connotations, in conflict with the normal meaning of a 'statement' (e.g. Georges Brassens).
Chabot-Canet then summarizes the three options by the key words *dire plus*, *dire moins*, and *dire autre chose*, with the correponding 'figures of speech' and attitudes – 'emphasis, exaggeration, and contrast' for (1), 'euphemism/neutralisation, anaphora/repetition, and homogeneity' for (2), and 'ambiguity, paradox, and duality/multiplicity' for (3).
Furthermore, Chabot-Canet's three esthetic choices go hand in hand with three 'seductive strategies' directed towards the public, that of an outspoken and explicit pathos in the case of (1), that of a discreet pathos in the case of (2), and that of a merely implicit pathos for (3).
In the first case, it is the artist's intention to persuade an individual 'you' that differs from the 'I'; in the second case, the intention is to delight a collective 'you'/'we' (lack of pragmatic intention), and in the third case to create a secret connivance with another 'I' without necessarily assimilating him or her.
The respective ethos or transmitted moral values can be described as conflicting for (1), consensual for (2), and paradoxical for (3) where the artist plays ambiguously with consensual and conflicting éléments in the process of communication.

16 Cf. the striking structural resemblance between Psalm 27:1 and Refrain A of Minière's song:
"The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" (Psalm 27:1).
"J'espère que je n'te fais pas la morale; tu sais je n'en sais pas plus que toi."

17 "[I]n a hyperconnected world getting more and more chaotic and fragmented and leaving us behind without orientation" (tr. U.M.).

18 In the form of photo, film and drawing/sketch, the latter transforming into and merging with the skyscrapers of the city.

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