

Table of Contents

Guttural Cultural 1

Guttural Cultural

By Howard Slater

During a career spent in virtual obscurity, Ghedalia Tazart's whittled away at the coherence of musical identity, moving through modes of articulation as a guttural nomad. Now a box-set collates his multiple voices. Howard Slater raps uvular, in prose and notation

A box set that gathers together and reissues the three previous Ghedalia Tazart's releases on Alga Marghen, throwing in the usual bonus tracks, is par for the course in the music industry's ordinary sale of things. But that's where the similarities end. The form of the product may be pretty acceptable and collector-inducingly obsessive, but what's contained in it openly and, it could be chanced, unknowingly, defies categorisation. If you've not come across Tazart's before you'll be in a majority, but, getting outside the mirror-scene a bit, your ears will become noisily whispered into by a minor voice. A voice so minor, yet layered, that it operates at the unpredictable level of molecular switchpoints; switchpoints of alterity without the border controls of introjected censorship. It's a voice that's been left alone enough (his first LP was released in 1979) to become a population of multiples, of vitality affects, but it's also a voice that wields and is embedded in a variety of machines.[1] From grimy electronic loops to mock opera, from world-music to found sounds, from guttural sonorous inarticulacy to the lyrical flushes of Mallarmé and Daumal, from an improvisatory nonchalance to a textured choreographic plan, the music that opens out here has taken twenty-five years to gain even this small level of exposure (Alga Marghen is hardly a label that people rush to Myspace to research!).

In eluding the taxonomy tax (a tax I feel I've tried to levy in even attempting to describe the music) Tazart's has been effectively seceding from all but a local popularity. At one level his other recent CD releases have been issued by very small-run French labels such as Demosaurus, Jardin Au Fou and Gazul, but the localness of Tazart's is there in the intimacy of risk across all his records; a kind of invite to share in all the dislocation of impromptu passion. We are made congruent in listening to Tazart's as he actively works with the material of his self, with personified emotions made dissemblingly sonorous, putting us in mind of Nietzsche's shocking challenge to the identitarians: 'finally you are no more than an imitation of an actor'.[2] The centre, the locus has been removed, diffused, and subjected to a continual deferral of its stultifying and inhibiting taunt to unity. It is this focus for self-regard that, as he whines and whimpers like an exposed fake or one at the limit-point of verbal expression, Tazart's implicitly maintains is the fiction. As controversial philosopher André Glucksman states on the sleeve notes to *Diasporas*, 'Ghedalia Tazart's is a nomad'. A much overused term should not detract from its accuracy when applied to this music: Tazart's not only wanders, sui generis, through the many musical categories and delimited locales that instill a self-affirming unity, he is lovingly in internal exile. Like a latterday Rimbaud he is an alchemist of the very local affects that he brings into voice and thereby discovers; affects that are both audibly inspired and reach-out to a taped militant chant, a city square ambience, a tango refrain, a broken organ, a synthesized rhythm, his daughter gurgling or a massified cathedral bell.

This localness, this locale of a porous psyche in an admixed place, is further contradicted with the overall sense of transports and movement we get when listening to these records. On Diasporas the overall thematic seems to be the aping of a North African way of singing which, these days, leads to all sorts of musings about cultural pillage rather than cultural inter-penetration. As there's very little biographical information on Tazart's we can hardly know for sure he's not of North African descent nor whether or not he once worked at General Motors. But, this seems to be a decoy kind of response to a bogus question that leads back to the essentialisms and non-becomings of a cultural homogeneity, to a respecting of the boundaries and financially beneficial closed markets that are enforced by cultural commentators and treaty-makers alike. Tangiers is now in Paris via Istanbul. On Diasporas, a track with the Ubuesque title of 'La Vie et la Mort Legendaires du Spermatozoide de Humuch Lardy' (The life and legendary death of the sperm of Humuch Lardy), we hear Tazart's singing to an accordion-like instrument underpinned by a steady beat on a djembe. Yet Tazart's changes his vocal style continually throughout the three minutes of this track from vaguely islamic to vaguely jewish to vaguely sioux indian to vaguely feminine to explicitly cutting into the melody by ha-hack-laughing like a temporarily mad man. The temptation would be to say, here in Tazart's, we have someone articulating what it is to be a species-being, or, here, in Tazart's, we have the first pre-articulation (outside sci-fi) of the push to form a world government headed by conformed intellectuals. Both responses would be undermined by the self-effacingness of this very idiosyncratic, self-exposed and disorientating music; a music that the Musearecords website [<http://www.musearecords.com/>] tells us began when Tazart's started to sing, at 12 years old, in the Bois de Vincennes, just for himself, after his grandmother died. Grief is unlocalisable as is the plurality of worlds that Tazart's presents; a redistribution of the sensible (to adapt Ranciere's phrase).[3]

Whether Tazart's assimilates or disseminates, comes together or openly unfolds, is not a choice we, as listeners, have to make. He does all these things. He is not national, but differentiated and relational. Layering the bass timbre of his own voice into a chanted drone, adding a synthesized note, overdubbing a murmured refrain, goading himself into declamations of parodic or justifiable anger, he assembles sketches that have the impact of concertos. He multiplies himself into a contradiction of unedited tensions, colliding the disparate times of feeling with a minimum of respect paid to song structure that makes Glucksman's description of him as 'an orchestra and pop group all in one person' entirely fitting. On 'Merci Stephane', Tazart's recites, body and soul, a poem by Mallarmé (in French) as a disco loop, complete with Chic-style rhythm guitar, slowly rises to the foreground of the track. We don't get the message as such, we get, more provocatively, the enigma. Akin at times to the later recordings of Luc Ferrari, who also did not shy away from the use of popular forms, Tazart's similar use and magnification of the incidental, when coupled to his overdubs, summons up, as with Ferrari, a very real sense of temporal thickness: not just our experiencing of music but our experiencing in general can be polyphonic and polytemporal. The key to this thickness may lie not just in the way Tazart's can have us seemingly at the origins of language with a totemic incantation being accompanied by a buzzing cellular network sound, but in the way that this thickness is intimately relayed across these twenty-odd year old recordings by timbre, dirty timbre.

It's timbre that's outernational. Timbre is the grain, the rasp, the fricative, the aural visceralisation of an unfurling emotion, a vitality affect. It is fitting and fits with an attempted expression, not a well rehearsed one. When it's alloyed to the incidental and the impromptu (for all Tazart's tracks may be layered but each layer comes across as being put down with no second takes) it amounts to a pre-articulation, an indication of a struggle, a none-too easily won means of expression, a means without precedent but not individual, singular instead, a group's pre-articulation, the group of the multiple self dissolving the boundaries of the overly identified who want to win you over for lessness. So, in some ways we are talking, thanks to Tazart's, of something more vital and communicative than language; for across these tracks there are words (in French) many will not be able to understand. But this does not detract from our understanding. Quite the opposite; it tempers our understanding

with enigma and leads us to put trust in the unspoken meaning of the timbre, be it of the voice or the variegated musical backing, applying to it a sincerity of intent and giving to us the image of an unthought known[4], of something happening to the side of consciousness in a duct, a quiver. This is in stark contrast to a more recent and much acclaimed album by Scott Walker. Presented as a similarly heady mix of voice and unfamiliar musical backing, *The Drift* comes across as firmly implanted in the majoritarian culture of High Art Darke; a monotonal operatics with tracks as long as the last days of drum and bass. Here we can fully understand the lyrics they are an hermetic appeal to englishness graduates. Maybe it'll be Ghedalia's gypsy-band with their partially unwilling responses that'll be visible on the horizon at the next Meltdown.

Audio Clip à *Une Éclipse Totale de Soleil*

Distorted drum box.

Bass blurs in a pumped semitone

Birds.

A child unspeaks.

Sings as if alone, straining to reach the high notes.

Another voice yodels to a repeated syllable.

Its throat becomes a cavernous auditorium.

Other voices rise, desperate and yearning.

Voices of ecstatic protest.

Voices of an affective class.

Notes from an oud or a one stringed violin enter.

Still the repeated syllable.

Is this the desert, a drawing room, an agora?

Some inviting schizo demos?

It's not a studio.

But the window is open:

birds again.

Pots and pans are struck nonchalantly as if trying to

keep to a rhythm or establish its semblance.

A high note held becomes sweet watery feedback.

Meanwhile Sioux surround the wagon train as

the strumming of a stringed box keeps pace.

A manâs voice: gravelly and chkchkchking,

scrapes its own voice box for musical mucus,

hears its own gradial tones in a different part of

its disaggregating body.

Then, seamless of âthenâ, quick fire slightly agitated chatter.

Cha-cha drum box trills as the voice tries to keep pace

with desperate glottals not glossaries.

Tunes and rationality are trying to break through

as the beaten box sounds in a cave near to a bird cage.

A layering of electrifying groams give inspiration

to a distorting low-end organ as another

improvised punk-folk ditty unassumes itself into

the forefront of a newly compounding emotion.

Slower now the beat box, almost whistling with

cymbal hiss as another hand-assisted vocable wavers

repeatingly, its join of loop obvious and hiatus-rough.

The voice now sings risingly to crescendos as if unaccompanied,

as if alone and beckoning an audience years and years away.

No threat of external evaluation in this 'studio', this minaret,

this intensified polis, this afternoon.

Ghedalia Tazart's, *Les Danseurs de la Pluie*, Alga Marghen Box Set. Includes the albums *Une Éclipse Totale de Soleil*, *Diasporas*, *Tazart's*, *Tazart's Transports & Les Danseurs de la Pluie*

[1] 'vitality affects' is Daniel Stern's phrase. Daniel N. Stern, *The Present Moment In Psychotherapy And Everyday Life*, Norton, 2004.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight Of The Idols*, Penguin, 1974.

[3] Jacques Ranciere, *The Politics Of Aesthetics*, Continuum, 2006.

[4] Daniel Stern, op cit.

For more on Guttural:

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guttural>

For David Fenechâs interview with Ghedalia TazartÃ's (in french):
http://demosaurus.free.fr/demosaurus/ghedalia_TazartÃ's/ghedalia_tazartes_interview.htm

For distribution of TazartÃ's box-set:
<http://www.lingering.co.uk/>