

□ Contemporary

□ New

□ art

□ music

□ musics

□ Music

□ in Belgium

FOREWORD

This edition of the ISCM World New Music Magazine takes as its theme the host country for the 2012 ISCM World Music Days Festival, Belgium, and aspects of contemporary art music in this particular context.

There are many interesting perspectives presented in the articles on the following pages, with a particular emphasis on education, something that anyone involved with music should have a great interest in. Collectively the articles demonstrate a great capacity for intelligent thinking, direct action, and wise reflection, something that is also very evident in the musical life of this place.

I thank the team who compiled and contributed to this collection, and hope that you find it interesting reading.

John Davis

President, ISCM Executive Committee

FOREWORD

It is my pleasure and honour to present this edition of the ISCM World New Music Magazine, dedicated to contemporary music life in my country, Belgium.

Most readers probably will associate Belgium with beer, chocolates, perhaps even surrealistic political issues. We would like to take the opportunity of the World Music Days 2012 in Belgium to introduce you to our outstanding and diverse contemporary music scene. Through the many articles in this magazine you will be brought into contact with subjects as wide-ranging as sound art, performance issues, philosophical and aesthetic debates, education and music theatre, to mention only a few.

All the contributors are established experts in their fields and as such are representative spokesmen and women for the issues at hand. Some of these issues may sound similar to situations in other countries; others may not. We hope that this publication will help to stimulate debate and improve understanding of this specific art genre, commonly called contemporary music, new music or contemporary art music.

Peter Swinnen

Vice-President, ISCM Executive Committee

EDITORIAL PREFACE

The ISCM World Music Days are often compared to a World Exhibition. Different countries from all around the world come together in a host country to show off the musical talent they have to offer. Even in a niche area like contemporary music, this approach yields a myriad of forms, genres, styles, connections and idiosyncrasies. We might say about this edition that the showcase does indeed reflect the variety and multiplicity of the Belgian landscape – but shouldn't we perhaps try to avoid this cliché? All the same, this edition of the magazine on the theme of new music from Belgium has immediately confronted us with the practical impossibility of sketching an exhaustive picture of what is going on in our little country by the North Sea. What is typical or characteristic of what happens here? Or is a geographical region, today more than ever, merely a coincidental collection, a category *qui n'en est pas un*? Flemish composer A may, after all, be stylistically and conceptually light years away from her counterpart B in the same city, whereas her music may have clear affinities to that of C in Sweden and his Polish contemporary D. In the many real and virtual gathering places of the 21st century global village, beta version, musicians meet up, exchange ideas and sometimes make music together; they study and teach all over the world; they are friends on Facebook. It has been a long time since their only contact was the Ferienkurse in Darmstadt or the World Music Days followed by (sporadic) contact by letter and postcard (scribbled full of serial matrices, we might imagine). Can we represent that multiplicity and provide an adequate image of Belgium in this magazine? Probably not, for which our apologies in advance. You can expect a fairly large pixel size. (Although we'd love it, of course, if a programmer read these texts and then decided to programme a Flemish musical theatre piece, commission a work from composer A above and come and visit a Walloon sound art festival this winter!)

ISCM Flanders is a young branch, only set up in 2005 and now already the organiser of the World Music Days – a musical feast in Flanders! Right from the start, it was clear that ISCM Flanders needed to do more than promote new music to the international in-crowd. After all, the art form is not nearly as obvious as the name World Music Days seems to suggest. If my neighbours hear about the World Music Days they will probably expect Metallica; the history teacher two houses down might assume Bach or Björk (both on authentic instruments, of course). Not many people are kept awake at night by the music we intend to talk about here. Even among average Flemish music lovers, you don't need to have heard of any of the composers on the World Music Days programme to feel part of the club, although all of them do know Jan Fabre, Anne Teresa De Keersmaecker and dEUS. So it is not such a surprise that the Flemish branch of the ISCM is so concerned with the social position of the art form we represent. This is why we have asked several authors to look into that question from various perspectives in this magazine. Naturally their stories are primarily set in Belgium, and maybe a geographical classification is more relevant here than when discussing purely artistic questions. All the same, we suspect that these issues are at least partly familiar in the rest of the world.

Maarten Quanten

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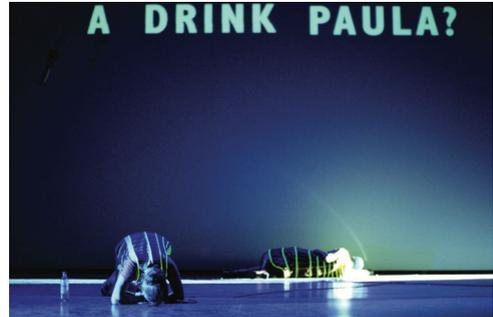


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BUBBLES OF STRINGS AND SCALES

Serge Verstockt & Kathleen Coessens

OR A PLEA FOR THE FOAM OF MUSIC

The origin of this exposition lies in a keynote lecture by Serge Verstockt, artistic leader of ChampdAction, at the Staten Generaal van de Klassieke Muziek. It aims for a pluralistic view of music in a globalising world, from inside, outside and aside. No one can ignore the sounds and music(s) that invade and shape our daily life. As sound and music are intertwined

with the cultural and ideological experiences and processes of the contemporary world, they escape traditional cultural and ideological classification. Our analysis is that Music with a capital 'M' can no longer ignore the multiple musics with a small 'm', and neither can it ignore the prevailing tools of culture. We definitely argue for the recognition of the multiplicity of strings, scales and spheres in the music arts.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a world in which perceptual input has increased to an unexpected level – an input which is most spectacular in terms of our auditive and visual awareness. We are overloaded with images and sounds. Silence is nowadays, as John Cage mentioned in one of his last interviews, almost everywhere in the world ‘traffic noise’ (New York, April 2nd 1991). Auditory attractions and disturbances are inherent to our fragmentary technological and complex world. While the auditory environment, both of sound and music, is created by humans’ ways of inhabiting and enculturating the world, we often consider its diversity to be indifferent to our own existence, and even alienated from our own subjectivity. However, the music creations and explorations which result from this perceptual and cultural being in the world question our ways of creating cultures and urge us to be more sensitive to its – disturbing, attractive – diversity. A deep artistic concern for these evolutions and for the ways music education and funding seem to (mis)understand or even ignore them feeds this reflection upon social choices. However, we will argue, art can make the difference here in how we can act, react, interact with the perceptual inputs that our societies and environments charge us with.

Debating the role of art in society means raising the question of what kind of society we want for tomorrow. The role of art in society is inextricably interwoven with notions of tolerance and diversity, with dialogue and imagination, and affects the public domain as well as the private, personal development of the citizen, the student, the artist and the musician. It concerns the citizen in his/her understanding of and access to the relation between the contemporary perceptual world and art (music) creation. It concerns the citizen in his/her quality of life and leisure, not only as being immersed passively in an auditive world, but having the choice to be a listener and participant in the debate. It concerns the important domain of education where the citizen has the right to be informed and to develop a

critical view of society and culture. It concerns the citizen who is an artist – or wants to become an artist – in his/her commitment to the world and to art, by creating access to the diversity and multiplicity of artistic expressions in contemporary culture. It concerns the citizen in all his/her qualities and potentialities of being human, by creating bridges between the known and the unknown, the objective and the subjective, the private and the public, between different cultures, traditions and perspectives. As Terry Eagleton writes:

Eagleton, 1990, p. 25

“Aesthetic (...) is as a dream of reconciliation – of individuals woven into intimate unity with no detriment to their specificity, of an abstract totality suffused with all the flesh-and-blood reality of the individual being.”

Indeed, there is a general agreement about the importance of culture and the arts for a rich and powerful society. But while the idea of the need for arts is commonplace, both the quantity and quality of these are much debated. Decisions concerning music school and art school curricula and subsidies for music centres are often subordinated to other domains – of which the economic is nowadays the most prominent. This impedes thorough reflection on the degree to which the arts should be sustained – the commonplace notion that ‘we should not forget that art is not a primary need’ is often heard – as well as on the kind of art that should be sustained, with regard to all its cultural diversity.

Following these considerations, we will argue for an open cultural horizon. An open cultural horizon has a positive influence on both the economy and individual and social well being. Such a horizon opens new perspectives, spreads values, promotes diversity, imagination and tolerance and invites to exploration and reflection. Cultural creativity in society is not only an aim

in itself, but a tool for a better society with more social cohesion. By allowing access to informed diversity, it counters the situation of the citizen as a piece in a game played by economic and political forces. Instead of feeling unnerved or threatened by an imposed environment, the citizen should have the opportunity to debate the world of the sensibilities in an autonomous and knowledgeable way. However, such an open cultural horizon is only possible when a society invests socially and economically in creativity and arts. And that's where the shoe pinches.

STRINGS UNDER PRESSURE

In contemporary Western society, classical music is vilified by governments, by the political classes and even by the masses (Boyes, 2008). Most European citizens are now familiar with repeating waves of 'cheese slicer' policy practices for the arts, i.e. across-the-board cuts in subsidies to cultural institutions and organisations. The strings of the music world are clearly under tension. Orchestras are in danger of being dissolved or have to merge. Cultural centres and organisations have to survive on bread and water. Statistics on audience quantity and revenue are more valued than aesthetic, artistic and social concerns. The budget cuts have to be compensated for by sponsors who impose their own agendas and world views – not necessarily in harmony with the openness of culture.

The first problem seems to be that classical music has been put on trial for financial reasons. On 12th July 2011 the Art Newspaper, reacting to the announcement of budget cuts of 25 percent in the arts, ran the headline "Cultural funding to be slashed by one quarter; performing arts worst hit". A year later, on 5th July 2012, El Confidencial, an influential newspaper in Spain, reacted to the announcement of a 15.1 percent budget cut by writing: "The impact of the crisis on Spain's cultural sector: No money, no culture". In Italy, the world-famous opera house La Scala faces a \$9 million shortfall because of reduc-

tions in subsidies in 2012, while Portugal has abolished its Ministry of Culture. However the President of the European Commission, Jose Barroso, claimed when launching Portugal's stint as the European Capital of Culture that "without culture, Europe has no direction" (Euobserver, 24/01/2012). "Culture is a basic need", added Andreas Stadler, director of the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York and president of the New York branch of the European Union National Institutes for Culture, "People should have the right to go to the opera. (...) Culture is (...) so linked to our identities." (The New York Times, 24/03/2012) But how, then, can culture be sustained?

Traditionally, three financial sources are behind cultural institutions and events: (1) public funding, (2) private non-profit support and (3) business support. As commercial and business participation in our societies grows, sponsoring has become a powerful tool for culture and the arts. Likewise, the commercial world has become aware of the importance of culture and arts. But is the benefit here really art and social responsibility, or is it a tactic to ensure the – questionable – position of certain nature and culture-threatening industries or companies and as such a pure marketing strategy?

This problem of sponsoring is brought to the fore in a very intelligent way by the book *Not If But When: Culture Beyond Oil*, where artists and ecologists raised ethical questions about sponsoring – the Tate Gallery being mainly supported nowadays by an oil company (Art collective Liberate Tate e.a., 2011). Where a few decades ago, cultural institutions were funded by tobacco money, now they are funded by oil companies: "despite widespread public concern about the dramatic threat of climate change, oil money is still found greasing the wheels of so many of our cultural institutions" (id., p. 6). Beyond ethical and ecological concerns, other problems arise in the 'day-to-day' politics of company sponsorship, as companies change from year to year which music festival or other cultural activity they want to sponsor, to what degree, and whether they want to sponsor it at all. This kind of decision, totally unrelated to



the quality of culture or art, makes the existence and continuity of cultural events and structures fragile. Festivals are even cancelled because of sponsorship running dry.

Still, there are other fund-raising possibilities that can benefit cultural institutions, which moreover rely upon a social commitment from society itself. For example, over the last ten years, countries such as Italy and some Central and East European countries (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Lithuania), have introduced a programme where people are free to choose a specific institution (an arts organisation, social organisation, university, etc.) or non-profit organizations operating in various fields, including the arts and culture, to which they can route between 2 and 5 percent of the amount of taxes they pay (Klamer e.a., 2006).

A second problem threatening classical music is the overwhelming impact of 'entertainment' culture, the prospect of 'easy magic'.

In part-time arts education, classical music is being invaded and even chased away by popular music. Can we blame popular music for this? Or does education fail to divulge and stimulate classical music for a broad audience? It is not

clear if this is the fault of the press, the responsibility of the musician, or of broader society. Or is classical music, considered complex, too scarcely programmed to be understood or appreciated? Or maybe art is devalued to a level of entertainment that blurs expertise and aesthetic creativity with popularity and commodification – an idea put forward some time ago by Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Still, new developments take place beyond their observations. It is interesting – but often disappointing – to see celebrities or political figures becoming ambassadors of the arts more often than piano virtuosos do. Maybe this is caused by the world of music itself remaining too hermetic, too rigid and too severe, closing doors and ears to a wonderful creative environment.

Popular music is omnipresent in our daily lives, but affects lives in a rather passive way: it is accepted as it is, it is ephemeral, commercial and parasitic upon human life and leisure time. It is 'easy magic'. And still, it has appealing aspects and should not be totally ignored by musicians. It tells us something about society, about force and attraction, about leisure and affect.

Classical music can also be said to be 'passive' in a limited sense when we consider the traditional way of learning techniques and

styles as prescribed. However, then we forget that classical music should be creative, active and ask for intervening minds. At least, this is the case when we put the 'museum-like' aspect of classical music aside, when we recognise the affect in music, when we do not gloss over creative or improvisational possibilities and do not leave half a century of music (twentieth century) outside the scope of education. How many music students are familiar with the experimental works of the second part of the twentieth century and perform them? More recognition of that often-neglected half of a century (and even more) in music education would link the older traditions of classical music with the technological world of today, by relating acoustic with electronic instruments, compositions of sound with noise, interpretation with experimentation, artistic performance with life experience, as Cage, Cardew, Kagel, and the Fluxus movement did from the fifties onwards. Music education urgently needs an opening up of aesthetic horizons. Society needs to be put in 'danger' by artists, to be confronted with unconventional expectations. As Helmut Lachenmann says in an interview:

Lachenmann, 2008

"We need adventure in art, (...) people should have a sporting ambition to go into a concert hall, and musicians should also have an ambition to learn and do things they haven't done before."

The strings of the music world are clearly under tension. Classical music is on trial! But does it deserve this treatment?

However! We would like to bring a positive message, a musical message. And that message is present. Never before has music been so omnipresent in our society. All kinds of music are present: classic, rock, pop, contemporary, yours, mine, his, hers, ... All ways of experiencing music pervade our living environment: radio,

performances, mp3 players, mobiles, iPods. We experience different kinds of music or 'musics', listened to, played, encountered by chance on the corner of a street, through an open window, by passing a whistling man, or deliberately sought out in a beautiful concert hall, by humming in the kitchen, or by turning the wheel of the iPod. And these contemporary 'musics' give pleasure, they enchant and attach people to other people and to their worlds. They accompany our thoughts and our sorrows, our movements and our choices. They open up a cultural horizon. So why shouldn't these 'musics' encounter each other over the walls of the box in which they are usually imprisoned by habit or self-protection, instead of remaining in these boxes as if afraid of each other. In these closed boxes, they experience themselves as 'small music', fearing the other as the 'big Music', be it an elitist 'M' – of intellectual superiority, or a market 'M' of economic superiority, or, on the contrary, they consider themselves as the Music – with the big 'M' – overthrowing or ignoring the other music with a small 'm'.

This is a plea to bring and encounter music over the walls of these boxes, indifferent to its presumed size or letter – the big 'M' or the small 'm' – in unexpected spaces of the city, in new spaces of encounter. It is a plea to climb the walls and listen to the horizon of aural perspectives, or to explore the underground, as the four musicians in Champd'Action – Serge Verstockt, Jan Pillaert, Peter Jacquemyn and Thomas Moore – did on 24th June 2012, playing the Tibetan horn in the tunnel under the river Scheldt in Antwerp (Verstockt, 2012; Coessens, 2012) – the first of a range of impeding 'under the tunnel' performances. Walkers and cyclists and a happy Sunday morning audience were unexpectedly moved by the waves heaving through the funnel under the water under the sky in between earth and earth...

Over walls or under ground, music needs to explore the poetics of plurality, like spheres that appear, bubbles of all kinds, all sizes, all colours, sparkling and foaming like champagne.

CLASSICAL MUSIC IS ON TRIAL!

A PLEA FOR MUSIC WITH THE 'M' OF MULTIPLICITY

Spheres and foam are words reminiscent of music and festivals, but they also form the title of a recent book by Peter Sloterdijk, *Spheres (Sphären)*, in three parts, *Bubbles*, *Globes* and *Foam*, reflecting upon multiple perspectives in contemporary culture and society (2011, 1998, 1999, 2004). With the metaphor of the 'world of foam', Sloterdijk gives a fascinating description of our time: a period in which life develops in multi-focal, multi-perspectival and heterarchical or network-like ways. Life today presents itself as a multifarious, infinite number of different spaces, of big and small foam bubbles. Life consists of small, separated residences where each wall constitutes the difference between where I live and where you live. These spaces are like 'connected isolations' in which individuals live as monads in their own isolated environment, but at the same time each space is connected with the others, as each life is connected with the others. Life is performed simultaneously on different but interrelated stages: it is produced and consumed in a network of workplaces. In such worlds of foam, no bubble can be promoted to the absolute, central, all encompassing bubble. Instead of this, an ethics of plurality, of decentralised, small and medium bubbles of foam requires each bubble to move

with a discrete, modest attitude in the wider world. Each bubble holds its own integrity while also being surrounded by a horizon full of other bubbles. In the foam, polyvalent and creative games of reflection have to develop, leaving behind all pretensions to an overpowering point of view:

"In the foam, discrete and polyvalent games of reason must develop that learn to live with a shimmering diversity of perspectives, and dispense with the illusion of the one lordly point of view."

Sloterdijk, 2011, p. 72

There is a resemblance between this world of bubbles and our reflection upon music (with both a big 'M' and a small 'm'). The ideas behind these notions are not ours, but are borrowed from Alan Bishop's theory of mathematics (Bishop, 1997; François & Van Bendegem, 2007). Bishop distinguishes between mathematics with a small 'm' and mathematics with a large 'M'. The notion of 'mathematics' stands for universal mathematical competencies and 'Mathematics' for the western scientific discipline. The big 'M' then refers to a possibly idealised but also fossilised view of mathematics,

accessible to the 'happy few' and stressing differences rather than similarities. The importance, for Bishop, of reflecting on mathematics – with a small 'm' – is that it acknowledges the universal potential of each human being for mathematics. This human potential relies upon six key basic skills or universal capacities, namely counting, locating, measuring, designing, playing, and explaining. Cross-cultural evidence makes clear – or at least very plausible – that these six activities are universal, and anthropological research shows that different cultures have developed their own symbolic technology and activity of mathematics.

The theories of both Alan Bishop and Peter Sloterdijk offer us insights into the prevailing music culture. Relying upon Bishop's insights, what could be the equivalent of the small 'm' in music, evincing the hierarchical path we explored in the foregoing section? Some kind of general human propensity and potential to music making. Christopher Small's concept of 'musicking' provides a good candidate:

“To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practising, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.”

Small focuses on music as an activity, as having a nature and function in human life, as being part and parcel of human capacities, such that it resembles the universal mathematical capacities of Bishop. Musicking is then a descriptive activity, not an evaluative one. Music with the big 'M' would thus be the typically Western view of music and music performance, be it the elitist Western concert tradition or the commodified Western star pop music, both fighting for the role of the big 'M'. Musicking, on the contrary,

is present in Indonesian gamelan music, or the adziza dance of the Ewe of Ghana, African American blues as well as urban rap, Bach's St Matthew Passion, or in a version of Singing in the Rain by your father under the shower. The point made by Small is to consider all these as perspectives on the universal activity of 'musicking', and to blur the lines between those who create, those who interpret and those who consume, as well as between levels within these categories.

Adding the vision of Peter Sloterdijk helps to reveal the complexity behind music with a small 'm' – behind the musicking. Different music genres of different cultures and world views together constitute a gigantic cloud of sound and foam, which, stimulated by prevailing technology and media, confront each other and interact continuously. It is a challenge for the music sector to cope with this gigantic music cloud. While this requires indeed a lot of audacity, a status quo of the situation of music today is intolerable: sticking to the existing, fragile bubbles might well make them explode. On the contrary, being part of the multiplicity of foam is better – or being part of the music with small 'm' – as foam is flexibly resistant, solid and in constant flux; it supports small eruptions and stress.

However, will being part of such a multitude not threaten the individual character or the authenticity of each bubble? We don't think so. Each sphere holds its own centre and autonomy and communicates from there with the other spheres in a peripheral space of dialogue. Individuality can only be recognised if other individualities are recognised also. Following the metaphor of the world of foam, we can see that the individuality of a bubble – a kind of music – is only in danger when such an individuality pretends to be an individuality with a big 'I' – like music or mathematics with a big 'M' – swelling artificially and losing any contact. The swelling will end suddenly in an explosion. Foam always needs to be more than one bubble – just imagine if today there were only one sort of music.

Small, 1998, p. 9

EMBRACING MUSICS FROM ALL DIRECTIONS

So we need to accept the foam and encounter its challenging playground. This will offer a stimulating environment and add zest to music culture. An environment based on diversity, on the multiplicity of the 'm's like the foam consisting of many bubbles, offers an horizon of so many perspectives. Diversity will be the keyword here, and by recognising this diversity, we want to argue in favour of a reversal of structures, not by exchanging orders, but by turning things upside down, by prioritising a reflection on the social reality and relevance of music and its expressions. Does classical music still have the same relevance it had 20 years ago? What shifts have occurred in society since then? Where are the adjacent bubbles in classical music today, and what are they?

Considering 'contemporary classical music' – which is different from the 'music of today' – we discern different movements in the landscape. The big canons of 'contemporary' music are no longer all that contemporary: Stockhausen, Cage, Xenakis, Berio, ... They are now joining the annals of classical music. A consequence of this is that their revolutionary works have become part of a historical performance context. We have entered a 'post-age' of compositions and experimentations by musicians like Alvin Lucier, Cornelius Cardew and many others, related to the sixties and the Fluxus movement. They are part of our cultural heritage. Even if they have opened a lot of new perspectives, still other perspectives are now emerging from the confrontation with the global world, the ever-expanding media and our cultural heritage. New bubbles arise in the world of foam of the 'music of today', and with them the need to reflect back on the older bubbles and to learn one's own place and space. That presents an enormous challenge: how should we go on from here, how should we create new sparkling bubbles in the foam of such interesting other and older bubbles. Moreover, there is not only a need for change inside the professional music world, but also in

all the adjacent bubbles, be they education at large, conservatories, music schools, art centres, media, production houses etc.

But how can we implement this change?

An overthrow of a rather fossilised situation is not possible by fighting a centre from another centre, by holding an 'M' position against other 'M' positions, but by engaging in the peripheral spaces, crossing the walls between the bubbles, engaging in dialogue and leaving monologic argumentation out. This can be realised not by changing the order of the bubbles – or of the 'm's – or by throwing away used foam, but by accepting the diversity of the world of foam, all its spheres, and by removing the rust of stiff structures. There is more in the world of foam than those bubbles that demand all our attention.

There are some possible trajectories for engaging with more scales, more musics and more sounds, allowing for the foam of champagne to sparkle.

Beyond Western classical music, there are other rich music traditions: think of Indian ragas, Moroccan lute music, Japanese court music... think again of all forms of musicking. Why could these not encounter each other, on the same stage, in the same place: a classical violin sonata co-existing with an Indian raga? In some conservatories, such as Rotterdam, a first step is taken by teaching a lot of non-western music – sitar, Turkish ud, gipsy guitar etc. and doing so to a high level of proficiency. In other conservatories, a museum-like situation has led to a fossilised, monological attitude, most of the time expressing false pretensions of big 'M's. But its audience is disappearing. By merging spheres, encountering new bubbles, exploring the different 'm's from amateur to expert level, new horizons appear.

Another example concerns the creation of music and its embeddedness in time. All present events form the history of tomorrow, but the present is also the scion of the past. Art is embedded in referentiality of the present and the past. The glance and reflection upon a painting of Rubens has fundamentally changed since





Picasso's painting; playing Brahms is no longer the same since Luigi Russolo or John Cage. A Lachenmann or a Ferneyhough are not only the scions of past classical music, but also the contemporaries of a postmodern, globalising world. Exploring music means a recognition of and an approach to classical music which is composed now, together with its contemporary context, and, last but not least, interfering with the field of tension between present and past. To engage and appreciate that field of tension, we cannot but consider with attention the music which is written now. We cannot wait until that music has entered the museum space, leaving not only responsibility to the next generation but also leading to a growing alienation with the present.

However important these points, the overall music sector has no honest or deep commitment to such a position.

A first indication is that a present-based creativity has to yield to the focus on the past. Music education today, at both amateur and professional level, concentrates on the reproduction of music up to 80% of the time. Even at the amateur level, a music student has a greater chance of composing something by launching a rock band, or by searching creatively on the computer to create an electronic music composition, than by attending a ten-year course of education in music. This 'museumisation' of music already has a considerable history if we see what music historians like Carl Dahlhaus wrote in 1983:

"The concept 'work' and not 'event' is the cornerstone of music history (...) The subject matter (...) is made up, primarily, of significant works of music that have outlived the culture of their age."

This quote may be 'acceptable' for music historians, but it is not for musicians. Such a view kills all creativity, not only from the artist's side, but

also from the audience's, and will also impoverish the existing music. If we compare this attitude with visual art, the proportion of creation and reproduction is reversed – at least in Belgium, which could explain the international recognition of Belgian visual art.

A second indication is most music institutions' disregard for new media. By ignoring the prevailing technological evolution, music culture ignores the growing need for interdisciplinary exchange between arts as well as for inter-artistic education and collaboration. Looking over the walls of institutions, we notice that other art forms are not so shy of these developments, using new media, intermedia, transmedia, e.g. in theatre and the visual arts. The medium is clearly not the message, but it is the necessary tool! The evolution towards a free appreciation of different media has started quite tempestuously, developing from a situation of a total liberalisation in the visual arts where painting was 'not done' during the eighties, towards multi-medial and inter-medial artistic practices alongside more traditional media. Nowadays, computer and technology are an inherent part of artistic creativity.

In music, the traditional boxes and their walls are difficult to destroy. And when it happens that music institutions create 'technological music departments', they not only create these at a distance from interaction with other arts institutions, but even clearly separated from their own 'traditional music department', building walls inside their own institutions. As such they remain doubly – on the inside and on the outside – behind the evolutions of the growing technological society.

The result is that more and more visual artists create music objects and that the music sector neglects its importance for other artistic disciplines: theatre uses video and soundscapes, composers could be needed for interesting sound installations, dance creations need the help of musicians.

Small details, small accents can make the difference. In contemporary art, the interrelation of the multiplicity of art forms, the use of different

media, is one of the driving forces to relate to society.

For music, this means that the score and the classical orchestra should live alongside other media, other forms of music making, soundscaping. But these potentialities are usually out of reach of today's music students and the blame lies entirely with the institutions and the overall mentality towards music creation and new media today.

As mentioned above, other artistic disciplines have demolished nearly all walls and integrated the use of new media. Projects in the visual arts are multi-perceptual, multi-media. Visual artists are interdisciplinary, working and creating sound installations and compositions. Are they the new interesting composers of the 21st century? It is a pity that these young artists cannot engage with interdisciplinary studies, enjoying cross-over courses in music departments

– and vice versa. That is a missed opportunity, both for visual artists and for musicians.

It is time for music institutions, music production houses and the whole music sector to demolish the walls and open up space for musical experiences. A whole generation of musicians, composers and other artists is waiting for this move, for these new insights and trajectories, but no official path for them exists.

If artists are the bearers of their culture, as they have always been, using prevailing tools to interpret it, to recount it, then the gap in the musical transmission of artistic and cultural heritage will widen and lead to increasing alienation of musical creation and expression from our society evolving mercilessly at high speed.

We can but hope that music foam is resistant and that the bubbles will push it further. Let us listen to the sound of champagne!

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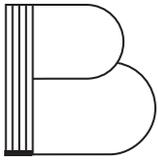
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ON THE ROAD

Denis Bosse

INTERVIEW WITH FREDERIC RZEWSKI





orn in 1938 in Westfield, Massachusetts, Frederic Rzewski has been a pianist and composer since 1960.

As a pianist he specialized in new music by participating in

Karlheinz Stockhausen's first performances. He co-founded the group MEV (*Musica Elettronica Viva*) with Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum in 1966, in Rome. Their music, which also involved Anthony Braxton and Steve Lacy, evolved between improvised music and electronic music.

It's only in 1975 that his work *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*, derived from a political song by Sergio Ortega, began revealing the quintessence of Frederic Rzewski's art. The piece magnifies the piano as the instrument of choice and proclaims the freedom of expressions as a compositional basis. Thereafter, the composer never ceased to assert that freedom in his oeuvre. This dimension is indeed much more important in his work than the 'politically engaged' label that is too often used to describe his music. No law, but a constantly reaffirmed and non-compromising integrity: through his quest for freedom, Frederic Rzewski always searches deeper to find the core of his own music and write it as directly and simply as possible. In fact, this was the basis of his teaching at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Liège where he was composition professor from 1977 to 2003.

In the past few years, the music of Frederic Rzewski has taken multiple shapes, ranging from monumental size pieces (*The Road*) to pieces of minimal dimensions (*Nanosonatas*). His work still focuses on the exploration of the unconscious, evolving towards a surrealist dimension and an even deeper sense of 'letting go'. Relentlessly searching for freedom...

Denis Bosse You performed the music of many composers, including Pierre Boulez' *Second Sonata*. What is your relationship with this music?

Frederic Rzewski When Boulez was in New York in the 70s, he wanted to organize a

concert series. He was open and was welcoming suggestions. I went to one of his meetings with Ursula Oppens and she pointed out that the United States is a multicultural country and new music has a different meaning there than in Europe, it is more complex. So, Ursula thought it would be interesting to have a musical program that reflected the complexity of the culture. At first, Boulez did not seem to understand. Naturally, she was primarily talking about African-American music with all its novelties such as Anthony Braxton. But Boulez still did not understand! Then he said: "Oh, I see what you mean, I think you're talking about improvisation, I heard that in Europe, it's always the same thing!" But I really doubt he had heard that in Europe! I think he was thinking of Globokar's group.

I have a lot of respect for Boulez, his music plays an important part in my life, and he was my hero when I was at the university, one of my heroes anyways. His music requires a certain level of attention and, in a sense, this is in contradiction with the main function of radio and the media in general, which is to support other activities such as driving a car for example! Reflecting on it, I realized that the medium is not neutral because it does not just convey information, it emphasizes a certain type of information: that's the very nature of 'broadcasting'. The word comes from agriculture: you take the seeds and throw them, instead of planting them in soil. This is not the direction radio should have taken; the concept was only introduced around 1921.

I think that's one reason why we rarely hear electronic music and contemporary music in general, not just Boulez, Schönberg is also a good example: if the radio plays Schönberg, you have to stop whatever you're doing and listen.

Bosse I read in an article about you that you made an effort to make sure your music could never be marketable.

Rzewski I hope it never is.

Bosse Isn't that one of the bases of your approach?

Rzewski Yes, of course, it certainly is, but for most people music is a piece of plastic that you buy in a store.

Bosse In terms of improvisation, when you played with Steve Lacy and Anthony Braxton, what was the founding of this spontaneous, collective process that was mentioned in several articles about you?

Rzewski ... I would have to read the articles!

Bosse It was only mentioned in a biography and I wondered what it was referring to at the time: a certain type of spontaneous improvisation?

Rzewski At the time? Which time?

Bosse The time when you were playing with *Musica Elettronica Viva*.

Rzewski But we just toured in Europe, yes, yes, it still going on!

There are three of us now, Alvin Curran, Richard Teitelbaum and myself. They mostly use computers and electronics. As of myself, I usually stick to the piano. Of course the materials and samples are prepared, but the structure is never planned, sometimes we talk about what we're going to do, but it is immediately forgotten!

Bosse Is your type of improvisation very different from jazz?

Rzewski It's completely different, closer to the classical tradition.

Bosse How so?

Rzewski Improvisation has always been an important aspect of classical music.

Bosse For Beethoven, for example?

Rzewski And Bach too.

Bosse You introduced a cadenza in Beethoven's *Fourth Concerto*: was it an improvised cadenza or was it written?

Rzewski Both! Jerome Lowenthal, who is a pianist from New York, does not improvise himself, but, like many classical pianists, he plays written versions of cadenzas. Many composers have written cadenzas for this concerto: Clara Schumann, Godowsky, etc. And Jerome asked me to write one. Then he recorded a CD with Beethoven's *Fourth Concerto*, but it's an interactive CD in which you can choose which cadenza you want! He also played a recital in New York with just the cadenzas for piano solo, and it was very interesting because it has been renowned through the century. I particularly remember Clara Schumann's, which was very beautiful.

Well, this piece was theoretically a cadenza for the concerto, but it is long! Maybe fifteen minutes long. Beethoven also made long improvisations. Anyway, I highly doubt this cadenza will ever be played in a concert hall with an orchestra! You can't really ask an orchestra to sit there for fifteen minutes doing nothing!
(Laughter)

Bosse You are a virtuoso pianist. What does virtuosity mean to you? Is it a goal as it is for Liszt or a means for expression?

Rzewski Liszt? You know, Liszt is a composer that I hardly know; for a reason I ignore, I was never attracted nor interested by his work. He wrote an extensive number of pieces for the piano and I do not know most of his music!

Bosse And Chopin?

Rzewski I naturally know Chopin because I am of Polish origin and since I was a child, I was told about Chopin! But we don't know much about improvisation from back then, because it was not recorded. And yet... when Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1880, it was a very simple device, with no electrical power:

it was mechanical, it worked with a crank. Why then was this device not created a century earlier? Mozart would have enjoyed it; he loved gadgets, and music boxes. There is no technical reason why we cannot hear the recordings of Beethoven's improvisations today! Why was that device not invented in the eighteenth century?

Perhaps it means that the concept of recording is a fad that will eventually disappear! Maybe this century will be known by future generations as the century of recordings, the era when people had this weird idea to keep music in a piece of plastic (laughs) kind of like the Egyptian idea of life after death: totally absurd!

Yet music has been around for at least 35,000 years, probably much more. 35,000 years is the age of the oldest musical instrument, which was only discovered a few years ago in Yugoslavia, a flute made of bird bones, with three holes, from which we can extrapolate the location of the other holes. And it seems to be a diatonic flute, more or less like the common flutes known throughout the world, with six holes. Music was therefore already quite developed. We can say that for 35,000 years, music was something that people did, and not something that was passively observed in concert halls.

Bosse I see three dimensions in your work, improvisation on one part, which we just talked about, also what I call a sort of 'science of repetition', and...

Rzewski 'Science of repetition'?

Bosse I mean a way that is very particular to you to repeat items, return to others, introduce variations. I'm thinking of a specific American music, Steve Reich, and some of your pieces of the 60's such as *Les moutons de Panurge*.

Rzewski In the 60's? Yes! True, I experimented with that. But there is no repetition!

Bosse It's a repetition without being one...

Rzewski Yes indeed, very simple principles.

Bosse It is something you still experiment with?

Rzewski I think I did just about all you can do with that idea! And I don't like to repeat myself! (Laughter) So I try to escape from the past.

Bosse You're also a performer, what importance does that have for you?

Rzewski I have a specific attitude because I can play classical music fairly well, but I think these pieces that we know so well, it's interesting to try to play them in a new way. I don't change the texts, but I sometimes like adding ornaments to them...

Bosse Or introduce an improvised sequence for example?

Rzewski Yes! In Beethoven's sonatas, especially in the first ones, there are many moments when you really have to improvise. The cadenzas... When I play classical music, I am undoubtedly very influenced by all the experience I have with modern music and in purely classical terms it is probably not a very good thing. I remember, in Liège, a violin teacher told his students that they should not play contemporary music because it's bad for classical music technique: I think it's not entirely wrong. It is probably true, and I think in my case it is true! I played so much Stockhausen, John Cage, etc., that when I play classical music, I tend to play it as if it were contemporary music!

Bosse In a sense, you allow the audience to listen to classical music as contemporary music.

Rzewski You might think that's a good thing, but that music critic in Cleveland recently did not think so! (Laughter) And I totally understand his point of view. For example, Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words* are, in my opinion, not just a collection of different pieces, no, it's a kind of oratorio for solo piano. Probably greatly influenced by the first book of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, which is also a

kind of oratorio. I decided that Mendelssohn's music, which is obviously classic – in fact, Schumann called him the Mozart of the nineteenth century – was to be played a bit like Mozart's. That is to say, with a fast tempo: so I play these pieces fast, which is not very usual, and hard to sell!

Bosse Do you also take some liberties when you interpret your own pieces?

Rzewski Yes, I never decide beforehand, I think it's better to have an empty head!

Bosse *The People United Will Never Be Defeated*, variations on a theme by Sergio Ortega are reminiscent of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*. Is there a link?

Rzewski No. If there is a link to anything, it would be to Bach's *Goldberg Variations*, which also have a cyclic structure in groups of three while *The People United* is in six parts with six variations that unfold in a certain order. There is a whole text about this, which I can't explain now.

Bosse Listening to these pieces, it feels like a kind of meeting point between different languages.

Rzewski Yes, it was my idea at the time, because the theme of Sergio Ortega's text is unity: the importance for the people to unite all their different democratic components in order to avoid the already predictable coup. And so, I wanted to use musical means to illustrate this concept, the relationships between the various traditions in various countries, and also at different periods in history. This is why a number of traditional melodies are cited. For example, this song by Hanns Eisler, *The Solidarity Song*, which was written in 1932 and deals with more or less the same subject as Sergio Ortega's.

Bosse In general, what do you think of twentieth century's musical trends?

Rzewski In a sense, they are all the same! In a sense...

It struck me about twenty years ago, when I wondered why classical music was always symmetrical: of ABA or strophic form. Why is it so orderly? Because life is not orderly and classical music is not like life. I wanted to find a way of writing that was closer to all that is unpredictable. Obviously, this was not a very new idea, since all twentieth century music is more or less like that! But then, if you look at the various musical trends, as you call them, they all have something in common: the music is always generated by an external formula, whether be it dodecaphonic music or even neoclassicism: a kind of machine in which you put your ideas and turn the handle and the music comes out! *(Laughter)* Even John Cage, who is perhaps the biggest anarchist of all twentieth century composers, never simply wrote what came out of his head. He always had a method, like the I Ching or the random methods.

Bosse But it is very difficult to just write what comes out of your head...

Rzewski Yes!

Bosse How do you do it?

Rzewski I've thought a lot about this! Another thing that struck me is that in music, the surrealist movement has almost never been present, although it greatly influenced other art forms.

Bosse There is André Souris.

Rzewski There is André Souris, indeed, and that's it! There are also composers who are perhaps close to the idea such as Satie, or even Poulenc or Darius Milhaud, and we could say that even Mahler uses methods that may allow the unconscious to somewhat express itself without the usual inhibitions. In painting, theater, cinema, the influence of inner world discovery that comes from psychoanalysis is everywhere,

although not in music. With a few exceptions, music seems to have always preferred the rational way. Post-war composers like to present themselves in the white suit of the laboratory technician; they use a pseudo-scientific jargon like 'parameters', etc. Why? It's probably not easy to explain but I think it has something to do with the fact that music belongs to priests. The most ancient composers are priests and music is therefore closely related to theology, and, in a sense, classical music is still a kind of sacred music. The division we see in art and culture between top and bottom naturally exists everywhere; however, in music, it is particularly clear: there is a clear division between serious music and light music and, in my opinion, this dualism is simply another form of the world's division between sacred and profane. This has to do with what we were talking about earlier: taboos in classical music, what is allowed and what is not allowed.

Bosse What is the importance of melody in your music?

Rzewski It's hard to avoid! *(Laughter)*

Some composers manage to do it, like Xenakis for example.

Bosse In this exploration of the unconscious, of which you speak, does melody have a place? Do you write what you whistle?

Rzewski Hum! I don't whistle much!

(Laughter)

No! I usually write in front of the piano... It's become a habit; I was always told it was a bad habit!

Bosse In *The North American Ballads*, we can hear the emergence of well-known melodies. Are they a way of speaking to the audience?

Rzewski Yes, there are four melodies.

I gave a talk about this in Berlin once, the concept of melody as a face...

I don't know much about psychology, but if I understand correctly, the human brain

is predisposed to recognize human faces; it is a shape in which certain parts of the brain are specialized. For example, there have been experiments where a subject is presented a picture of a human face that is systematically and gradually distorted in order to see how far we can get before the subject no longer recognizes the face. When I thought about this, it occurred to me there was some similarity with traditional music such as lullabies. It seems to me that there may be a link between the mother's face and the mother's voice, because there are certain formulas in children's melodies that are somewhat universal, that can be found everywhere, and many types of popular music from different countries are alike in their pentatonic structure for example, or in their general form. And so, I decided to explore this notion and, yes, in these *North American Ballads*, I tried to do that, take traditional melodies and subject them to various distortions or transpositions, because I realized that we can still recognize certain melodies through all these distortions. Which is not the case, for example, with dodecaphonic series! *(Laughter)*

Bosse Some of your work is based on a tonal approach. What does tonality mean to you?

Rzewski Nothing in particular! Can you explain?

Bosse I think you have a very particular approach to tonality: you use it as a means of expression; what does it mean to you when you write passages that are more tonal than others? This is very striking, for example, in the variations *The People United*...

Rzewski Yes, the theme is tonal... but I don't have much of an opinion on tonality...

Bosse But some composers absolutely refuse the notion of tonality, while for you, it seems to be a means of expression.

Rzewski Hum. Yes, well, which compos-

ers adamantly refuse the notion of tonality?
There aren't many!

Bosse For example, in France, composers belonging to the spectral movement.

Rzewski They refuse the notion of tonality?

Bosse The tonal system anyway.

Rzewski I thought the whole idea of this spectralism was based on harmonics!

Bosse Yes, but not on the hierarchical relationship between tension and relaxation, tonic and dominant, these are not concepts that are relevant to them.

Rzewski Frankly, I never think of tonics and dominants! I learned this in school, harmony... But I never liked harmony; I thought it was a sort of 'voodoo'! (*Laughter*) There are all these treatises on harmony, but they contradict each other, it's a bit like books on mushrooms: in one book, you read that a kind of mushroom is delicious and in the next it's deadly! (*Laughter*) Who is right? It's kind of the same thing with harmony, I've never really been interested by it... Pousseur was a great fan of harmony, he was very passionate about it, and for me it's the opposite: I like counterpoint; of all traditional disciplines, it seems to me to be the only one that is actually useful.

Bosse Can you explain a bit more?

Rzewski Yes, the most interesting type of counterpoint is the first kind, one note against one note. I really enjoyed these exercises when I was a student. And I always wanted to teach that in Liège, but it was never possible. I really like counterpoint.

Bosse How is counterpoint articulated in your work?

Rzewski Just to explain what I was saying earlier about this first kind of counterpoint:

you have a given *cantus firmus* and you have to write the notes for a melody that must have a certain profile and there is a reason for everything, it's kind of like the army, there is a rule for everything! And the number of choices is very limited. So you learn very quickly that if you make the wrong choice, after 3 or 4 notes you're stuck! You have to go back and fix your mistake. I think all this is very useful because you develop a sort of sense for the consequences of your choices and you begin to understand that it is not necessary to calculate everything that might happen, and you develop a kind of sixth sense for what will take you where you want to go. So it's a bit like improvisation, but in writing: the more it is intuitive, the more it is successful. It is no coincidence if Bach was a great improviser, both elements are linked: rigor in the writing and freedom.

Bosse I would like to talk about your relationship with text. In some of your works, like *De Profundis*, the pianist has to talk, make sounds, sing, whistle. I think you've invented that concept of the reciting pianist.

Rzewski Maybe, I don't know, but it's true that there may be something new in that. I started doing it simply because I found that I had some talent with this type of thing! (*Laughter*) That's all! So even if I wrote this piece for other people, in the end I always think of my old pianist friend Frederic!

Bosse But in *De Profundis*, there is a certain relationship between the enunciation of the text and the music. A relationship that is difficult to explain but that creates a very intense sensation and I was wondering if there was a particular approach regarding that?

Rzewski It's funny, when I look for a text, I try to find one that already has the music. Because I'm lazy by nature and I always look for the easy route, so if I find the music that is already done, all I have to do is transcribe it! (*Laughter*) And this text by Oscar Wilde is one

of the pinnacles of English literature, it is amazing, it works, the words without the music, it's enough! I adapted the text, I did not change it, I took a fragment from a certain place and another fragment elsewhere and I built my own story like this. It's not exactly an oratorio, it's a monodrama, yet I have no experience as an actor, and the idea is not to interpret this in a theater form, it's not theater, it's music. Actors work with a text, they prepare it. This is one of the reasons it is often difficult to convince actors to read rhythmic texts, it's something that we often see in contemporary music and it often doesn't work because for the actor, it's an invasion of his territory.

Bosse Are your texts rhythmic?

Rzewski Yes of course, all the rhythms are written. That's why it would be difficult to give this to a reciter.

Bosse *The Road* is a very impressive piece.¹ It lasts eight hours, doesn't it?

Rzewski Yes at least!

Bosse Is the piece finished?

Rzewski Yes, it's been finished since 2003.

Bosse And besides this monumental piece, you also wrote the *Nanosonatas*, so very short sonatas.

Rzewski Yes, usually two minutes.

Bosse So, are you attracted to extremes?

Rzewski No! In the case of *The Road* I just wanted to write a kind of novel. Like nineteenth century Russian literature, which I studied a lot. Much of this music is based on texts by Gogol, Chekhov, Tolstoy. I wanted to create a novel, something that you play at home like *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, a private music.

I really did not want an audience to sit there for eight hours, listening to this music, no, no, no! Much to the contrary, you read a little here and a little there: you don't read *War and Peace* in one sitting! (*Laughter*) It exists outside of any timeframe, in a sense.

Bosse It's very Proustian?

Rzewski Yes, Bergsonian I would say. Bergson speaks a lot about this notion. For example regarding melodies. He said somewhere that melodies were timeless. Because you hear a fragment, the beginning or the end, and you recognize the whole melody. It is a perception that takes place outside of time. So, the reason I wanted to make such a long piece of music was to ensure that it would not be performed live.

Bosse Is there a link with cinema? I'm thinking of David Lynch, for example.

Rzewski No, I would not say so. It's rather linear.

Bosse Why did you number the different parts of the work in miles?

Rzewski The idea was to write on the theme of the road! The road is already there when you arrive and continues when you leave and you don't really know what will happen along the way: there are car accidents, unpredictable things and yet I have to create a structure.

Bosse Yes, and it's a very strong structure, indeed.

Rzewski Maybe a bit too strong! Looking back, the piece seems a little too structured to me...

Bosse I would like to know who your favorite composers are.

Rzewski It changes! Right now, I really like Mendelssohn. He is one of the great gen-

issues of the nineteenth century. My favorite ones? I like them all! (*Laughter*)

Bosse In some biographies, you are called a Marxist and an anti-militarist.

Rzewski No! Where did you read that? On Wikipedia?

Anti-militarist, yes, I totally agree. As for Marxist... I am often called a Marxist.

Bosse And is it not true?

Rzewski I have a lot of sympathy for Marx! I read a lot of Marx's works and I like him a lot and it's a guy that I would have liked to know. But I can't say I'm a Marxist! What does that mean anyway? A Marxist musician, that makes no sense!

Bosse It probably has to do with the political commitment expressed in your music. You seem to defend...

Rzewski Yes, people like to describe me as a political expert, but I'm not. It's true, I've written a few pieces based on political issues, it's perfectly true, but I cannot say I am an expert in the field! Hanns Eisler might have been a politically involved composer, Sergio Ortega was very politically involved, and I think I'm an amateur in the field. There was recently an international conference on Hanns Eisler in London and many people from various universities were invited. And I was contacted by the German television, they wanted to interview me because I'm supposed to be an expert in politically engaged music, and finally the interview did not take place because of the volcano that closed down all airports! (*Laughter*) Many guests never arrived!

But the relationship between music and politics is complex; naturally, I've been thinking a lot about this issue, and I realized that we could easily say that music can be used for political purposes. Yes, it happens all the time. But I cannot find a single example in history

where the influence clearly works the other way. That is to say, can music have an influence on political matters? Obviously, composers will fancy that it can: Pousseur gave a lot of thought to this type of issue, his utopian ideas. And it's not impossible; however, it is very difficult to prove: no one can say today how the world would be if Mozart had not written *The Magic Flute*. Mozart's music has very probably influenced all kinds of people but I cannot find an example in history where music has had a clear influence on political matters. There might be an exception. I heard on the BBC about the origins of the Spanish Civil War. Initially, the German military had no intention of meddling with the Spanish Civil War. But there was a group of German businessmen in Tangier where Franco was. He made all kinds of proposals to them so that they would convince the Führer to join the civil war. These businessmen left for Germany and went to find Hitler who was in Bayreuth. He had just heard a performance of *Siegfried* when he received these businessmen and listened to their proposals and he said: "Yes, we're going to try out our new incendiary weapons." He was talking about Guernica. And he called it the operation *Feuerzauber*, or 'magic fire'. In this case, there may be an influence of Wagner's music on a fairly important decision. But even that doesn't prove anything!

Bosse You spent many years in Belgium and I wanted to ask you about your relationship with Henri Pousseur.

Rzewski I met Pousseur for the first time in June 1960 at the ISCM festival in Cologne. Then I saw him again in Berlin and later in Buffalo, where we spent time together and became good friends. But with Henri, I always felt that even if he was not much older than me, he belonged to another generation. That is to say, the generation of people who experienced World War II. I was born in 1938 and I was 7 years old when the war was over. Naturally, in the U.S. we played children's games where I was always the German or the Japanese guy because I was

smaller and it always ended badly! (*Laughter*) And I would go home in tears. But for me, war was just a children's game. For Pousseur, things were very different, he was forced to join the army and at the end of the war they wanted to assign him to the anti-aircraft artillery, he was only about 15 years old, and his mother fought to save him. He was evidently strongly influenced by these experiences.

Bosse What do you think of Belgium, this country that is in crisis at the moment?

Rzewski I love this country! I really like this country! It took me some time to get there, but I now find this country fascinating. Of course it is not very active and there are all sorts of aspects that are not very interesting, but it is precisely what makes it interesting. There are other European countries like Yugoslavia that have different stories, more tragic stories, that don't happen here! What I find interesting is: why do people not kill each other? (*Laughter*) This is a secret I have not yet managed to fathom! And I find it fascinating!

Bosse Are you rather optimistic about the future of Belgium?

Rzewski I'm always optimistic! Yes, I think Belgium is a good idea.

Bosse Could you tell us a bit about your current projects before we end this session?

Rzewski I want to live as long as Elliot Carter! I know him very well, he's almost 102 years old now and he's in very good shape and he writes beautiful music! Have you heard his recent works? What he's written these last five or six years is absolutely amazing and quite avant-garde. The *Fifth String Quartet* is truly a masterpiece, as his recent works for piano, these, these pieces he wrote for Pierre-Laurent Aimard. I love his music. It's not at all rigid.

There you go, that's a project. (*Laughter*)

Bosse Other projects?

Rzewski Study the piano! There was a time when I thought that studying the piano was the most boring human activity that could possibly be invented, but as I get older, I find that it gives me physical pleasure, pure pleasure, the pure satisfaction of being able to do physical movements. Your wife teaches yoga, she would understand what I am talking about! I do that more and more often now.

When you reach a certain age you have to make choices, you can't do everything; I try to keep myself informed about what's happening in the world, which is not an easy task. I gave up all hopes of understanding computers (*Laughs*) because you have to be 13 years old to understand them, so I gave up! No, I try to go deeper: what I do well, I try to do it better, which is not automatic.

Ok, is that enough?

This interview was published in French in 2010 in an issue of *Les Carnets du Forum*, devoted to music and politics.

Les Carnets du Forum, vol 2., edited by Michel Fourgon, 2010, a publication of Forum des Compositeurs.

Note

1 *The Road* (1995-2003) is a piece for piano solo made of eight parts:

Part I *TURNS*, Mile 1-8

Part II *TRACKS*, Mile 9-16

Part III *TRAMPS*, Mile 17-24

Part IV *STOP*, Mile 25-32

Part V A *FEW KNOCKS*, Mile 33-40 (*Where Are You Running, Una Tragedia Domestica, Slow March, Strange Meeting, The Days Fly By, Coming and Going, A Friendly Dispute-Working it Out*)

Part VI *TRAVELLING WITH CHILDREN*, Mile 41-48 (*Sailing to Palmyra, The Prodigal Parents, Dance, Abadonna, Night Thought, A Walk in the Woods, Why?*)

Part VII *FINAL PREPARATIONS*, Mile 49-56 (*The Weak and the Strong, Castles in the Air, Notes from the Underground, The Same Old Story, Too Late!, Back to Earth, The End of the Line, The Flood, Epilogue*)

Part VIII *THE BIG DAY ARRIVES*, Mile 57-64 (*Leaving, Marriage, Many Loves, Uphill, Stop The War!, The Babble, Nowhere, Leaks And Plugs*)

The Road, like all of Frederic Rzewski's works can be heard on <http://icking-music-archive.org/ByComposer/Rzewski.php>

THE PLACE OF CONTEMPORARY ART MUSIC

Peter-Paul De Temmerman

IN THE CURRENT CULTURE DEBATE



As is often the case with cultural organisations, there is a lot going on behind the abbreviation ISCM. The International Society for Contemporary Music aims to provide an international forum for 'contemporary' music. Clearly this is a very broad topic. In the essay below I will try to make a case for a form of expression I would like to describe somewhat more specifically as contemporary art music.

To define clearly what this essay is about, I will begin by elucidating each element of the title. This elucidation will necessarily also include an indication of the place contemporary art music occupies in our society.

CONTEMPORARY ART MUSIC

An artistic expression does not exist simply because it exists: I believe that the essence of an artistic expression also lies partly in the fact that it has arisen from choices, explicit or otherwise, and not primarily because it did not exist beforehand. Why am I discussing 'contemporary' music and not 'new' music? For the simple reason that the term 'new' is far too general. Consequently, I have chosen the term 'contemporary' because it can cover three important areas of meaning. Firstly, it may indicate a form, content or event that is taking form now, at this moment or in this period. Secondly, it concerns an expression that is active now, whose effects are now being felt, which is intervening now to a greater or lesser extent, although it may not have been formulated now. This may happen in the field to which the expression was addressed or outside

it. But in any case it implies relevance. Thirdly, 'contemporary' phenomena are those which are important now, things which are not trivial and even have an urgency about them, a certain necessity. At best, these three aspects manifest themselves simultaneously. Hopefully it is already clear that 'contemporary art music' does not refer to a monolithic block of expressions, but to expressions that share a considerable cultural and historical background, consequently also manifesting themselves in a related cultural field.

Unlike the ISCM, I refer to 'art music' and not just 'music', likewise to avoid over-generalisation. I would like to discuss the choice of this term in somewhat more depth as well, because it is not arbitrary and in recent decades it has not been uncontroversial either.

First and foremost, it defines a boundary. We are talking about music, and this music is intended to be valued as art and not (merely) as entertainment. 'Art music' also refers to a constant evolution in a certain direction. An artistic expression develops and/or changes many times, to some extent in relation to what has gone before it. This relation can take the form of a confirmation and further exploration of a given artistic discourse or a reaction against it. Certain choices, such as the introduction of atonality, affect the way that artists look at the world through their art decades later. The realisation that contemporary art music is part of a history is extremely important. However in recent decades, attempts have been made to segregate art music all too emphatically as an independent and elite phenomenon. This is particularly true for postwar modernism.

The term 'art music' developed in Western culture and thus gained a historic meaning, but nowadays the term can refer to different traditions. In the context of this essay I will limit this term to the area within my frame of reference, namely the Western and, in particular, the European musical tradition.

The term 'art music' implies that the artistic expression it refers to has a certain autonomy.

Besides the fact that it is artistic, it may have a meaning derived only from itself. Of course composers are connected to the world around them and may derive motifs or a sense of meaning from their surroundings. But this does not apply to sound as a phenomenon, in the sense that a direct reference to a reality outside sound-making itself is not actually possible. A political chord, for example, does not exist. Nonetheless, approaching sound as a phenomenon has a whole history of its own in Western art music, different to that in other cultures and histories. We only need think about tuning, for example. But this too is different in other music cultures derived from the Western tradition. The sound spectrum that the Western art music tradition has developed to date, and will doubtless continue to develop, is exceptionally rich. And this richness deserves to be cherished.

Before we delve further into the position of contemporary art music in the cultural debate, I would like to consider for a moment the place that this music occupies in the West European cultural scene. The answer is simple: its place is almost non-existent. To begin with there is the superabundance of cultural expressions, from film, literature, theatre, dance and visual art to circus, music, sport etc., of which music is only one. If we only consider music, we are struck by the fact that even here contemporary art music occupies a particularly marginal position. That applies both to the music available to listen to in concert halls or music carriers such as CD and vinyl, and to the opportunities to get to know it through the general, commercial and/or public media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines). What are the consequences of this? I am working on the assumption that the media, and cultural spaces in general, contribute both to the formation of the individual's frame of reference and to the creation of social relationships between different individuals, and in that sense to a community. Clearly they do not exclusively fulfil this role, because of course there is school, work, family, religion etc. as well. Nevertheless, their influence on the formation of a world view,

in this case personal reality, is far from negligible. We live in a community that is completely detaching itself from its own cultural heritage. Popular culture – not the older folk culture – forms the frame of reference for almost all areas of the cultural field. In itself that does not necessarily need to be a problem, but it is certainly important to try and find out for example which influences are causing the presence of art music to wane. I do not believe that this is exclusively – or even primarily – to do with the characteristics of the music itself, but rather due to the cultural policy of the last few decades, which is of an ideological nature. Of course the overwhelming subjection of cultural expressions to market forces plays a role as well.

Efforts have been under way for decades to level out the difference between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture for good, in favour of pluralism and social equality. And yet this debate itself is primarily a fundamental part of high culture. Even this text belongs in that context. It is mainly academics or other representatives of high culture who make social and political pronouncements in the context of such debates on the cultural expressions of some culture or other that is considered to be lower. They do not do this to compare aesthetic characteristics, but to compare the value of the recipient of the cultural expression with the value of the person judging the recipient. And this should be unambiguously equal. I, as a lover of Bach and hence implicitly a representative of higher culture, announce that I am worth no more than my neighbour who loves Elvis and does not listen to Bach, let alone knowing or understanding anything about his music. This is a moral principle, not even a judgement, because it is true from the outset. Reflexively, people go on to conclude from this that the cultural expressions that delight the judge and maker of pronouncements (myself) and the recipient of lower cultural expressions (my neighbour) must also be equal. That is a moral judgement disguised as an aesthetic one, which places the adherent of this principle in a decidedly ambiguous and fundamentally hypocritical posi-

tion. When an aesthetic judgement is read as an ideological discourse, you create a situation in which people may no longer dare to speak openly. I say that Bach is of equal value to Elvis, because I do not want to be suspected of believing I am worth more than my neighbour, not because I really think Elvis is as good as Bach. Hence if you make a positive aesthetic statement in such cases, referring to an elite which may or may not exist, you automatically make a latent negative statement about those who do not belong to that elite. Or conversely, if I make a positive statement about the Rock Werchter festival for example, I am automatically saying something positive about the people who attend it. After all, rock festivals of that kind are the apotheosis of pluralism and social equality: all classes are united fraternally on one big party. Although the moral and aesthetic judgements in this context have nothing to do with each other, we do try to link them, which increases the likelihood of taboos arising, and therefore also surveillance of what is valuable. This makes it high time to sweep this debate off the table. It is only when we go back to distinguishing a moral judgement of a group or its members from an aesthetic judgement of a product of a member or members of a group that it will once again be possible to make the following aesthetic statement: “Of course such things as banality and triviality still exist.” Ultimately this should be at the heart of the debate, and not the question of who feels insulted or reinforced.

THE THRESHOLD PROBLEM

You don’t create a new audience by asking for one. But you will not get anywhere unless you make the artistic expression available. In any case, most people will only go looking for unfamiliar music if an impulse comes from a person or institution which acts as an example or reference point to the lay person in question. That is not really about the intrinsic value of the artistic expression, but generally has much more to do with the place allocated to it in the social

network concerned. Cultural relationships have always been connected to social relationships: if the social relationships change, so do the cultural ones. The opposite occurs far less. Formerly this influence and effect was much clearer and, especially, more open: one need only remember the cultural associations affiliated to the Belgian social movements. These social movements were rooted in the pronounced political and social pillars in society¹, resulting in each case in a cultural association grafted onto the corresponding ideology. For example the Catholics had the Davidsfonds, socialists and non-Catholics had the Vermeylefonds and the progressive leftist Masereelfonds, Liberal non-Catholics had the Willemsfonds, and Flemish nationalists, the Rodenbachfonds. In Flanders (as the largest cultural community in Belgium), these associations also contributed to a stronger sense of Flemishness and the creation of a Flemish identity in the Belgian political and cultural system. The cultural associations all have two features in common. Firstly, they aim to provide a platform for their ideological heritage. Secondly, they aim to offer their members cultural development that is to a greater or lesser extent ideologically influenced, thus permitting personal growth and, in that sense, emancipation. Nowadays – and not entirely without justification – this approach is strongly felt to be paternalistic. But here, too, we can discern a certain ambiguity and hypocrisy: people cringe at the idea of ‘improving’ the lower classes but do proclaim the virtues of social mobility. In my opinion, however, there is no essential difference between the two. Both are rooted in an emancipatory ideal. Lowering thresholds to increase social mobility is praiseworthy of course, as long as it is done through education, initiation and training and not by intervening from above in the content of what is on offer. It corresponds to the old ideals of education, but also to the emancipatory aims of the old socialist vision of popular improvement. The Flemish composer Lucien Goethals (1931-2006) once put it like this: “It is not the threshold that needs to be lowered but the people who need to be raised up.”² I think it is high time to re-evaluate that idea

and reformulate it in the context of our time, in the sense that the experience of culture and the arts can contribute to raising people beyond their personal and social limitations.

In that context I assume that art itself is more or less oriented (or should be) towards superseding its own categories – more specifically in the very making of art. Someone who practises an art form, such as a composer or musician, aims to reach an ever-higher level, (usually) within the limits of the vocabulary of their art form. Of course artists are subject here to a historical development. As an artist, you react to the present context but also to the history of the art form you practice. History is obviously linear in time, but the development, unravelling, discovery and/or refinement of cultural expressions often happens in fits and starts. New times sometimes demand new means of expression. Sometimes these new means, just like the desire to renew them, can be so radical that people claim to have broken with the past. This is clear for example in the way that composers like Pierre Boulez talked about their work. However it always turns out with hindsight that no one can completely divest themselves of their own history.

That focus on surpassing one’s own categories has also frequently been present in the valuation of the arts. It was a valid aim to develop one’s own faculties in order to make an aesthetic judgement. In other words, taste could be improved. I have written this in the past tense because people tend to assume nowadays that the refinement of taste – if it exists at all – cannot be shared collectively, and if it is shared in the high arts such as classical music, it is mainly just snobbery anyway. In popular artistic expressions, however, the emphasis is usually different, namely a focus on ecstasy, flow, experiencing excitement, one’s own body, which is by definition personal. In music-making, people tend far more to orient themselves towards the effect they are creating than refinement of the expression itself or the experience of it. Here ecstasy, passion, desire and entertainment play an important role, sometimes supported by intoxicants. In the higher arts this aspect of frenziedness, ecstasy and

intoxicants is more or less absent, although it is probably inaccurate to draw the line so sharply – you could argue that for example Phill Niblock, Fausto Romitelli or, in Belgium, Serge Verstockt do emphasise ecstasy as a subject. Nevertheless, one can state that in art music it is certainly the intention to sharpen perception as much as possible, or at least to aim for a pleasure that resides among other things in listening itself. One form of expression focuses more on sensationalism and relaxation, the other on sensation, perception and effort. I don't mean to say here that pop music is necessarily banal, or that intoxication is not pleasant. But if the form of expression is banal, the intoxication is succeeded by boredom, whereas one really can expect from good art that it continues to intrigue, invite questions and offer insights once the moment is past. Valuing such expression often demands greater mental and intellectual efforts, although it has been precisely the demand for this type of effort that has for some reason been called into question over recent decades: asking people to make an effort excludes those who cannot or do not want to make it, and so it is 'exclusive'. And people don't like that. In my view that is a strange way of thinking. Such an effort excludes because of the effort itself, not because of the individual or because of the envisaged aim. In other words: if you make the effort, you get a corresponding result; otherwise you don't. It is so simple, and yet the idea survives that many contemporary arts are deliberately exclusive, and above all that this is a problem. This is how Bart De Wever, the most popular Flemish politician of the moment, a dyed-in-the-wool right-wing conservative, puts it: *"These days art hardly touches the community at all, despite some artists' desperate attempts to shock. Or as the Spanish (sic) Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz said: 'Rebellion has turned into procedure, criticism into rhetoric, transgression into ceremony. Negation is no longer creative.' A lot of contemporary art has retreated into a private reservation, where art holds a select circle together but also segregates it and sets it apart from society. These contemporary art works are only recognisable as art to that little insiders'*

club and don't make the slightest bit of sense to the man in the street." So art is supposed to touch the community, but does De Wever mean the whole community? It is pretty crass, but many people implicitly validate this idea. This begs the question of whether an artistic expression should adapt, lowering the threshold and becoming accessible to 'the man in the street.'³ I find it problematic that people in Flanders have been doing just that over the last few decades, on the initiative of organisations themselves, of government bodies etc. Composers, ensembles and organisers are expected to build bridges, and so here and there you suddenly find pieces for an ensemble and DJ, ensemble and video artist, ensemble and book, ensemble and a celebrity who needed to declare their love for classical music or a popular jazz pianist who has been asked to write a piano concerto. Whether this really does build bridges is something I sincerely doubt, but the contents of the resulting productions are effectively determined by policy. Maybe – or even probably – this intervention by the government has also led to viable artistic choices, and doubtless to the production of interesting art as well, without artistic compromises. But in fact that distinction is not actually relevant here. The point remains that such attempts indicate that people believe that (contemporary) art music cannot stand on its own merits. Or, worse still (and I think this is implicitly the dominant assumption) that it is best to hide away the work's own merits in the background, because to do so is more politically correct. That is gradually erring in the direction of social realism. So, no, I do not believe that a complex artistic expression should adapt itself to 'the man in the street.' There are all sorts of complex expressions that leave 'the man in the street' completely unmoved: maths for example. If we adapt the content of maths so that everybody understands it, our buildings will fall down. People will accept maths quickly because the direct benefit of maths to architecture is demonstrable, whereas the direct benefit of a complex but interesting artistic expression is not. On the other hand, the use of a banal artistic expression is not demonstrable either.

HOW ELITIST IS CONTEMPORARY ART MUSIC?

Can we create a nomenclature of the basic characteristics of a cultural expression? And can it then be classified? In other words, can we determine its relevance on the basis of features of its form or content? Can a given expression have intrinsic values, or are they always found in relation to something else? The dominant idea today is that making distinctions essentially implies discrimination. In my opinion, the denial of categories such as high and low culture is not so much an observation as an ideological construction that has helped to determine the content of culture, implicitly also aiming for a dominant position. Hence a cultural debate must also be a political debate. Although we live today in a tangle of connections and minor links between different social institutions, state institutions, market players and the individual that is more complex than ever before, even now – or maybe especially now – it has to be possible to give a new, clear articulation to what art actually is. In my opinion the answer to that question would have to be justified by the artwork itself, which implies that there are a great number of possible answers. I believe that these are consequently meaningful and less meaningful, more simple and more complex, popular and little-known. We have lived through cultural relativism and seen its – sometimes harmful – effects. It is time to draw up the balance sheet.

When we talk about high culture, it is still almost immediately linked to the highest social and economic class. Supporting or promoting such art is believed to consolidate the position of that class, which is already privileged, and that is undemocratic. However this reasoning is doubly wrong. After all, we could just as easily say that it is not high culture, but low culture that is dominant.

Just about everyone in the academic, political and economic elite will proudly claim to embrace popular culture. Surely some of them mean it honestly, but for the most part their aim is to safeguard their own social position. An asso-

ciation with 'elitism' nowadays puts you on thin ice. To put it somewhat crudely, you're cool if you go to Rock Werchter and an arrogant ivory tower-dweller if you prefer the Donaueschinger Musiktage. Two interesting opposing movements are at work here. On the one hand, society is becoming ever more informal, and you see this mirrored in social relationships in the cultural sector. On the other hand, art literally always formalises, gives form, structures. In the old days there were clear parallels between the formal definition of social conventions and their artistic counterparts, for example in terms of modesty, elegance, sexual mores etc. Today this relationship is uneven, vague and highly sensitive to fashion. Popular culture may not be the official high culture, but unofficially it is, at least to the extent that it imposes itself as a frame of reference.

The second reason why the idea of elitist high culture is wrong, is as follows: the idea that all cultural expressions are of equal value has not led to greater cultural diversity and certainly not to a proportionately wide-ranging culture; on the contrary. What is more, it has not led to the end of ideals of beauty either. And weren't the ideals of beauty (demonstrated and promoted by the elite) what led directly or indirectly to social exclusion in the first place? We were told for a while that a shared history was not only impossible but that any attempt to write one was despicable. A history that stands still is not only attractive to progressive left-wing historians. It is highly attractive to the market as well. It makes it far easier to form a canon and to conserve and guard that canon. It is a long time since this had anything to do with the counter-culture out of which pop music arose or with guardianship of heritage in the case of classical music. What it has everything to do with, is marketing the canon. For the vast majority of music lovers in Western Europe, music began some time in the sixties with Bob Dylan and the Beatles and even now only consists of related musical forms, which can be crudely defined as Anglo-Saxon pop music. For art music lovers, again putting it crudely, Western music history stopped with Claude Debussy. Nowadays it is mainly a market-driven

BANALITY & TRIVIALITY STILL EXIST

dynamic that makes communities and identities emerge. And although it may just fall short of determining our history, it does define our common frame of reference. It is not a very broad frame: more than ever, an ideal of beauty or a value is proclaimed, be it by interest groups and institutions that are far from open or recognisable. That certainly applies to commercial pop and rock music: the American company Live Nation⁴ silently dominates big events and festivals worldwide, thus helping to determine at a global level what is worthwhile and what is not.

Just as the masses thirty or forty years ago never questioned why the largest Flemish radio station, Radio 1, had an influential programme that satisfied its audience purely with opera and belcanto, today's masses never wonder why that has changed. This has nothing to do with the intrinsic qualities of opera and belcanto, or with

what you can hear today on that station. In 2000 Radio 1 changed its image from a broadcaster of chansons, opera and cabaret into a station where you can hear 'superior' pop music, like Muse, Wilco, Tom Waits etc. The justification of this in the press at the time was as follows: "Radio 1 wants to reach out to the intelligent listener" – so weren't the station's former listeners intelligent? I do not know whether they have since managed to find those intelligent listeners. We find the same story at Klara, the Flemish state broadcaster's classical station. Of course they mainly offer classical music, but there is plenty of time for world music (with the exception of Flemish folk music) and jazz as well. Today's music is represented in Late Night. This is where you would expect to find contemporary art music, but in fact it only has a limited presence. Far more attention is paid to the border zones between art and pop music, with special programmes dedicated to Laurie

Anderson, David Byrne, Goodspeed You! Black Emperor, Matmos and so on – as if the contemporary art music scene didn't produce enough material. In doing this, a state broadcaster helps to define a certain frame of reference that does not correspond to what is actually being made in Flanders or Europe. It is a conscious, ideologically determined policy decision, not a neutral reproduction of the present-day art music world. On its website, the state broadcaster describes its mission thus: "As the public broadcaster, the VRT has the task of reaching as many media users as possible with a variety of high-quality programmes that awaken and satisfy the interest of viewers and listeners."⁵ That is just the point, though: what interest do they want to awaken and satisfy? It has been put forward that the individual is the highest authority and so personal experience takes priority, but the bare reality is that we are partitioned off into target groups. And for public radio as well as most other state-supported cultural organisations, the main goal is not economic but almost existential. It is not the content that is the determining factor, but the extent to which one identifies with the envisaged target group. And that is precisely where we find the question of legitimacy. People sometimes

claim that something's legitimacy can be measured by its popularity, but that is dubious for at least two reasons. Firstly, popularity is often the result of a self-fulfilling desire: if you let people in Flanders listen to Anglo-Saxon pop music almost exclusively for forty years on four out of the five public radio stations, there is a fairly good chance that pop music will become most listeners' frame of reference and hence also the substrate from which new musical expressions will arise. Moreover, new heroes are constantly being generated within the limits of this frame of reference. Conclusion: it may be that the genuinely dominant taste preference is formed by an elite, but it has been a long time since that elite represented West European art music, let alone contemporary art music. This means, explicitly, that contemporary art music is actually much more free than people would have us believe. It is time we made that conclusion loud enough to be heard. There is absolutely no need for an individual, organisation or group concerned with contemporary art music to make excuses for the supposed elitism of their chosen form of expression. Rather one should point out the elitist nature of pop music, in the sense that the channels representing pop clearly and consciously exclude other music.

Notes

1 The primary divisions in the society of the Dutch-speaking world have tended to be vertical, i.e. between different religious and ideological groups known as 'pillars', rather than the horizontal divisions of a society where class is the primary dividing factor.
 2 From a conversation between the author and Lucien Goethals on 11/06/2001. He expressed these thoughts on the problem of thresholds: "What is the threshold? This threshold only exists in the imaginations of those who use the word. You cannot lower the threshold of new music without lowering new music along with it (...). It's not true that new music is harder to understand. The assumption that we need to make music less elitist is idiotic. There is no threshold. Who is stopping you? People make their own thresholds. Obviously you need a certain level of thinking, but are you supposed to disconnect your brain? It's not the threshold that needs to be lowered but the people who need to be raised up. Many people want deep

meaning to manifest itself in the same way as superficiality. And that isn't possible."

3 www.n-va.be/nieuws/opinie/hedendaagse-kunst (consulted in July 2012)
 4 "Annually, Live Nation promotes or produces over 22,000 events, including music concerts, with a total attendance exceeding 50 million – more than the NBA, NFL, and NHL combined.[3] As of September 30, 2005, Live Nation owned or operated 117 venues, consisting of 75 US and 42 international venues. These venues include 39 amphitheatres, 58 theatres, 14 clubs, 4 arenas and 2 festival sites. In addition, through equity, booking or similar arrangements Live Nation has the right to book events at 33 additional venues." Source: article by Live Nation (events promoter). See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Live_Nation_\(events_promoter\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Live_Nation_(events_promoter)) (consultation: July 2012)
 5 www.vrt.be/faq/wat-de-opdracht-van-de-publieke-omroep

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TWO MOVEMENTS FOR

S **T** **N** **G** **I** **N** **G**

P **O** **S** **T** **E** **P**

1. Dark matter

Little lion knew little. He could eat, though. Little lion ate the mermaid. “Not too much”, little lion thought. Little lion was leaion

NEW PATHS, BLIND SPOTS, AND SURPRISING ISLANDS

Pauline Jocqué



MAPPING NEW MUSIC EDUCATION IN FLANDERS



n 25 October 2012, MATRIX New Music Centre in Leuven, Belgium, will organise an international conference to discuss the teaching of new music under the title, *New Ears*.¹

The symposium takes place in the context of the ISCM World Music Days and offers an ideal opportunity to take a closer look at new music education in Flanders. After all, this is a new field with a great deal of variation – one that has not yet been described in detail. Although research is still underway, we hope this article will shed some light on the preliminary results.²

What is the current state of new music education in Flanders? The question calls for two difficult definitions: “What is ‘new music’?” and “What is ‘education’?”.

In its broadest sense, we can define new music as art music written after 1950. This definition immediately presents a wide array of musical genres and styles. The arena of new music encompasses countless secondary concepts, each with its own array of definitions. (For instance, how phenomena such as improvisation or computer-generated music compare with a traditionally composed contemporary score.) Even so, further differentiation would be going too far. Throughout our research we consciously chose to maintain this broad definition to include as much information as possible from the most diverse domains. The phenomenon called ‘education’ can also take on a variety of shapes and forms, from standard musical training (including Part-time and Higher Art Education) to pre- or post-concert lectures, summer schools, or workshops for primary school children. For the purposes of this study we have defined education broadly as any form of learning about new music: from passive listening, discovering, and thinking about new music, to active creation and performance.

To be able to describe the current state of new music education in Flanders, we must first answer a few questions. Within what contexts do we find new music education? Can we speak of a systematic approach or are we dealing with fragmented projects? What educational

models are being used? What is the profile of the participants? Who are the teachers? What institutions or organisations are involved? How are they (re)acting? Are there major gaps? What kind of problems are we finding and what suggestions and recommendations are the experts making? Can we determine any long-term effects – if they are even measurable?

In the interest of transparency, we used questionnaires and direct dialogue to put these questions to a variety of representatives of the various domains which are (or could be) concerned with new music education. We started by examining part-time art education (In Dutch *Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs*, or DKO), looking specifically at communal schools of music. Thereafter, we approached the conservatories and university colleges (including art education), where our study took two forms. We looked at the current state of new music in a variety of basic music training courses. We also studied the position of new music in the various teacher training programmes. Beyond that, we surveyed organisations throughout the broad field of art education that employ a wide variety of educational activities to bring the arts closer to their audiences. Finally we approached the professional new music ensembles, festivals, concert venues and other more or less specialised organisations.

The **communal schools offering part-time art education** (schools of music) in Flanders handle new music in different ways. Most, however, offer no new music education of any kind. There are a number of reasons for this, the most notable being a complete lack of demand for new music, whether among students or teachers. When no one seems to be interested, the schools very often see no reason to give new music a spot in their curriculums. Some of their answers make clear that the lack of new music in the lessons does not derive from any specific aversion, but simply because their interests and emphases as academic institutions lie in other domains. Other schools indicated that they are too small to include new music. Some said that it is not always possible to start new courses or experimental projects – sometimes for financial

reasons, but more often owing to a lack of expertise.

The theoretical and historical aspects of new music have a place in many communal schools of music in the form of 'Music Appreciation' classes (in Dutch: Algemene Muziek Cultuur) in which pupils gain a general (albeit cursory) overview of Western music history including that of the twentieth and twenty-first century. These courses address listening skills and, in some cases, look at a small number of contemporary scores – though that will more often be the exception than the rule. However, what is generally missing in the schools is an active link from these lessons to applied music in the form of instrument or ensemble classes, so education only takes a passive form. Moreover, we must accept the fact that the emphasis is clearly still on music from before 1950.

▼ Answers from the electronic questionnaire for Part-Time Art Education

had little or no contact with new music are, very simply, not likely to show an active interest in it.

So a vicious circle arises. The lack of expertise among current or future teachers results in a lack of interest in new music among pupils. As a result, the schools do not take steps to set up new projects, train teachers, or otherwise build knowledge among their teaching staff. Some schools say that they would like to break out of this cycle and are asking for ready-to-use teaching materials for new music, opportunities for teacher training, and more knowledge-sharing in general.

This brings us to the following observation: communal music schools that did include contemporary music in one way or another in their curriculum do not do enough to share the projects and their experiences with other schools. As a result, there is very little transfer

“Really only happening right now at class level and only because the teachers involved are acquainted with the music.” “Has a lot to do with the teachers you have, or to what degree they are prepared to teach new materials or techniques involving contemporary music on a regular basis. Room for improvement...” “We very much want to learn from communal music schools that have more experience with this material.” “Many teachers are not sufficiently apprised of developments within the various frameworks.”

The survey of Part-time Art Education schools also revealed a general lack of expertise. We established that teachers who are either interested or trained in contemporary music are more likely to offer this material to their students and more easily get their colleagues involved in larger-scale projects. Communal music schools with less access to this expertise among their teachers seem to find it too great a step to introduce new music education. The fact that the pupils themselves are not making the demand is, in this case, not a valid argument. Pupils who have

of expertise and best practices from one school to another. What is more, it is not possible at present to incorporate new music into the curriculum systematically as a subject. After all, communal schools of music can only request funding from the Ministry of Education for new music projects for the higher cycles, and projects of this kind are by definition temporary. With the revamping of part-time art education in 2014, this obstacle might be overcome by offering contemporary music systematically or in specific programmes offered in the new-style third

and fourth cycles. Education Minister Pascal Smet's provisional policy document makes clear mention of an up-to-date part-time education programme with greater breadth and depth, more opportunities for differentiation, and renewal of the curriculum.³ However, it does include the condition that it must appeal to a large enough audience to be considered socially relevant – whatever that might mean. To that end, we can only wonder if specific courses in contemporary music for the upper cycles do not come too late in the educational process to reach many pupils.

Craenen set up in the Oud-Heverlee Municipal Academy for Music, Word and Dance (led by Jasper Van Paemel from 1 September 2012) or the Free Improvisation and New Music Atelier under the leadership of Frederik Croene at the Emiel Hullebroeck Academy for Music, Word and Dance in Gentbrugge. Every year, the Schoten Municipal Academy for Music, Word and Dance even organises its own festival called the 'Contemporary Music Weeks'. Finally, some schools consciously choose a work from the contemporary music repertoire as the compulsory

“We shouldn't only get composition students to learn about contemporary music – also instrument and voice students. This seems to be a real obstacle for many. There are very few students who have a clear idea of new music, though that obviously varies from one instrument to the next depending on the relevant repertoire.”

But we can see other signs as well. A variety of schools are working with new music at different levels of intensity. In real numbers, and building on the data we currently have available, we are talking about twenty-odd schools (at 112 administrative head offices in Flanders). As part of these activities, the schools often work with professional new music ensembles (the Sint-Niklaas Municipal Academy for Music, Word and Dance has already collaborated with the Goeyvaerts Trio and the Nadar Ensemble), composers, art education organisations or with contemporary music festivals (such as the Kortrijk Municipal Conservatory and the Kortrijk Flanders Festival). A smaller number of Flemish communal schools are integrating new music into individual instrument lessons and new music is part of the repertoire that music students must learn.

In most cases, though, this only applies to specific classes. New music is seldom integrated into the entire communal school curriculum. Others devote specific classes to new music – such as the Experimental Music Class which Paul

composition for their final examinations. Often, however, they will do that without placing the compositions in their context.

As we mentioned earlier, projects involving new music take place most often in schools where the teachers themselves are composers or musicians performing this music. Examples include Frederik Croene and Karin De Fleyt (Academie de Kunstbrug in Ghent), Kris and Pieter Matthyssens (SAMWD Sint-Niklaas), Frederik Neyrinck (Municipal Academy for Music and Word in Menen), Kim Vanden Brempt (SLAC/Municipal Conservatory in Leuven), Paul Craenen/Jasper Van Paemel (Municipal Academy for Music and Word in Oud-Heverlee), Johan Bossers (Communal Music School in Tongeren), Barbara Buchowiec (GAMWD Heist-op-den-Berg), Katrijn Friant (Municipal Academy for Music, Word and Dance in Deinze), Benjamin Van Esser (Communal School for Music, Word and Dance in Zaventem), to name just a few. The finding provides further evidence that the presence of new music in Part-time Art

Education cannot be taken for granted. Rather, it is largely dependent on the personal interest and efforts of teachers and principals to make space for new music at their schools.

external), ensembles or organisations armed with a great deal of knowledge of new music and the ability to teach. Students benefit from this, and not only from the knowledge and

“New music offers many opportunities for musical growth and the development of critical listening skills. Listening patterns, so often dictated by commercial music, are broken and the child or young person’s own creative input becomes the point of departure, without preconceived formats.”

Flanders (including Brussels) is home to four **music conservatories**: the Artesis University College in Antwerp (including the Royal Conservatory), the Brussels Royal Conservatory, the School of Arts (including the Ghent Royal Conservatory) of Ghent University College and the Lemmens Institute in Leuven. With the exception of the Ghent Master of Arts Soloist in Contemporary Music (MaNaMa, or Master-after-Master programme), contemporary music does not have a strong foothold in the curriculums. Although the conservatories have clear policies concerning new music, they do not always follow up on them in actual practice. Just as with Part-time Art Education, the inclusion of new music in instrument lessons depends mostly on the teacher. Even in the case of music theory or history, contemporary music does not always get equal time. Some teachers seem to feel distrust, all of which sets the vicious circle in motion. Little knowledge or interest on the part of the teachers is passed on as a lack of interest among students. As a result, teachers feel less called upon to build on their expertise. Embedding the material more deeply throughout the entire educational programme might offer a solution.

Even so, there are a number of successful projects to be found, and some of them are still expanding. In most of these cases, the schools approach experts (whether in-house or

experience. They also learn how to use new materials such as electronics, percussion, new instruments which they would not otherwise find in a conservatory. They learn how to work in new environments such as studios and concert halls, they get the opportunity to form mixed groups with experienced musicians, and more. Within this context, the ChampdAction’s LABO project (in collaboration with deSingel, Artesis University College in Antwerp and, in 2012-2013, Sint Lucas Antwerp) deserves mention. A complete week here is devoted to contemporary music and multidisciplinary projects, focussing strongly on the use of new media and electronics.

So far, projects of this kind have usually only managed to attract students of percussion, composition, jazz and improvisation. It appears to be more difficult to engage ‘classical’ instrumentalists – and to provide sufficiently interesting material. It goes without saying that teachers can play an important role by motivating their students to accept opportunities of this kind. In this context, we can also see that, in many cases, it is always the same students who are approached and that little effort or support is spent on recruitment within other student groups. Systematically integrating new music into the curriculum followed by every conservatory student, rather than only using a more project-based approach, could perhaps change this.



New music receives only limited attention in specific **music teacher training** at the conservatories and general teacher training for primary and secondary education. In concrete terms, contemporary music is only taught at the request of the students themselves (which, certainly in the case of primary and secondary school teacher training, rarely happens) or on the instructor's initiative, outside the standard curriculum. Very few teachers who train for primary and secondary education are well versed in new music and its associated educational opportunities. This may be the source of the most significant vicious circle: future teachers are not acquainted with

Creating soundscapes for You are Hear © Afsoon ▲

new music and therefore rarely address the material, or are able to, in their lessons.

We cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of expanding and sharing the knowledge of new music and of teaching new music, whether for teachers or students. In specific teacher training at conservatories, too, there is a lack of well established new music programmes. This is clearly associated with the lack of thorough knowledge of contemporary music among students who have completed their basic musical training at conservatories. After all, teacher training is designed to offer educational tools with which to impart the musical knowl-

edge that teachers (or future teachers) have amassed to their pupils. The lack of knowledge of new music – or the ability to teach it – stems directly from the seriously limited and fragmented material offered in the basic training.

“One of the coolest assignments for us was working with musicians who already have a clear idea of what they think of as beautiful – to shake them up by letting them hear or feel what is possible.” “The children sink perfectly into the story while the teachers are often amazed at how easily children and young people understand.” “Our experiences in practice are positive. More resources for research and the ability to work more systematically would help us have a greater impact.”

There is a great deal of demand from the training programmes for primary and secondary teachers for uncomplicated, easy-to-use teaching materials using practical examples for use in the classroom. Specific teacher training programmes at the conservatories are also calling for more practical examples. In the autumn of 2011, for instance, the Lemmens Institute in Leuven invited MATRIX to propose a set of materials for future teachers. Artesis University College in Antwerp (training music teachers for secondary education) and the Ghent Conservatory teacher training programme recently began collaborating with MATRIX with the aim of getting future teachers interested in new music and broadening their experience of new music education.

When we look at **art education**, we are struck by the open attitude towards new music. This is also the case for organisations which operate much more broadly. During the period in question (2011 and 2012) the Ministry of Culture for the Flemish Government under its ‘Arts Act’ provided long-term subsidies for art education at twelve organisations. Eight of these organisations offer some form of music educa-

tion. At least six of them (Aifoon, De Veerman, Flanders Jeunesses Musicales, MATRIX, MET-X and Musica) offer some amount of new music in their curriculums. These organisations are making a steady contribution to new music educa-

tion, whether through programmes anchored in their main scope of action or through a variety of projects. In the case of Aifoon and MATRIX, new music is their core business.

Art education organisations provide a broad offering in the form of coaching for young composers, concerts, rehearsals with professionals, summer schools of varying lengths, project weeks, short-term incentives, courses on demand, master classes, year-long courses, and more. The most common formats are workshops, project weeks and summer schools. Many of these organisations collaborate with other partners such as ensembles, other art education organisations, schools and so on, and work with them to devise educational programmes tailored to the participants concerned. Others provide complete projects that can be implemented straightaway, for instance, as part of standard education or at cultural centres.

We must not neglect to mention organisations working with new music as an educational and developmental tool, but which are subsidised by e.g. the Flemish government’s Youth Department. Though their basic aim may be dif-

“We don’t want to be a museum. We want to be an organisation for our time.” “Projects like the Institute for Living Voice offer a seedbed in many different directions – in the short and long term.” “In those places where children took steps into unknown territory – no matter what the area – it became clear that the longer the project went on, the more their self-awareness and self-confidence evolved in a positive direction. Besides the fact that children discover new talents in themselves, or develop existing ones, there is also clear enthusiasm for (new) music and an increasing sense of belonging – all welcome additional consequences. A cohesive group emerges, there is no bullying, they take one another’s side. They hone a whole array of social skills.”

ferent, in many cases the results of their projects overlap well with those of art education institutions. For this reason, we also provided these organisations – the most important of which are WiSPER, Artforum and Mooss – with the same questionnaire.

Organisations offering art education teach new music using a wide array of approaches. The many premises, educational and musical ideas, subject areas and formats all create a broad landscape. One common theme, however, is that they aim to acquaint people with the experience of new music – which is not always self-evident – in the broadest sense. This is based on the idea that new music is very much part of the arts in general. Some organisations work to provide specific stimuli. Others try to stimulate the participants’ own creativity directly, whether by listening to new music, creating it, or performing it. And others aim to transfer specific knowledge and skills. Usually, however, organisations use a combination of all these techniques.

Many of the project participants are not acquainted with contemporary art music, so there will be a hurdle that must first be overcome in order to take part. The organisers’ questionnaires have shown that the participants are often

▶ Answers from the electronic questionnaire for professionals in new music

surprised, amazed and enthusiastic, and come away with a clearly positive opinion of new music and the new ideas and concepts that they discovered along the way.

Although Flemish organisations devoted to art education generally like to paint an extremely positive picture, the survey also revealed a number of problems. These included a lack of financial means with which to continue their development, the need for better knowledge-sharing, and a call for better networks. In the past, a variety of organisations collaborated regularly or shared their expertise, but, as the questionnaire showed, they could use more of this.

More and better networking days involving ensembles, art centres and schools, and official contact persons could provide an answer to this call. The lack of knowledge of new music at the communal music schools and in the field of (compulsory) daytime education is another sore point that was revealed. All too often, teachers at these institutions are not familiar with new music and their attitude to the ideas on offer vary from distrustful to antagonistic. This does not make it easy for art education to connect with daytime schools and communal schools of music, although precedents clearly show that cooperation is possible. Closer rap-

prochement between these domains remains a point for improvement.

Within the field of **professional new music** in Flanders, there are numerous ensembles, music theatres, music festivals, art centres and concert organisers – some more highly specialised than others. Many of the organisations and institutions working in new music also offer some form of new music education: in-house workshops in concert halls, master classes for musicians, musical introduction for children, traineeships, pre- or post-concert lectures, and more. Often, they collaborate with art education organisations, conservatories, or university colleges. In the spring of 2012, for example, the Royal Flemish Philharmonic (deFilharmonie) collaborated with arts education organisation De Veerman to create the project *Blood on the Floor* based on a work of the same name by contemporary British composer Mark-Anthony Turnage. The week-long project involved autistic children and their teachers at a Rudolf Steiner School. Some organisations are asking explicitly for broader cooperation in the form of more professional advice or structure from the field of art education to start new projects or explore existing work in greater depth. At times, however, the sector also experiences a degree of reluctance as it searches for new partners or participants for educational projects, especially among schools, private parties, communal music schools and conservatories.

It is worth noting that these organisations more often focus on young professionals or pre-professionals than on the potential concert audience. For example, the LOD production house for opera and music theatre in Ghent offered composer Daan Janssens a professional setting for his first steps in music theatre. The B!ndman saxophone quartet is offering young pre-professionals artistic and business coaching. Spectra and Ictus – both contemporary music ensembles – are closely involved in the Master-after-Master (MaNaMa) degree in contemporary music at the Ghent Conservatory. At the same time, Muziektheater Transparant is playing host to the Institute for Living Voice, which works with

young vocalists. This focus on young professionals (and pre-professionals) is an important area of new music education, and much effort is clearly being put into it. As to educational activities concerning the perception of new music by concert audiences, there is still room for growth. Cooperation and knowledge-sharing with arts education organisations seems to be the best possible route.

Taking stock of new music education in Flanders is no simple matter. The areas in which it is to be found, in whatever form, vary widely. We have already researched a number of issues, but our surveys have shown that more study and communication are called for to bring together the different fields, create a clearer image, and arrive at solutions to the many challenges confronting the new music education. The keys to this can be found in breaking the vicious circle within formal education, expanding the exchange of expertise, training teachers in new music and all its educational possibilities, and encouraging more and closer forms of collaboration. Only in this way will new music become a fixture in communal schools of music, conservatories, art education organisations and the concert repertoire.

Notes

1 For more information and details about the programme. See www.matrix-new-music.be/en

2 This map was commissioned by MATRIX. The research results will be supplemented by numerical data, presented during New Ears – International conference for new music education on 25 October 2012 in Leuven. See also www.matrix-new-music.be/en/new-ears-international-conference-new-music-education

3 See www.ond.vlaanderen.be/dko/rapporten/concept-nota-dko.pdf

MUSIC THEATRE:

Maarten Beirens

A FLEMISH SPECIALTY?

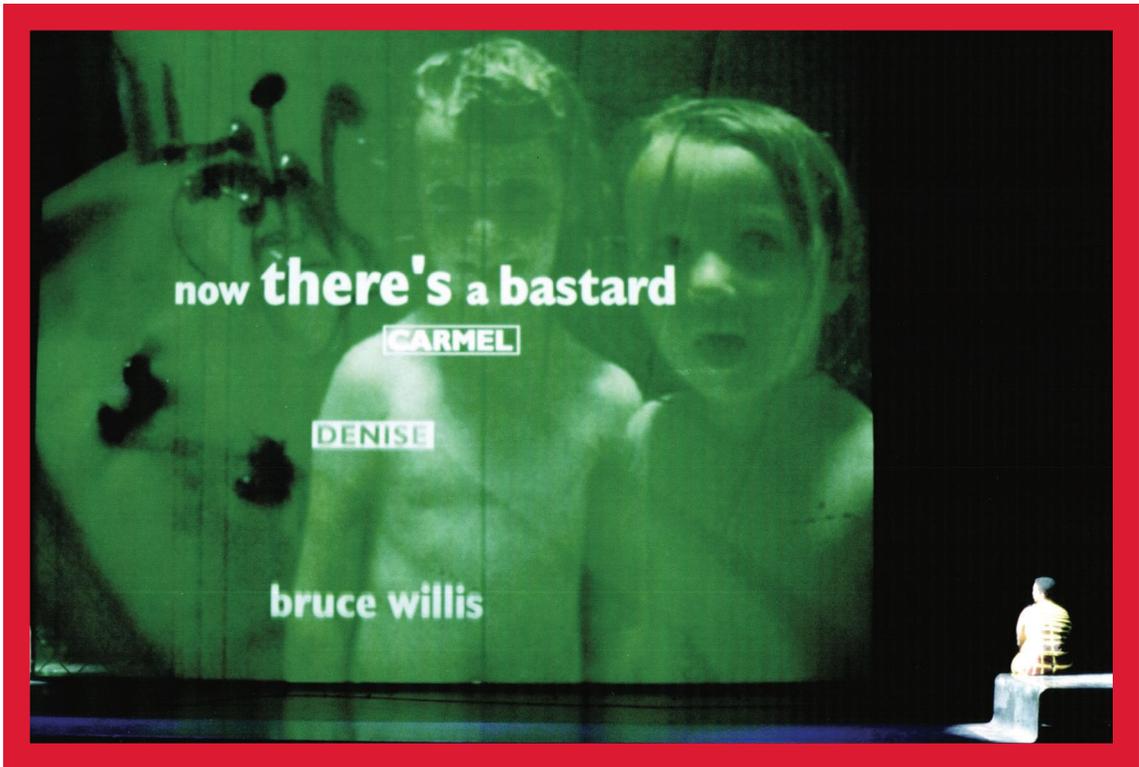


As is the case in most West European countries, Flemish music theatre underwent a far-reaching evolution in the second half of the 20th century.

The broadening of the notion 'music theatre' can be taken here as an important indication of the liberating factor it encompassed. The possibilities it created for composers to get involved in music theatre without having to resort to 19th century conventions are reflected in the dynamic and creative music theatre scene that took shape from the mid-1980s onwards. The dominance of the 19th century operatic model (and the few alternatives, notably operetta and musical) gave way to novel tendencies and experiments (to mention but one – a Belgian example, though never performed in Belgium yet: the elaborate open form of Henri Pousseur's *Votre Faust* (1968)). Just as new music required alternative models for pitch organisation or musical structure, so the presence of new music on the (operatic) stage often required fundamentally different approaches to form and dramatic structure, radically rethinking the relations between text, music and staging. Obviously, this does not

imply that opera in its more traditional guise as such has disappeared. Many composers, including those in Flanders, have continued to work quite happily (and successfully) within operatic conventions. Adhering to such traditional features as singers representing particular characters, presenting a story involving dramatic action and psychological development of those characters or subdividing the work into clearly demarcated scenes and acts, does not necessarily imply that the musical language would resort to – say – a late-romantic aesthetic. Still, the distinction between working within and outside the boundaries and structural conventions of opera is a fundamental choice and it should be expected that innovative musical ideas by nature benefit more from an alternative take on at least some of the operatic conventions.

The evolution in the course of music history away from conventional opera, towards different, innovative and often hybrid forms of what we are calling here 'music theatre' may be an international tendency, but one with a particularly strong impact on Flemish stages. The first problem in describing this body of innovative



music theatre works, however, lies in the inevitable vagueness of the term. 'Music theatre' in this sense, can take many different shapes, ranging from small-scale to large-scale, from text-dominated to predominantly visual, from emphasis on singing to the consistent use of spoken text, from retaining certain operatic elements or formulae, up to completely discarding that tradition in favour of other ways of joining text, image and music. A precise definition would be crucial in identifying this 'music theatre' genre, but the hybrid and diverse nature of the genre renders such a task impossible from the outset.

As if such confusion was not bad enough, the rather inconsistent use of terminology as practised by critics, directors and composers alike, makes it no less complicated. The primary reason why a work as 'unoperatic' as *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) is usually labelled as an opera is that its creators, director Robert Wilson and composer Philip Glass, chose to call it one. For the sake of

The woman who walked into doors, Kris Defoort © Herman Sorgeloos

convenience, the term 'music theatre,' as used here, will be taken as the generic term for a broad range of staged works involving a combination of music and other media. In that respect, music theatre may share many characteristics (and sometimes truly overlap) with other common categories. First of all: opera, for innovative aspects may sometimes be functioning within the traditional genre, broadening its conventions, rather than creating something entirely different. In many cases, it is mainly a matter of perception whether to consider a work as opera or music theatre. Secondly, the fashionable label of 'multi-media' may often seem applicable (after all: any combination of music, text, visual elements, and scenic action is by nature a fusion of elements from separate media) and especially so in works where visual media, including video, film, computer graphics, etc. have a prominent function. Finally, in those works where spoken text remains prominent, the difference with theatre might be blurry. The distinction between a play with

A DRINK PAULA?



extensive incidental music on the one hand and a music theatre piece involving actors and spoken dialogue on the other hand also depends on perception. Given the increasing presence of visual and musical elements in so much ‘proper’ theatre nowadays, the hybrid position of music theatre should by no means only be seen against the conventions of opera, but equally against developments in theatre as such. One obvious observation is that the genre of music theatre as described here does not constitute a clear-cut independent genre, but is part of a continuum – ranging from opera to theatre – joining elements from both traditions (and other traditions as well: including the visual arts, film and of course literature) in order to find new and exciting means of expression. The one common factor in music theatre would be that music plays an important and often even the most fundamental part in conceiving the production in question: the catalyst, so to speak, that triggers the input from other disciplines and organises them into a coherent work.

▲ *The woman who walked into doors*, Kris Defoort © Herman Sorgeloos

How many elements (and artists involved) can thus be combined, and how these combinations relate to the familiar categories of opera and theatre, may already be apparent from the example of what have arguably been two of the most successful Flemish music theatre productions. Let us compare, by way of an example, the two large-scale music theatre pieces by composer Kris Defoort. His *The Woman who Walked into Doors* (2001) is based on the novel of the same title by Roddy Doyle and is set as a monologue for the female lead character, who was represented on stage both by an actress (a speaking part) and a soprano. While, musically, it is a monologue (alternating between speech and singing), the dialogues with the other characters of the story are included in a ‘virtual’ form with the responses of the other characters present on stage in the form of computer projections of texts and images on a central screen. The staging by director Guy Cassiers and the computer-processed video images and

text projections (by Peter Missotten en Kurt D'Haeseleer) are at odds with operatic tradition, moving the drama from on-stage confrontation between characters to a double monologue, placed against the towering backdrop of the large screen, with which the singer and actress interact. A practice that is decidedly different from operatic conventions, but much in line with previous theatre productions by Cassiers. Add to that the musical ambivalence. Defoort, although classically trained, had established himself as a jazz pianist, composer and arranger, with *The Woman who Walked into Doors* as his first substantial 'classical' venture. The orchestra pit was occupied by two ensembles: a classical chamber orchestra and Defoort's own ensemble Dreamtime, thus successfully blending jazz and contemporary classical idioms.

Kris Defoort's second opera, again with Guy Cassiers as director, was *House of the Sleeping Beauties* (2009), based on the novel by Yasunari Kawabata. Here, the presence of video is far less dominant than in their previous collaboration, but the 'vertical' choreography (by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui) takes on a similarly overwhelming visual impact. Once again, the protagonist is represented both by an actor and a baritone, but this time he interacts with several other singers and actors, reinforced by an off-stage chorus of four female voices. Because of these more conventional traits in the overall concept of the work, staging and dramatic interaction, and because this time a conventional orchestra is playing in the pit (and the music makes no allusions to jazz at all), one would be tempted to more easily identify *House of the Sleeping Beauties* as an opera, in comparison to the more hybrid and hence 'music theatre'-like *Woman who Walked into doors*. Nevertheless, both works are not only made by the same creative team of Defoort and Cassiers, but are also of similar dimensions: large orchestral forces, relatively few singers, singing always 'doubled' by spoken text and structurally crucial input from visual elements (video and choreography respectively). Both productions would equally

deserve the label of music theatre, since each in their own way, both part ways with operatic conventions as at least as much they refer to them. Still, the musical level, with the juxtaposition of jazz and 'classical' elements, may well play an important role in identifying *The Woman who Walked into Doors* as less operatic than its more fully orchestral successor. Moreover, *House of the Sleeping Beauties* premiered in La Monnaie, providing the context of an opera house, as opposed to the more neutral stages where the first performances of *The Woman* ran (première in the art centre deSingel in Antwerp; its performances at La Monnaie were organised not in the opera house itself, but in Les Halles de Schaarbeek). An interesting element in this tense relationship between new media and operatic conventions is that since 2010, Guy Cassiers has been directing Wagner's *Ring* cycle at the Staatsoper Berlin and La Scala in Milan, thus bringing his idiosyncratic approach to staging which produced such intriguing combinations in Kris Defoort's music theatre pieces to works that lie at the core of the opera canon.

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The genesis of a music theatre tradition in Flemish new music might have some roots in a lack of enthusiasm for new musical/dramatic concepts on the part of opera houses. When Karel Goeyvaerts, at that time a very renowned composer, set about composing an opera in the early 1980s (a work with very abstract subject matter and a correspondingly static concept of on-stage action), he could not find any opera house willing to commission it, let alone stage it. Goeyvaerts' solution to this problem was as original as it is pragmatic. He managed to conceive almost every work for which he did get a commission (regardless of what it was: vocal or instrumental, chamber music or orchestral) as an opportunity to create the basic musical material for one scene or segment of the opera. Thus Goeyvaerts composed a set of 'satellite works' to the opera, slowly developing and moulding his musical ideas in such unoperatic genres as the

solo piano piece, the string quartet or symphonic work. This process gradually culminated in the actual opera *Aquarius*, which he finished in 1992. As can be expected, Goeyvaerts did not live to see his opera staged. The first concert performance of the completed work was given in 1993, a few months after the composer's death. Another 15 years passed before the first staged performances of *Aquarius* took place in 2009, in a joint production by the Flemish Opera and the Holland Festival. But even during the 1980s, things changed rapidly and even a rough survey of the production of new music theatre works (including opera) correspondingly shows a steady increase. Opera houses as well as specialised music theatre companies actively stimulate each other in the search for innovative new works. In 2009 the biennial festival Opera XXI was founded, a joint initiative of arts centre deSingel (Antwerp), the Flemish Opera (Antwerp/Ghent) and the music theatre companies Transparant (Antwerp) and LOD (Ghent): two weeks filled with performances and world premières of Flemish and other new contemporary music theatre pieces and operas, effectively highlighting the strong tradition of innovative music theatre Flanders has to offer all year round.

That the turning point in the production of new music theatre pieces occurred in the mid-1980s may be due to several factors. But it is remarkable that it coincides with two important evolutions in the field of Flemish music theatre. The first of these is the revolution that took place inside the opera houses. Flanders has one major opera house, the Flemish Opera (Vlaamse Opera), which distributes its activities over the two opera venues in Antwerp and Ghent. At least equally important (but politically speaking not subject to Flemish cultural policy) is the Belgian National Opera, La Monnaie (De Munt), in Brussels. In the course of the 1980s, both houses introduced novel approaches to opera, best summarised as the desire to 'turn opera back into true theatre'. This not only abruptly reversed the old-fashioned habit of using the staging as a mere excuse for indulging in a display of vocal virtuosity, but also

initiated the programming of a different repertoire. This explains the renewed interest in 20th century composers (Berg, Janacek, Britten), the innovative staging of well-known masterpieces (Wagner, Mozart, Verdi), and the adventurous exploration of unfamiliar territory, which meant in the case of opera both baroque repertoire and contemporary music.

The stimulating effect of this tendency can almost immediately be deduced from the swiftly increasing production of new music theatre pieces from the mid-1980s onwards. Getting rid of the conservative approach to opera and stressing the full theatrical possibilities of the genre must have been stimulating for aspiring opera composers. Parallel with this tendency, the shift from 'opera' to the less convention-ridden 'music theatre' opened up new aesthetic possibilities. This brings us to the second factor in the bloom of new music theatre from the '80s onwards: the emergence of several very active smaller music theatre companies.

These companies are best described as small producers, creating several music theatre productions yearly. They generally do not have their own venue and do not employ a permanent team of musicians and singers. Hence each production needs a cast and orchestra to be assembled and other venues have to be persuaded to program the production. While this gives a great amount of flexibility, it also makes these companies dependent on the cooperation of other partners in the field, such as concert halls, music festivals, and opera houses to present the staged productions, or ensembles, choirs and orchestras to provide musicians. The result is an intricate network of alliances and co-productions, with the smaller music theatre companies as instigators, mobilising partners from across the entire professional musical and theatrical field in Flanders (and in the past years often abroad as well). Although many interesting and sometimes rather specific such companies have existed or still exist, such as Leporello, Opera Mobile or Pantalone (the latter aiming at an extremely



young audience), three 'major' players among these 'minor' companies will be discussed in more detail by way of examples. These are Transparant, LOD and Walpurgis.

Probably the most conventional of these companies, in the sense that they mainly focused on chamber opera to begin with, is the Antwerp-based Muziektheater Transparant (formerly 'Kameroopera Transparant'). The mission of Transparant has long been to present opera on a smaller scale, with special (but not exclusive) attention to contemporary repertoire, including but not limited to Flemish composers (much of Transparant's fame in the 1990s was based on their productions of nearly all Peter Maxwell Davies' music theatre works). In recent years, Transparant has ventured more often towards the more eclectic forms of music theatre. Interesting in this respect is that Transparant has developed a long-term working relationship with selected

Luc Van Hove, *La Strada*, Transparant © Vlaamse Opera ▼▲



Flemish composers. This approach allows composers to try out different things and to gradually develop their instincts for music theatre through a succession of compositions and productions. Wim Henderickx, Jan Van Outryve and Eric Sleichim are excellent examples of composers who have had the opportunity to build up a considerable music theatre output during their 'residency' at Transparant. With Joachim Brackx and Annelies Van Parys, a younger generation

of composers has recently been integrated into this formula.

LOD (formerly 'Het Muziek LOD') started out with less clearly 'operatic' ambitions – their name stands for Lunch Op Donderdag ('lunch on Thursday'): the series of lunch concerts that were the original reason for founding the company. Soon, however, they started to develop music theatre productions. Again, as with Transparant,



intimate working relationships with artists, including resident composers, are crucial for LOD. Their breakthrough came with the productions that composer Dick Van der Harst made with playwright and director Eric De Volder, such as *Diep in het Bos* and *Zwarte Vogels in de Bomen*. Along with Van der Harst, composers Jan Kuijken, Dominique Pauwels and Kris Defoort became the resident composers at LOD, recently joined by the younger composers Daan Janssens and Thomas Smetyrns. It is interesting that with LOD, these composers not only have the opportunity to work on music theatre productions, but can also develop more concert-oriented pieces. Strikingly, these composers' background lies outside classical music. Van der Harst – himself a bandoneon player – is interested in all kinds of world music, as his cross-cultural *Huis van de Verborgen Muziekjes* testifies. Kris Defoort was, in spite of his master's degree in classical composition, best known as a jazz



pianist, composer and band leader. Defoort is a particularly interesting example because his work at LOD covers a wide range from jazz-related projects, through classical concert works, to his opera *The Woman who Walked into Doors*. The commitment to undertake such an ambitious opera project, with a composer who at the time his residency started did not have a reputation as a classical composer, is a venture few opera houses would be likely to undertake. It shows the kind of dynamic and slightly adventurous approach to music theatre LOD, like the other 'smaller' players, introduced to the Flemish music theatre scene. Such innovative impulses benefit the entire music theatre scene.

Whereas LOD and Transparant cover the entire field from the very small up to regular opera-sized productions, Walpurgis has stuck to a very specific concept of small-scale music theatre ever since its foundation in the early 1990s. For this company, the difference between opera and music theatre is more than a terminological question. Walpurgis therefore specializes in music theatre that deliberately parts ways with the classical models. Their goal is to establish more unconventional fusions of theatrical and musical elements. A certain eclectic aesthetic is never far away, as is exemplified in the work of composer Peter Vermeersch, whose music theatre pieces (like so many of his compositions) manage to include elements from rock, jazz, cabaret and other non-classical idioms. The surprising mix of elements is obviously even further enhanced by the theatrical aspects and the choice of libretto.

Although they started by operating in a field that was not covered by the opera houses, their success has in turn vitalised the activities of the opera houses. Indeed, the experience that many Flemish composers were invited to gain with these smaller companies, has allowed them to work towards increasingly ambitious works, that otherwise might never have been realised. The point could be made that these smaller companies made the music theatre-genre



Peter Vermeersch, Zilke, Walpurgis © Koen Broos ▼

accessible to a lot of Flemish composers. The room for experiment and for developing their own music-theatre 'style' these composers were offered, also brought them to the attention of the opera houses and in some cases also to international partners. Indeed, from the late 1990s onwards, the opera houses were keen to incorporate some of these efforts into their own programmes. For instance, when LOD created Kris Defoort's *The Woman who Walked into Doors*, La Monnaie was one of the co-producers. Similarly, Transparant found eager co-producers for Wim Henderickx' operas *The Triumph of Spirit over Matter* (La Monnaie) and *Achilleus* (Flemish Opera).

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Flemish music theatre underwent a far-reaching evolution in the second half of the 20th century. The broadening of the notion 'music theatre' can be taken here as an important indication of the liberating factor it encompassed. The possibilities it created for composers to get involved in music theatre without having to resort to 19th century conventions, are reflected in the dynamic and creative music theatre scene that took shape from the mid-1980s onwards.

Since the mid 80s, the traditionalist approach has remained especially strong in large operas. This tradition was, for all its expressionist traits, still highly recognisable in André Laporte's *Das Schloss* (1985). Piet Swerts explored a more neo-romantic style, full of allusions to 19th century operas, in his *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1995, commissioned by the Flemish Opera), based on the novel by Choderlos de Laclos. Luc Brewaeys made his music theatre debut with *Antigone*, an excellent example of the unoperatic 'music theatre' currently practised in Flanders. But for his first 'genuine' opera *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca* (2006 – like *Das Schloss* commissioned by La Monnaie) Brewaeys resorted to a straightforward realist narrative, based on a play by Luigi Pirandello. The only musical deviation from operatic conventions that appears in *L'uomo dal fiore in bocca*

is the substantial role for the solo tuba, which has quite a virtuoso solo part throughout – an instrumental counterpart to the protagonist's emotions. In Luc Van Hove's *La Strada* (2007, commissioned by the Flemish Opera), the composer takes the movie by Federico Fellini as source and consequently draws a realist, linear narrative from it. A substantial orchestral part contributes ongoing, intricate motive development that provides the basis for the lyrical vocal style. Although these four 'major' operas stick to traditional concepts of the genre, albeit with original accents such as Brewaeys' odd fusion of a chamber opera with a tuba concerto or Van Hove's faithfulness to the elliptic chronology of the movie-based narrative, their musical styles refer to different contexts, ranging from the romantic tradition to spectralism.

At the other end of the spectrum, the repertoire shows a growing tendency towards alternative forms of music theatre. A very strong tendency in Flanders consists of what may best be described as an eclectic 'music theatre' tradition. This tendency partly relates to international evolutions towards small-scale music theatre and alternatives to operatic conventions, but part of it seems to deliberately stretch the musical approaches as broadly as possible. Several companies that receive structural funding from the Flemish government as 'music theatre' companies, such as Compagnie Kaiet, Theater De Spiegel and particularly Braakland/ZheBuilding are in fact already more concerned with forms of music theatre that go beyond the domain of classical or 'art' music, with composers/performers, such as Rudy Trouvé (the former guitar player with the rock band dEUS) and Gerrit Valckenaers. Whereas a large proportion of the tendencies described above stem from a classical perspective reflected in musical styles as well as in the primacy of music, Braakland's productions typically draw their input from a more text-based theatrical background, with music very strongly underscoring the text, rather than providing the point of departure. Peter Vermeersch may serve as an excellent example of a composer who has combined

a great sense of musical heterogeneity with alternative approaches to music theatre. As a founding member of the Maximalist! Ensemble, Vermeersch's earliest works were influenced by minimal music, but his musical tastes would subsequently take him in many other directions as well. The styles of the ensembles he founded bear ample testimony to this diversity: funk with X-legged Sally, rock with A Group and currently jazz with his big band Flat Earth Society. Vermeersch fuses all these (and other) influences into a recognisably contemporary style that mediates between the compositional and formal subtleties of new music and the more accessible, rhythmic and tuneful drive of the vernacular musical traditions. In *De oplosbare vis* (1994) and in *Charms* (2001), Vermeersch turns absurdist lyrics by Josse De Pauw and the Russian poet Daniil Charms respectively into cabaret-like songs that contain some surprising twists, inventive orchestration and grotesque details. These productions systematically alternate between acting and singing. His most ambitious music theatre piece shows a similar alternation between theatrical and musical components. In *Heliogabal* (2003) the subject – the decadent life of the Roman emperor – is nevertheless more ambitious and the dimensions are much larger, with a large cast and with the Flat Earth Society as orchestra.

Many composers subscribe to the tendency to develop new ways of combining music and theatre, as exemplified by Vermeersch. His former Maximalist-colleague Walter Hus, for instance, turned three adaptations of Shakespeare dramas by the iconoclastic theatre maker Jan Decorte into a music theatre trilogy: *Meneer, de zot en tkint* (2000), *Bloetwollefduivel* (2001), and *Titus Andonderonikustmijnklote* (2002). The pseudo-naïve, almost child-like language Decorte employed is mirrored by low-profile staging as well as a sense of musical simplicity engendered by developing concise motifs and refraining from overly dramatic gestures. Symptomatic of this approach is the final opera of the trilogy, *Titus Andonderonikustmijnklote* which is entirely performed by the – mainly untrained – voices of

the musicians who are simultaneously playing their instruments. The bare essence of music theatre, created with very limited resources, reflects the intentional simplicity of music and text here, in search of a sense of music-theatrical purity. Likewise, the collaboration of composer Dick Van der Harst with librettist and director Eric De Volder generated a poignant combination of (again stylistically eclectic) music and theatre in *Diep in het bos* (1999), *Vadria* (2000) and *Zwarte Vogels in de bomen* (2002).

The archetype of small-scale and non-traditional music theatre has more or less become a dominant tendency. It attracts composers who tend to incorporate non-classical elements into their style, such as Frank Nuyts, Chris Carlier, Koen Van Roey, Geert Waegeman and Jan Kuijken. But composers who are more inclined towards their classically-trained musical background also contribute enthusiastically to this type of music theatre. These include Petra Vermote, Peter Swinnen, Eric Sleichim, and Wim Henderickx.

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The division between operatic heritage and the new 'music theatre' tendencies (which often coincides with a division between large-scale and small-scale productions) has had a profound impact on the Flemish music theatre scene since the 1950s. The most striking observation here is that the dynamic presence of the 'smaller' music theatre companies has brought about a cultural climate in which young composers are again increasingly drawn towards the possibilities of music theatre, as can be deduced from the ever-growing output of the last two decades.

However, the two perceived directions are not mutually exclusive. Recent years have shown composers working with both types of productions: either more traditionally 'operatic', or more experimentally 'theatrical' ones, according to the scope and needs of the work in question. The increasing number of collaborations and co-productions between 'independent' music theatre

companies and opera houses is further evidence of how the entire field of Flemish music theatre is benefiting from these dynamic evolutions. One recent example of how these tendencies can actually interact or merge in different and surprising ways may serve as an appropriate conclusion to this overview.

Wim Henderickx stands out as one of the recent true 'specialists' of music theatre in Flanders, with seven works composed since 1998. His long-standing residency with Transparant certainly helped to make such a lasting involvement in music theatre possible. At the same time, his evolution as a music theatre composer shows an interesting shift of approaches and ideas: from more traditional forms back to quite radical small-scale 'music theatre'. His first work in this genre was *Behouden Stem* (1998), a very small work that incorporated acting and film and was only scored for an actor/singer and two percussionists. The music, partly derived from a madrigal by Monteverdi, took on a rather autonomous position, alternating rather than interacting with the film and the acting. While this approach was perfectly consistent with the new 'music theatre' tendencies at the time, Henderickx' second work, *The Triumph of Spirit over Matter* (1999), was a far more conventional opera. A plot about manipulation and deceit in and around an art gallery inspired the composer to write a late 20th century opera buffa. Only the final scene breaks with the fast pace of the work and, unexpectedly, adds an element of introspection and even metaphysical or spiritual serenity. A similar compositional strategy appears at the end of *Achilleus* (2002) an operatic version of Homer's *Illiad* conceived for a young audience. There, the straightforward rendition of the events is suddenly suspended in the ultimate scene, the *Requiem of the fallen heroes* which introduces an intensely solemn meditation on war and death.

The appearance of such abrupt musical deviations from the preceding drive of the work may herald the prominence of such metaphysical and even meditative elements in Henderickx'

later music theatre pieces. The early part of Henderickx' career was dominated by his interest in Eastern music and spirituality. In *Void/Sunyata* (2007), a work that is part of his *Tantric Cycle*, Henderickx attempts to combine this Far-Eastern inspiration with the language of music theatre. The meditative and introspective nature of the work becomes quite strong. *Void/Sunyata* is an utterly abstract work, devoid of all narrative, with voices and instruments entwining in a purely musical dialogue organised around emblematic Buddhist and tantric spiritual notions. Nonetheless, the physical dimension of the work remains essential, as the distribution of musicians over the stage (involving a stage design and video projections by the visual artist Hans Op de Beeck) and the 'surround sound' of the electronics testifies. At the time of the first performance of this work, Henderickx stressed how the concept of this work as music theatre remained essential to him, in spite of its far-reaching abstraction. In doing so, he seems to have abandoned the operatic model in favour of an almost experimental reconfiguration of the relationship between music and theatre: interestingly enough, in explicitly addressing an abstract metaphysical or spiritual theme. An equally abstract treatment was given to *Medea* (2011), where Euripides' play was reduced to a series of monologues (written by author Peter Verhelst) for the protagonists, performed by actors. *Medea's* alter ego on stage is performed by soprano Selva Erdener, whose climactic lamento permeates the entire work. Actors and musicians are positioned in a single long, straight line, directly facing the audience. This setting is based on the tradition of Turkish musicians. The balance between East and West – arguably the most prominent theme in Henderickx' entire career – is further reflected in the inclusion of non-western instruments (notably the Armenian duduk) as well as in the ritualistic, deeply static staging.

**Little lion was legion.
Little lion knew it was about time
for the grand gesture. But he
decided not to act.
“How much do you want for this
sound?” , asked little lion.
In the end he wasn’t very hungry.**

**“Lullabies are for pussies” , little
lion roared. “I am the one farting
symphonies. I use electronics to
dry my manes. The whole animal
world sings in my head. I ate the
peacock.”**

**“A woman walked into my lair,
we drank some whisky (Oban or
Talisker, I forgot). In the end we
had no index, no memories, al-
though it was the age of aquarius
(the wider world of water). Faust
was obviously having his techno
period, the wolf pack howling its
everyday mystery. How many
litanies can a lion of no fortune
endure? How many monkey trials
keep the people united? Living this
concerto of dark and light with a
breeze of blind men.”**

ARE WE POSTMODERN?

Michel Fourgon

***“We have developed speed
but we have shut ourselves in.”***

Charles Chaplin, *The Dictator*, 1940

Twentieth century musicians, as a vast majority, have shown great interest in the notion of ‘modernity’. In doing so, they embedded themselves in their time, the time of assertion of ‘contemporariness’.

***say, ‘the’ fundamental
value from which emerge
all others.”***

From a musical point of view, Rimbaud’s posture, although very noble, transmuted and became the idea of absolute novelty, rejection of academism, and search for the unbelievable. Some even associated it with a certain form of progress – a rather adventurous attitude –, it appears, because accepting the concept of progress in art also means adopting a position which assimilates and reduces the creative activity to its sole technological components.¹ Moreover, some authors have recently used the expression of ‘advanced music’, a clear reflection of outrageous arrogance, because anyone mentioning ‘advanced music’ inevitably places others in the category of ‘retarded music’. However, the qualitative criteria associated to so-called progress in history (and, actually, is history automatically right?) shows the first limitation, because it leads

***“One must be absolutely
modern.”***

Rimbaud,
1984, p. 52

Even today, part of the artistic world still resonates, almost feverishly, to this iconic invitation by Arthur Rimbaud, expressed in 1873 (as part of a text of which the general meaning remains mostly obscured). One century later, Gianni Vattimo writes with the philosopher’s distance:

***“(…) modernity is this era
where ‘to be modern’ becomes
at value, even, should we***

Vattimo,
1988, p. 105

straight and logically to the expression of hardly acceptable nonsense. Is Haydn superior to Guillaume de Machaut? Chrétien de Troyes less than Baudelaire? Velasquez not as worthy as Kandinsky?²

Clearly, however, we must objectively admit that numerous musicians, including some of the most famous, have adopted a resolutely 'modern' attitude and claimed an 'avant-garde' artist's status, which is actually rather positively interpreted by today's society. Inventors of polyphony, Ars Nova composers, Renaissance musicians (who, themselves, pejoratively qualified their predecessors as 'gothic'), the first baroque musicians (who created and promoted a 'new style'), then Beethoven, followed by Wagner (a champion of the 'music of the future'), the great modern composers of the first half of the 20th century, or those of the second half, all, in their days, strived to distinguish themselves (sometimes with force) from practices of the past and created a style or, at least expressed a will, wholly oriented towards innovation. More than 30 years ago, Pierre Boulez was very clear on this subject:

"(...) now, history seems to me not superfluous but rather as a surcharge to the being. In my opinion, we should get rid of it once and for all. Many composers, even in my generation, are obsessed with restoring some obsolete languages that they wish to re-integrate, whether out of poetic motivation or technical considerations. I believe the reason is that they did not experience history enough; it burdens their thinking; it is a sort of weight that they dragged because they did not get rid of it."

Boulez, 1975, p. 159

However, if quality must only be measured according to modernity, what about Palestrina, Bach, Brahms, Ravel, Berg, Stravinsky or Wolfgang Rihm? No radically revolutionary banners here, still we find sublime music here also... Therefore, the so-called advanced technological criterion does not appear clearly relevant. Technology supports thinking or results from it. Under no circumstance should it substitute for it. Moreover, it would be ludicrous to believe that relying on new lutherie (which is certainly not without appeal) could constitute a guarantee of clearly modern attitude or thinking.

Moreover, it would be appropriate to ask whether those who proclaim themselves innovators really are as they say. The music of Machaut resonates with sounds of *trouvères* and polyphonists who came before him; Monteverdi used the Italian madrigal's heritage, and Mozart inspired Beethoven. Webern used sounds of Franco-Flemish composers; the music of Boulez shows traces of Debussy and Nono includes sounds of Venetian polyphonists. Consequently, even in light of history, it appears difficult to hold a position of absolute separation.

So, some composers, in growing numbers, with an attitude that could be described as 'post-modern', see their relation to the past in a less negative way. This phenomenon is also observed in other artistic disciplines, as well as in the area of philosophy. However, it is hazardous to formulate an accurate definition of postmodernity. It is a vague notion, difficult to identify and perceived as largely polysemous. Inevitably, anyone who attempts to describe it will first have to navigate in troubled waters. However, such an endeavor may provide a few analysis tools to further understand the musical world around us. Therefore, the object of this article is an attempt to reach a better understanding of the meaning(s) of 'postmodernism'. To be on the safe side, I will try to restrict my point, as much as possible, to the sole area of music.

Gianni Vattimo once again provides a few interesting philosophical clues to orient us, beforehand, through these steep paths:

“Indeed, pretending we are at a level beyond modernity, and assigning to this fact a somewhat decisive meaning, presupposes acceptance of what more specifically characterizes the very point of view of modernity: the idea of history and its corollaries: the notions of progress and surpassing. (...) However, things turn out differently if one acknowledges, as is appropriate, that postmodernism is not only characterized as innovation compared to modernism, but, more radically, as a dissolution of the “innovation” category, as an experience of “end of history”, instead of a presentation of a new, more progressive or more regressive, level of this very same history.”

This leads him to later qualify (not without some cruelty) today’s promoters of modernism as “neo-avant-gardists” (Vattimo, 1988, p. 57). Moreover, Vattimo’s theory scores off the erroneous idea that postmodernism is, ultimately, nothing more than a new, advanced form of modernity.

In the musical world, few authors actually dared to describe the contents of postmodernity; as a matter of fact, this term is absent from most music dictionaries. In his *Vocabulaire de la Musique Contemporaine*, Jean-Yves Bosseur rightly writes, in the pages dedicated to this topic,

Bosseur, 1992, p. 134

“In the world of music, it would be hazardous and vague to consider a thinking trend that would provide a homogeneous description of this notion.”

This reveals one of the first aspects of postmodernism: this is not a movement or even an artistic genre claimed as such; it is a series of isolated, disseminated behaviors, spontaneously forming a whole which, however, circumvents several common areas. We will attempt to identify them later; however, I wish to clear up a misunderstanding that currently occupies the minds of many. It appears, indeed, that for many musicians or musicologists, postmodernism is associated with the idea of a return to tonality, to the forms of the past, to simple, rhythmic formulas or even to hypothetical ‘ancestral and universal’ laws of composition. Altogether, it would appear to be a truly retrograde, comfortable approach, unable to overcome the past, and sterile of any innovation. Obviously, this approach could be recognized in trends such as ‘socialist realism’ or the more current ‘new consonances’ (of all sorts), or even in the various so-called ‘new age’ expressions. However, it would be appropriate, in this regard, to distinguish between, on one hand, a reactionary vision, that could be defined as ‘neo-classic’ and, on the other hand, the postmodern position *per se*, that is much more subtle and indifferent to the notion of a return to the past. Indeed, postmodernism re-integrates certain components such as melody, periodicity, and consonance, considered as usable material among others; however, such integration is completed without the necessary rejection of the components of modernity. Starting in the 1920s, Igor Stravinsky is one of the first composers to enter this path. Actually, he is promptly accused of ‘neo-classicism’, and this unfair label has remained with him until today. What he actually seeks, following his so-called ‘Russian’ period, is to play with, and from history, in order to re-create a new, original, even unexpected universe, and this attitude does not erase, in any way, his famous ‘touch’. As proof, his style

remains recognizable as of the first measures. This approach, actually shared, in part, with Béla Bartók, is not therefore a remake of the old or a copy of history, but consists of relying on a number of acquisitions to make innovation emerge. In Stravinsky's case, and in view of his voluminous production, we could even state that he tried to base his compositions on almost all acquisitions. On the contrary, the neoclassical genre attempts (for commercial purposes?) to slavishly renew with the past or, preferably, re-create what already happened. Consequently, this is a true renunciation to explain the world, a flight to the past combined with categorical denial of modernism. However, postmodernism shows a certain form of admiration for modernity. As a matter of fact, it is significant that most early postmodernists were also former important actors of the avant-garde groups. Hence, we see, on one hand, a vivid revisitation of the (near or far) past and, on the other hand, a play on modernity itself, which does not appear to be rejected. This playfulness, a sort of conscious jubilation, also appears to be part of the distinctive aspects of postmodernism: one plays with history as with conventions, codes, languages, and these games could even be painted (as with Mauricio Kagel, for example) with a certain form of humor...

Another persisting phenomenon that should not be taken lightly leads to considering any composer who uses or manipulates quotations as necessarily associated to postmodernism. Even though, undeniably, numerous postmodern composers integrated within their work a significant number of historical quotations, many did not do it, starting with most American minimalists. Moreover, many others, who do not claim a postmodern approach, used such quotations.³ Consequently, this criterion also appears irrelevant in our quest for a definition of postmodernity. In this regard, it is amusing (or irritating, depending on the beholder) to note that the use of quotations is, still today, shunned by the defenders of modernity (mostly in Parisian societies, apparently).

Philippe Manoury, quoted
in Bosseur, 1992, p. 31.

“Quotation and collage are one of the flaws of 20th century music, even though masterpieces did use them. (Sinfonia by L. Berio, Hymnen by Stockhausen)”

I will not revert here to this paradoxical assertion, to say the least! Likewise, Célestin Deliège writes:

Deliège, 2003, p. 365

“(...) in all quotation instances, whether literal, language, or style, in music, a quotation is always a threat to the consistency of the piece.”

Using phrasing dear to François-Bernard Mâche, it appears, however, that in view of history, the use of quotations could almost be assimilated with a sort of ‘myth’.⁴ Not even taking into account the numerous ‘variations on a theme by...’ that punctuate most of the history of Western music, we find multiple instances of this practice in the Middle Ages (centonisation in plain chant, contrafactum in ‘trouveurs’⁵, mass themes in Franco-Flemish composers), in the Renaissance (parody masses, music borrowed from antiquity), and later in baroque music (Bach, Händel) then in Mozart, Beethoven, Liszt, Brahms, Mahler, Bartók, etc. and even in Schönberg. The same is true for jazz and rock, genres that are largely quoted or brought up by composers of the 20th and 21st centuries (including Stravinsky, (Bernd-Alois) Zimmermann, Pousseur, Berio, or, more recently, Romitelli and Ledoux). Likewise, today’s popularity of extra-Western music (also found, for a long time, in many modern composers) also pertains to this tendency to absorb shown in many composers. Consequently, the quotation phenomenon appears as one of the *habitus* of musical tradition against which no self-respecting modern composer should rebel. In fact, other art forms such as painting, literature or motion picture don’t seem the least embarrassed by using quotations so frequently. A

few examples are Malevitch, Picasso or Warhol, as well as Lautréamont (followed by the surrealists) or Butor, and Chaplin, Truffaut or Buñuel. Therefore, the 'anti-quotation' attitude today appears to me somewhat old-fashioned and closer to genuine academicism or even snobbism than to a true, deep opinion on a subject worthy of more attention.

In the same vein, the indetermination criterion does not appear to me as any more relevant to our subject than the 'return to the past' criterion or that of the presence of quotations. In the late thirties, John Cage introduced the first forms of indetermination in Western written music.⁶ The repercussions and influence of his theory on European conscience are now famous. Even though his approach became, in a certain way, one of the anchor points of American minimalism, Cage opens truly new, almost unexplored ways devoid of links with Western tradition. Additionally, the question of the past doesn't seem to interest him, which could mean that his approach actually comes from a specifically 'modern' attitude. Consequently, we will not spend much time on what pertains to open forms, even though numerous postmodern musicians introduced, in their word, a series of formulas including random processes. This attitude is, in my opinion, fully enshrined in what is described above as "the game on modernity itself", but it cannot, on its own, constitute the condition of postmodernism. Indeed, some postmodern composers such as Steve Reich, followed by many others (including many young composers of today), rejected any form of integration of indetermination within their music, while openly modern musicians such as Boulez, for example, have not always been insensitive to Cage's theories.

Let us now examine the question of the birth of postmodernity. Having already described the pioneer work of Stravinsky, we will not dwell on this any further. In an article titled *Humeurs postmodernes*, the reading of which triggered my desire to write these lines, the Quebecois composer Michel Gonneville writes:

Gonneville, s.d., p. 49

"Assuming I define musical postmodernism as a movement born around 1968 and still active today, it would encompass a multitude of trends with one common aspect: they are defined relative to the Darmstadt modernism, born from the lessons of the Viennese School. This is probably a catchall definition and it would be easy to find in this movement overlapping or sequencing subdivisions: more recent 'pop' trends against more educated trends, trends that more radically deny reference modernism and others keeping links with it."

In addition to the highly symbolic, even provocative character of this year, 1968 is the year when Henri Pousseur completes the writing, in collaboration with Michel Butor of *Votre Faust, fantaisie variable genre opéra*. It is also the year of publication of an article by the same author, titled *L'Apothéose de Rameau (essai sur la question harmonique)* (Pousseur, 1968). According to Célestin Deliège, Pousseur, whom he rightfully calls a 'first dissident' (Deliège, 2003, p. 357-370), is historically the one who bravely (I am saying that!) was the first, around 1960, to seriously question the foundations of generalized serialism. Knowing that Pousseur began to write his *Faust* in 1961 and, to be precise, it is at that very moment that postmodernism, seen as a reaction against Darmstadt modernism, was allegedly born.

From the outset, the movement initiated by Pousseur takes all sorts of directions, found in various composers and producing, among other things, the famous *Sinfonia* by Berio (also in 1968).

“Votre Faust was a terrible blow, not only to post-webernism, but also to musical modernity, resulting, in avant-garde, in the most typical aspects of post-modernity.”

So, postmodernism truly originates from the most radical modernity itself. Gonneville already hinted this nearly 20 years ago:

“Postmodernism in hard-core modern composers? Could it be limited to these small language easements? Why not? We could then talk of postmodernism premonition, detectable in modern composers.”

Since then, ‘premonitions’ and ‘small easements’ gave birth to extensive progeny that will make *flores!* In addition, the fact that some serial composers, following Pousseur, assigned these ‘easements’ and the increasingly important place resulted in some trouble or even confusion. In this regard, the work of Luciano Berio is particularly interesting. After a phase of total serialism, he takes the postmodernist orientation (although without fully relinquishing some ‘serial spirit’), including with *Sinfonia* (the piece often quoted in this regard), but also with *Folk Songs*, *Laborintus II*, *Sequenza III* (for voice), *A-Ronne*, *Coro*, *Voci*, etc., all (magnificent) pieces written for the voice. Later (and following the death of Cathy Berberian?), Berio seems to have returned, with some significant exceptions, to a style closer to modernism, so that we have a work that shifts unabated between, on one hand a search aimed at exploring new spaces and, on the other hand, a distancing from these spaces. But after all, is this situation such a paradox? In the term ‘postmodern’ is the word ‘modern’ that

almost naturally acts as a trace... By the way, Stockhausen’s journey appears even more inextricable (*Hymnen*, *Mantra*, *Licht*, etc.) and I have no intention of attempting to unravel it here.

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Ultimately, and in view of the above, I realize that my attempt to define postmodernism is, by nature and because of the relative closeness of its first manifestations, questionable on several points. However, it is the result of a personal search that probably calls for further developments, but is voluntarily embedded in history. Therefore, I present it, hoping that it will be useful to others in their own reflection on the present or on the recent past. In fact, I could summarize it with a few key expressions that can be stated as follows: rejection of the idea of progress in art and of the illusion of technological advances, positive attitude towards history, isolated and unplanned approaches, awareness of modernity (even subjugation), opposition to neoclassic conservative vision, prospective games based on the past, a priori refusing to reject modernity, non-relevancy of quotation and non-determining criteria as conditions for postmodernism, reaction, beginning of the 60s, in face of the dead-end of Darmstadt’s generalized serialism, ambiguity of serialists who became postmodernists.

So, are we postmoderns, if only partially? The question may be somewhat provocative, I agree. To answer it with some nuance (everyone can, in fact, express his or her own answer), we still must investigate postmodernism in its more recent manifestations, meaning after moderns invented it: a new era after postmodernism? Not now, I believe.

Since the middle of the 80s, contemporary music took diverse and varied orientations. We should only applaud this, because this mutation resulted in the conquest of new audiences. The younger composers, having started their work after the 60s and 70s, have taken up the torch of postmodernity and molded it according to their sensitivity. Others remained in the grooves created

by their predecessors in Darmstadt, but made them wider (for example, the 'new complexity'). Since the creation, 30 years ago already, of the spectral school – a definitely 'modern' school because of its attitude, promoted as innovative, and offering an alternative to serial combinatory, itself an alternative including an arsenal of new composition tools –, it must be noted that modernism failed to federate around a tangible renewal project and offer, by doing so, the unspeakable, 'unbelievable' which it claims to offer. So, we are somewhat disappointed. On the other hand, it is indisputable that the great majority of the audience did not respond positively to its invitations. Should we call this a failure? It is certainly too early to say. Since Mahler and Debussy, the tremendous speed of musical evolution evidently left the public speechless or, to say the least, confused. As a matter of fact, the same happened in other artistic disciplines. As a result, in the last 30 years, isolated approaches mushroomed with more or less success. However, the amplification and dissemination of expressions finally drains the very meaning of the label 'contemporary music'.⁷ Obviously, this fact is not foreign to the entropic movement, resulting from the growing and continuous multiplicity of postmodern expressions that emerge. But it doesn't matter. Today, we are fortunate enough to live in a musical landscape where singularity, alteration and even

strangeness are, to some extent accepted. The time of ideological sarcasm seems gone. Today, a composer is allowed to exist without being serial, spectral, or minimalist. He can even be a little of all these things at the same time, if he wants. Despite some rearward action, the idolatry of the new, that, most of the time, does not originate from composers themselves, but rather from commentators, appears to be somewhat out of fashion and the contemporary music 'clergy' (who never fail to try to discredit what surrounds them) eventually will admit that they did not win this war. We can only rejoice from this! No more norms, almost, no more 'guardians of the temple'. Free at last... But, let us beware. No hasty euphoria. Today, we must fight the tendency to generally format our hyper consumer society that insidiously eliminates, wherever it goes, anything that jeopardizes its mercantile goals...

In conclusion, and as a friendly response to Rimbaud, let me say this: "We must strive to be resolutely free." But, by the way, being free is also what Debussy wished with all his heart, isn't it?

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Notes

1 With regards to musical composition, the word technology refers to all technical means (including those pertaining to interpretation and diffusion) made available to the composer at any given time.

2 On this subject, André Souris wrote, as early as 1951: "to speak of growing complexity, is applying to art progress the idea of progress as expressed by scientists and musicologists of the last century. Oddly, this preconceived idea is still current today. The fact is, it is today only encountered in music. Indeed, who would declare today that Rubens is more complex than Giotto, and Picasso more than Rembrandt?" (Souris, 2000, p. 186).

3 Among other composers, I think of György Kurtág, Luigi Nono or Franco Donatoni.

4 I hereby refer to his beautiful book titled *Musique, Mythe, Nature ou les dauphins*

d'Arion, Paris: Klincksiek, 1983.

5 This expression globally refers to troubadours and trouveres.

6 Although we find the first traces of this in Johannes Ockeghem, in the 15th century, this topic was not subsequently investigated.

7 Even though most musicians still use this term for practical reasons, I do not like this expression. It has been overly connoted by history. I would prefer to substitute the term of 'living music'.

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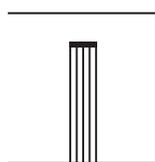
ON TRADITIONS, NORMS

Maarten Quanten & Klaas Coulembier

AND POLICIES

“‘Making music’ – the term implies conscious involvement – also means, time and again, constructing social relationships. Where individuals also represent a social reality: both a solo interpreter and an individual composing in isolation fulfil, whether they realise it or not, a social task. They are part of a network of resonating brains.”

Sabbbe, 2010



It is 2012 and the World Music Days are being held in Belgium at the initiative of the relatively young Flemish branch of the ISCM. Thus the participating concert organisers and ensembles are mainly geographically located in Flanders as well. We can add that the venues have been prepared to invest seriously in organising this festival. For some it is easier to combine it with their regular programming than for others. At the TRANSIT Festival for example, the lion's share of the works programmed are premières anyway, the Logos Foundation concentrates almost exclusively on new music and even the

Concertgebouw Brugge includes a cautious but fairly regular dose of newer works in a programming that is mainly focused on repertoire. For other venues the situation is a little, or completely, different. That some of them are contributing to the World Music Days all the same does show a fundamental interest in contemporary art music perhaps, and even a readiness to invest in the newest of the new. However this is in no way an expression of a general tendency for Flemish (and by extension, Belgian) venues or other media, where the old or tonal/metric idiom is usually predominant in the form of classical repertoire or popular musical genres.

In fact we could go as far as to say that contemporary art music is generally an exotic, even marginal phenomenon in the Flemish cultural landscape. Even in the world of art music, you have to look a long way to find music less than 30 or even 60 years old on stage. Incidentally, we are not trying to claim here that the situation is greatly different in the rest of the world. What does strike us about the Flemish scene is how well other contemporary (performing) arts are flourishing. Arts centres and venues seem to take it as read that the theatre or dance productions they present are new or at least recent. In a wider artistic context, that is not such a strange thing. After all, our systems of artistic signs have been updating themselves constantly for centuries and are interwoven with the time in which they are created, the time on which they give an abstract, or less abstract, commentary. The powers that shape the world of art music, however, generally seem to find this much less important. They are clearly concerned for the most part with the 'reproduction of heritage', and that is easy enough to see. The roots of this phenomenon can be traced back to the nineteenth century. Media, education and venues are part of a relatively long tradition that places a gigantically disproportionate emphasis on repeating musical heritage. This has led to a certain schism between contemporary creation on the one hand and the professionally presenting, framing and shaping field on the other, a division that is nonetheless considered normal.

In this text we do not intend to approach musical aesthetics as a value-free or politically neutral phenomenon. The resulting musical work is always underpinned by a structure that is shaped by a certain artistic, aesthetic 'ideology', whether its creator makes this explicit or not. The shaper of an art music scene selects structures; he or she makes structures of structures. Here, too, 'ideologies' (whether artistic, aesthetic or social) play a role with respect to the *shaping of a social field*, which for precisely that reason implies a *political act*.

This text – which in fact poses an elaborated question – began with the (obviously subjective) observation that those who shape the art music landscape only very seldom make those ideologies thoroughly explicit in public and link them to a wider context. The following paragraphs are based on the premise that everything could just as easily have been different, that contemporary art music can be a valuable form of expression, that artistic expression is connected to the time of its creation and that its contemporary public experience is relevant. That inevitability is an illusion. Starting from that idea, questions have to arise concerning how our art music landscape is divided up and what the intentions are of those who shape it.

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Every piece of art music is a multiplicity of connections, internal and external relationships that gain meaning in the communication between maker, performer and listener, constructions that are formally related to every other musical expression. They are a consequence of an abundance of ideas on the part of the composer, who expresses himself in relation to his or her musical *and* extra-musical 'circumstances'. The maker produces these relationships consciously, less consciously and/or unconsciously. There is no absolute method of coding or decoding them, and probably a large proportion of the content is lost in the communication process. The receiver's mind, after all, is not the same as the sender's. The phenomenon of music (a sound

structure) has the potential to 'move' the receiver, to have a physical effect on his or her body, to evoke feelings of connection and religiousness and even contribute to a trance or meditation. When music has this kind of impact, we can speak of a form of power production. Authors such as Jacques Attali even take this a step further. In *Noise. A Political Economy of Music* he claims that the power of music can serve or oppose those who hold power – incidentally Plato had described such characteristics of sound structures long before in *The Republic*. That mechanism of 'serving' became menacingly apparent in the twentieth century under the German Nazi regime: glorification of the *Volkseigene*, appropriation of the great German musical tradition, the ban on expression 'foreign to the system' (*Entartete Musik*, jazz, the Second Viennese School). And then there was Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno who took upon himself to defend that school. The 'neo-Marxist' considered complexity and innovation to be no less than an antidote to the culture industry and its conformity disguised as innovation, to the artistic manifestation of liberal capitalism that – just like authoritarian regimes – created dependency and hence was no longer directed towards the subject seeking autonomy.

Throughout Western history, various powers have determined which forms of artistic expression were allowed to flourish and which kept small or out of the way. In extreme cases, 'music foreign to the system' has even been associated with the 'enemy', whether that was the Jewish people, the bourgeoisie or intellectuals in general, demonising the music along with its associated context. It did not matter whether that 'otherness' had arisen from the inside (think of modernist or experimental music) or come in from outside (e.g. Yiddish music, jazz). As already said, these are extreme cases of the repressive exercise of power by state apparatus fighting a wide-ranging political and often also military battle against anything that deviated from a norm they measured by their own standards. Art that did not conform to the aesthetics of the regime could become a symbol

of foreignness and enmity. This certainly did not only mean texts and pictures that directly referred to a (political) reality; an 'abstract' succession of sounds, free from linguistic semantics, could perfectly fit the bill simply by not meeting the theoretical musical demands considered by the regime (whether secular or religious) to be 'good' or even 'true'. Furthermore, many of those in power believed that showing or playing 'foreign' art could lead to heterodox or even dissident thoughts. Maybe music has that power, and is it not capable of encouraging people to think? In any case, history has shown that making and dealing with music has often had a clearly ideological nature.

But how exactly the link should be made between music and the wider social context is anything but a matter of consensus. Where Adorno, the Second Viennese School and even the post-war serialists and many after them viewed complexity and innovation as an aesthetic and ethical necessity, other thinkers and makers such as Cornelius Cardew (who himself had once been a prominent member of the avant-garde) denounced them as the playground of the bourgeoisie, soothed by music, detracting them from the hard social reality in which they behaved as oppressors. And according to Pierre Bourdieu, in making certain aesthetic choices a listener mainly expresses his or her socio-economic context. Cultural capital (which could be familiarity with and appreciation of modernist music) is then – crudely speaking – a way for the 'intelligentsia' to distinguish itself from the 'materialist, philistine economic elite' and the 'poorly educated working class' (Osborne, 2008). There is probably no algorithm to state what exactly the political meaning of a construction of sounds and silences is. Furthermore, there is little hope of a 'truth', let alone one that is absolute, static or independent of context. Nevertheless, the discussion above has taken place and is still going on; human beings are trying to understand their art, even more now that it can no longer be made for the glory of God and the emperor.

Perhaps there is a certain link between today's populist nationalist who pleads for the abolition of government subsidies for experimental art forms and similar thinking on the part of earlier, extreme nationalist regimes. After all, both base their ideological discourse on the premise of a stable culture and a clearly delineated people to be defended, expelling anything foreign to it and consequently avoiding alterity. Maybe such ideas are even related to the centuries-old church pamphlets denouncing polyphony as heresy? If such links do exist, they are difficult to consolidate. So we do not intend to explore theories of this kind. However it *is* easy to prove that political ideologies – in the widest sense of the word – still have a significant impact today on ideas of how the arts in general, and music/ the music scene in particular, should be shaped. It could well be that such mechanisms are more difficult to fathom and often seem more subtle in one's own time. For example, liberal economic principles have had an impact that is difficult to overestimate on music produced in the last few decades. Pop culture has replaced folk music culture to a great extent. Aesthetics and music theory have moreover allied themselves with procedures such as market research and market observation ("giving audiences what they want (even if they don't know it yet)"): a beloved and lucrative activity for the creative industries, which have more than once led to artistic and stylistic dumbing down.

Such efforts to find the lowest common denominator are fairly well accepted, a norm, even logical and most people do not question the aesthetics – let alone the ethics – of this. But this does not mean that the practice is ideologically neutral. The music industry shapes tastes, creates a supply and has beaten God in the omnipresence stakes. These mechanisms form a society and this means that writing hits, with the concurrent banning of alterity and complexity, the creation of familiarity and the conditions for *easy listening*, is also a political act, a – perhaps subconscious – expression of a wider social mechanism and a connection of it to musical ideas. The fact that a large group of people find

'entertainment', 'beauty' and maybe even 'identity' in this music does not bestow neutrality on the underlying (artistic) ideological mechanisms.

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Government bodies act in an explicitly political manner when they intervene in the economics of art by subsidising certain artistic players. In that process – in Flanders at least – the notion of 'quality' is disconnected from 'popularity'. Thus the government demonstrates – building on its fundamentally democratic ideology – how far it is prepared to tolerate vulnerable phenomena of value and even help them to grow (cf. the democratic emancipation of minorities). This immediately leads to the difficulty of a simple 'self-regulating' economic mechanism that allocates 'value' and 'significance' to works being replaced by a far less absolute principle. After all, when does art become valuable? As cultural sociologist Rudi Laermans notes in a publication on Flemish cultural policy, *Het cultureel Regiem* (2002), government subsidies do not only bring in money but also bestow official, symbolic recognition on the artistic player in question: it gives them symbolic capital (Laermans, 2002, p. 49).

In Flanders, committees of specialists advise the Minister of Culture on her task of subsidising the arts world. Although the Minister personally still has the final right to decide, the government has decided to put its own ideological position into perspective by partly decentralising the power of decision. Both in determining the framing regulations and in effectively implementing them (evaluation of the sector), the Minister allows herself to be supported by advisory councils of knowledgeable persons, who thus effectively shape the musical landscape at macro level. Their considered judgement, after all, determines which artistic players will be helped to develop by the State, as the shaping power whose democratic convictions, in this case, can counteract knee-jerk reactions from the market, and thus shape the arts world and society. In practice this means that composers, musicians, theatre makers and programmers

are subjected to peer review, since they also make up the committees, sometimes alongside an (independent) musicologist or journalist. (It is understood that they must leave the table when their own funding applications are up for discussion.) The government does not expect – it has said as much in various publications¹ – that these specialists will achieve complete objectivity in their evaluation, which would be impossible anyway. However they are expected to increase their objectivity by (only) taking into account the criteria mentioned in the ministerial Arts Decree², for example. Furthermore, the government hopes that precisely the combination of several ‘subjectivities’ will lead to a more objective, ‘inter-subjective’ and hence high-quality assessment.³ In artistic terms, the need for diversity is pointed out, both in terms of aesthetic tendencies and the balance between established projects and young initiatives. In other words, the macro-organisers of the landscape, policy makers, do not intend to create dominant trends but a fertile soil for multiplicity – a fundamental equality of value between different artistic tendencies that wish to develop relatively independently of the market.

Of course ‘quality’ in art remains an elusive term. It is easy enough to determine whether a string quartet has generally good intonation and a steady tempo, but other aspects of ‘good performance’ are far less absolute. And what about the quality of a concert programme? Is it originality that counts or (conceptually) solid combinations? What outweighs what? And should early music be ‘historically informed’ to count as ‘good quality’? Or maybe nowadays it has become ‘original’ (and as such ‘good quality’) to stop doing that? The various committee members are bound to have different opinions. In any case, the Arts Decree and accompanying guidelines and manuals do not always provide guidance.

These issues make clear why it is that as well as formalising their procedures, both the Minister and the committee need to communicate on the artistic policy they apply and how they consequently deal with specific cases, since in a democratic system, cases create precedents. At any rate, authoritarian decisions must be

avoided as much as possible in such a context. A suitable way to ensure this seems to be as much openness as possible on artistic norms and ideological positions. The required communication can be done by publishing vision texts and essays by assessors, individually and in a group. Certainly, the aim to create plurality, as we see in Flanders, is an interesting and democratically defensible starting point. When we look at the work done in practice by the committees to shape the cultural field, we see however – as already said – that this does result in a scene dominated by repertoire, ‘classical music’ at least seventy years old. These distributors of monetary and symbolic capital seem to have concluded that the art music world does not need much contemporary expression to achieve plurality (particularly in terms of presentation venues). This observation demands a closer look – after all, the evaluation committee can only evaluate and make choices, not bring new initiatives to life. Over the past years, however, several new music venues have disappeared from the landscape. Consider November Music (Ghent), De Nieuwe Reeks (Leuven), Music@venture (Antwerp). We will not go into the reasons for this, but we will consider the way the committee seems to be reacting to this tendency. In the most recent round of evaluations for structural subsidies (in 2012, for the period 2013-2016), there was no corrective effort to be seen in the formal ranking (list of priorities) of organisations given a positive evaluation in the field of music. Without going into the technicalities of the evaluation procedure, it is difficult to understand why the landscape analysis by the committee did not result in prioritising new music venues. However we have no idea what the motivation of the committee members is and was in determining the ranking. They are presented as almost neutral observers of ‘quality’ despite their evaluation being ideological in nature. Even from a perspective that aims for objectivity, if they aim to create plurality then their analysis of the landscape should lead to granting high priority to the increasingly scarce venues specialising in contemporary and experimental art music. However,

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if policy wishes to take a conservative position in shaping the art music landscape then – after self-observation over the last few years – it should anchor this position in its decrees. If that is not the case, perhaps the committee's analysis of the landscape does need further clarification. Openness, after all, is a necessary condition for questioning and discussion.

What we ultimately hear at our concert venues is of course to a great extent the responsibility of concert programmers. They have artistic freedom of movement, but within our socio-economic reality they are still dependent on subsidies. In that sense, they need to direct themselves towards the context created by the government and supervised by the group of their peers. Their artistic impact on society is relatively significant – often more significant than that of a composer or ensemble. These actors are in fact occupied with the production of norms: they are involved in affirming professionals, getting the audience to attend certain musical expressions, they are capable of supporting new projects by artists they trust. They receive and distribute symbolic capital and, yes, this implies a certain exercise of power. Just as was the case for governments, programmers need to underpin the power they exercise. Making their vision (ideology) explicit can be one way of doing this. Such procedures are inherent to the peer review mechanism that occurs when subsidy applications are evaluated. It is a shame, however, that these discussions are hardly ever made public or held independently of subsidy applications. The spectator – and we are writing this text from that perspective – actually only has the season brochure to find out what has been programmed. Introductory texts by programmers and artistic directors are almost always limited to defining the programme from a promotional perspective. Hardly ever do we find extended essays by these artistic authorities in which they explain the reasons for the policy they apply.

To repeat. Recent works are scarce goods in Flemish art music programming. The tradition is completely different in other performing arts.

Every programme is the result of decisions made by programmers, decisions that could theoretically just as well have been different. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of organisers has not dared to go radically against the flow. Don't they (really) believe that contemporary art music is worthwhile? Or do they think it is interesting enough in a marginal position, but that famous repertoire with its tonal and metrical common ground is an appropriate area of focus? Is there a lack of quality work available? Or are other (non-artistic) factors at play? Pressure of subsidies? Nobody is letting on.

So let's put forward a hypothesis. Programmers are willing, but audiences don't turn up. Art music fans don't like what they are being fed. Perhaps that is putting it a bit too strongly. The audience is there, and it might even be growing, but it is still a fair bit smaller than the audience for repertoire concerts or early music. We find ourselves, as it were, in a cultural Catch 22: there is no audience because there is no habit or culture of listening to contemporary art music, and no habit can develop because there is no audience.

And then in certain circles the question keeps coming up as to whether all that new stuff is really democratic, or in other words: government subsidies are a nice little earner. Can we speak of a worthwhile cultural experience when participation is minimal? Does that lead to a cultural democratic deficit? On the other hand, when do participation figures get big enough, in the knowledge that the entire (concert) audience for art music is only a very small percentage of taxpayers? Or do audience figures form an 'objective' criterion by means of which the government can assess the functioning of concert organisations? And moreover, aren't market principles now forcing their way back to a de-marketized zone? One thing is for sure: the architects of the musical landscape are continuously (re)producing the prevailing norms in the art music world, thus shaping audiences and future demand that in turn will influence supply. Confirming a tradition – for practical or aesthetic and ideological

reasons – is therefore an act of cultural politics, just like breaking with tradition.

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A music culture does not only emerge on stage, among the advisers to a minister or within professional ensembles. Our society has a long tradition of music-making as a social phenomenon, and loosely linked to this is an organised form of arts education that supports children, young people and adults as amateur musicians and may train them as professional performers, music theorists, music teachers, music psychologists and/or composers. But what about the place of new art music in this educational context? From the rise of atonality onwards, it is often conspicuous by its absence. Going to music school or the conservatory today still primarily means learning to reproduce ‘classical music’ (with Bach, Mozart and Beethoven leading the field).

In the 1940s, 50s and 60s in Flanders, it was normal for conservatory principals and their staff to take quite conservative artistic ideological positions, as we can see from curricula and the recollections of musicians and composers looking back on their student years. Young musicians were expected to conform to the conservative artistic ideas of educational institutions if they wanted to get their diploma without having to fight out serious battles with the educating powers-that-be or even having to leave the conservatory. Where Karel Goeyvaerts had to go to Paris on his own at the end of the 1940s to be allowed to study the music of Bartók and the like, opposition to conservatism in the late 1960s and 1970s was somewhat more widespread. Protests erupted from the students and even the staff. At the Ghent Conservatory, progressive composers such as Louis De Meester and Lucien Goethals were allowed to teach and groups sprang up who defended new forms of musical expression, sometimes almost militantly. These eruptions resulted in the institutionalised (though very limited) presence of new music in conservatories. At the same time, incidentally, early music gained a place there too.

Nonetheless, tendencies focused on major repertoire and often also artistically conservative currents continue to determine the norms of higher music education. Although some conservatories are now committing to new art music – for example by setting up a post-Master’s degree in contemporary music – the conserving aspect is still prominent and dominant. This means that even now, students have to make a conscious choice to specialise in contemporary art music, whilst the basic curricula are still dominated by classical repertoire. A student today can graduate with a Master’s in Composition without gaining any skills in dodecaphonic, multiple serial, algorithmic, spectral or electronic composition. Maybe these skills are unnecessary. But why then do all composition students still have to wrestle with tonal harmony and classical counterpoint? It is as if they really were transcendental musical truths. The same applies for students in instrumental classes. It is no secret that the great majority of courses focus on the performance of older music (pre-1950, maybe even pre-Schönberg). The shapers of education have come up with a norm in which twentieth and twenty-first century aesthetic visions carry little weight and are even approached by a number of teachers as heterodoxies.

But at least new music is *allowed* now! It has been able to create a bubble for itself – not as the normal form of expression, but most of the time it is tolerated. Resistance and action, concepts from the 1960s and 70s, no longer seem necessary since the old taboos have been removed from the corridors of the conservatory. However the context constantly reproduces the norm, the power of habit. If we compare art music education to other (performing) arts degrees, ‘habit’ undeniably becomes ‘conservative’. But all the same, conservatories have not introduced any fundamental changes to curricula. The basic skills of the modern musician are apparently still based on an absolute mastery of the classical values and knowledge of repertoire. Questions over *why* and *why not* do not have to be answered: this is just the way it is, and apparently no new formulation of the ideological basis is required.

Teachers in part-time arts education are trained at conservatories such as these and transfer their knowledge to children who – assuming they have the necessary ‘talent’ – may also consider a career as a musician. In short: in music education, a constant and intensive interaction with new art music is anything but obvious. This helps to create a culture that fundamentally excludes twentieth and twenty-first century symbols and sign systems. The history of our music education is what it is. A tradition like this is strong, and that it should continue in this way is to be expected and even understandable, but this does not make it any less of a choice, which is not free from ideology.

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The major traditional media such as daily and weekly newspapers, radio and television devote steadily less attention to classical music. There is a review, concert announcement or interview to be read here and there, but these are seldom about contemporary forms of art music. Public broadcasting seems to see it as its main task to broadcast programmes about pop, rock and jazz (which may of course lead to interesting television in itself). It is taken as read that commercial broadcasters are subject to market forces, generally resulting in pulp television in which even popular genres are not welcome if they move out of the mainstream.

However both Flanders and Wallonia have a radio station focused on art music and (sometimes non-European) folk music. There is little to be said about twentieth and twenty-first century music on the Flemish station *Klara* (KLAssieke RAdio, CLAssical RAdio): it hardly plays a meaningful role at all. In recent years the station has put particular effort into conforming with the mores of commercial media and music culture. Thus a culture of anecdotes dominates, music charts are created, classical composers are portrayed as far as possible as the personalities of their time, classical music awards are presented (MTV culture) and, to top it all, the director of the station describes her station in

prime time on public television as “the wellness centre of radio land”. More than ever, cultural radio has surrendered itself to the inescapable culture of slogans and marketing. “Classical for everyone!” – “*Iedereen klassiek!*” is Klara’s calling card. And endless repetition goes without saying, easy listening, to be sure not to scare off the listener. Newer and more complex music is not taboo – since that would be grist to the critics’ mill – but consigned to the late night programming. The listener must not be challenged, must be tucked in with the familiar, soft, warm fleece of major repertoire.

The niche markets for art music and artistic conservatism came together in the twentieth century. The repetition of the familiar in music education is connected to a similar tendency in the media and on stage. After all, this kind of programming probably leads to a higher guarantee of satisfying audience numbers and listener statistics. A basic behaviour pattern for listeners is to appreciate the recognisable and to a certain extent predictable-sounding discourse, being swept up by a familiar musical flow. While this claim is far from insignificant to the market economy, there is of course nothing to prevent a parallel artistic and ideological reflex on the part of cultural managers and shaping powers in education. Indeed – as we have already said – it is no simple matter to determine the relationship between pragmatism, strategy and ideology here.

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The past decade in the Flemish art music scene does not seem to have been a revolutionary one. And yet a number of shapers in education and the performing arts scene have been successful in putting contemporary art music on the map. For example, there are post-Master’s degrees offering music students the opportunity to focus exclusively on contemporary music. The number of students remains relatively limited, probably because the highly traditional training they have received prior to this course greatly shapes the young musicians’ frame of reference. In part-time

arts education, experiments have been conducted here and there with new music classes over the last few years, and in several places these have or will become permanent fixtures. Furthermore, a few arts education organisations have committed themselves to new music and the experience of sound during the same period, through workshops, lectures, residential courses, lessons and installation trails. In the conservatories, the number of progressive teachers is growing, albeit slowly. A handful of large venues now give contemporary music more stage space than a few decades ago, and sometimes it even seems to be coming out of the sidelines. These people are fighting back against the norm of 'classical' culture, despite its being a much more powerful force within the niche sector of art music.

We live in a society where the economy is not currently doing well, with a crisis affecting 'the people' (to quote certain politicians). Across Europe – and certainly in Flanders as well – conservative political nationalism is back on the increase. The leaders of such political parties speak out aloud against 'left-wing elitist' contemporary art as having retreated into "reservations" and thus having no social relevance (Bart De Wever, *De Standaard*).⁴ The link between (neo)nationalist and (neo)liberal thinking is fairly obvious in this context. The problem is that the latter has also infiltrated the world of our (performing) arts, according to Belgian cultural sociologist Pascal Gielen, in his *State of the Union* speech to the Flemish theatre scene, delivered in August 2011 (Gielen, 2011). Gielen questions the business-oriented discourse by means of which we subscribe to the "efficiency and management rhetoric that policy-makers today love to hear," in which the "economic justification" of artistic productions plays a central part. In our opinion, Gielen is fully justified in his claim that this discourse has an ideological history (he refers to Thatcherism in Britain) and that it is highly problematic to apply this policy as if it were politically neutral.

If we connect that thought back to the music scene, it is soon clear that if we "let the

figures speak for themselves", contemporary forms of expression will fare badly. Too much contemporary musical expression means small audiences and therefore "bad policy" as well – since the government demands that venues generate a certain percentage of their own income. This consideration will surely often lead to the business management of an organisation putting a certain amount of pressure on programmers. More than a purely financial consideration, the point is that the government is concerned here with a quantifiable response to the question of 'participation' (since culture only exists where it is experienced). On the one hand, new work is being put on the programme – and the government encourages this⁵ – but on the other hand there is no effort to achieve an equal proportion (at least) of old and new work, because that would entail the loss of too many audience members and a questioning of the programme's 'social relevance'.

However. If we continue to follow that logic, we have to ask whether a concert with string quartets by Haydn and Schubert is that much more socially relevant than a production with works for ensemble by Johannes Kreidler or Beat Furrer – and we mean this purely on the basis of the number of tickets sold on an average concert evening. Let us assume that there will be four hundred listeners at the 'classical' concert and eighty at the 'new' one. These numbers must of course be considered in the light of the more than seven million Flemings to whom the Flemish Minister of Culture is answerable. We can state objectively that most of them will *not* be at the concert, and yet they have to help pay for it (to quote, for a moment, current populist discourse). Figures like these can generate very convincing pie charts – not four hundred versus eighty, but 7.3 million versus eighty (0.000011%) and four hundred (0.000055%). How does the system actually work? At what point does a production become socially relevant? From the moment that half the seats in the hall are filled? Or three quarters? And how big should the hall be? Neither 'quality', 'social relevance' nor even 'participation' (what does the audience hear, ex-

actly? What do listeners take away with them?) can be measured in this way. In fact the only observation that can be made is *that* the concert-goer is *there*, not what s/he feels or thinks or what impact the art work has now or in the long term (Laermans, 2011, p. 49).

The presence or absence of meaningful forms of expression among the multiplicity of music written in the last half century can be argued in another way. The architects of our musical landscape have an extremely well-founded aesthetic vision and intellectually developed view of (music) history and contemporary society, almost by definition. From such an amalgam of ideas, they take up a position as (inspired) shapers. Is it imaginable that such aesthetic and political vision is very often *not* over-coded by management logic, business-based justifications of programmes and/or a reduced definition of participation? In the aforementioned speech, Pascal Gielen pleads for the efficiency discourse in the theatre scene to be done away with (Gielen, 2011). In the wider political context of (neo)liberalism, perhaps hand-in-hand with (neo)nationalism, such 'transferred logic' leads after all to a highly vulnerable position: the arts world thus recognises a very important tenet of a different, potentially threatening ideology, a mechanism that has moreover proved so often that it is at odds with the specificities and strengths of *free* artistic (and social) thought. Maybe a well-developed professional and political network between people in positions of power can offer protection, both to conservative and progressive shapers, but even then the controlling dynamics of a field whose roots are in artistic quality and aesthetics would be overgrown by rules that in fact have nothing to do with it and are even (apparently) in conflict with it.

Doubtless commoditisation and efficient policy have a very important role to play in a professionalised arts scene. But the fundamental goal of the shapers remains an aesthetic and social one. The political, democratic component of this will however gradually die away without constant openness, positioning and discussion. This component is not easy to identify or measure

and one can only take a solid, well-considered and defensible position in a context of continuous debate between the architects of the arts scene, journalists, musicologists, sociologists, philosophers, politicians and other observers. In doing so these architects should be given the opportunity to engage in social debate on the substance of music policy, to see it questioned and to have their shaping powers made less dependent on positions of acquired power within the arts world, networks and management skills. Maybe this is a utopian scenario in our time? Nonetheless, this dynamic does seem to be far more present in the other performing arts in Flanders. Is there a link with the fact that contemporary forms of expression play a greater role there and aesthetics are automatically more in line with the time in which they are made public?

The last thing we want to do here is to claim that there are no voices in the art music world pleading for substantial examination, debate and the development of an artistic and social discourse. A notable contribution of this type appeared in 2006 in the form of an open letter from Herman Baeten, the then chair of the evaluation committee for music.⁶ He called upon the large venues and ensembles to develop a substantial discourse for the place of music in society and to organise debates on the subject.

He also questioned the absence of the academic world in the development of such a context. Baeten does not specifically direct his remarks towards those concerned with contemporary music, but maybe the urgent need for action that he indicates is greatest for them.

Perhaps such aesthetic, ethical and political discourse from the music scene will make little impression on the neoliberal and neonationalist powers that Gielen describes. After all, it is characteristic of their ideology to claim that their own logic – including its aesthetic ideas – is an objective, static truth. Possibly they will believe with apparent justification that they have to deny musical difference its right to develop, supported in that view by 'the people'. Clear ideological positions from these political powers will probably be given the empty, supposedly objective

label of 'common sense' or 'good management'. Under this type of 'pragmatic' government the State, in its attempt to remain financially healthy, will perhaps try to rid itself of so-called money-guzzling 'left-wing elitist hobbies'. Such plans have already been implemented by our Dutch neighbours but the ideological tendencies responsible also constitute a political majority in Belgium, especially in Flanders. New music, experiment, different sound can be considered an artistic questioning of apparently absolute values. A considerable number of authors, of whom we have already mentioned a few here, have pointed out such relationships between aesthetics, ethics and politics, and this issue continues to occupy researchers in various disciplines. Maybe we will never be able to put our finger on the exact connections between the domains; maybe effective exposure of such mechanisms would even completely change art (or our experience of it). Nonetheless, the architects of the musical landscape believe in the power of art – whatever power might mean here. They believe in certain formations of the arts landscape that may be radically different from how other shapers see the future. That belief is (part of) a reflection, and its critical and

artistic basis does not need to be crystallised within the (absolutist) ideological frameworks of ruling powers, either in their artistic or their general political and executive variants. It is necessary however for the ideological approach to the relationship between art and society to be linked to a strong discourse with substantial content, to making ideas explicit, to openness. Only if ideas are made explicit, with an analysis of the social situation and one's own (artistic) vision for this situation as their basis, can this lead to a genuine confrontation of ideas, free from personal preferences.

As one of the most vulnerable segments of the arts scene, but one which we fully believe to be highly valuable, new art music in particular needs a debate based on well-supported ideologies, that questions the proportions that prevail on stage, in schools and in the media. The 'reservation' in which too much new art music still finds its home must be broken open. "Let the music speak for itself" is a fine sentiment, but perhaps today we need to speak a bit more for the music.

Notes

- 1 www.kunstenergoed.be (including the clarifications of the Arts Decree and guide to the evaluation procedure)
- 2 http://www.kunstenergoed.be/ake/download/nl/5905871/file/kd_geco_rdineerd_met_historiek.pdf (consulted August 2012)
- 3 http://www.kunstenergoed.be/ake/download/nl/4782422/file/110401_draaiboek-beoordeling-kd_2.doc, p. 6 (consulted August 2012)

- 4 *Hedendaagse Kunst*, column by Bart De Wever in *De Standaard* (8 November 2011)
- 5 http://www.kunstenergoed.be/ake/download/nl/4782422/file/110401_draaiboek-beoordeling-kd_2.doc, p. 6 (consulted August 2012)
- 6 <http://www.muziekcentrum.be/news.php?ID=356> (consulted August 2012)

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- Sabbe, H., *Homo Musicus. Over Muziek als Evolutionaire Adaptatie*, Brussels, 2010
- De Wever, B., *Hedendaagse Kunst*, column in *De Standaard* (8 November 2011)
- www.kunstenergoed.be
- www.muziekcentrum.be

Henri Pousseur in memoriam

Molto misurato Kurtág György

p *espr* *cresc.* *largamente, ben tenuto* *f* *ss stridente*

TRADITION

Herman Sabbe

AND INNOVATION



ultural evolution is driven by an interplay between tradition and innovation, between continuation through the process of transference and change within the transference itself. We can

distinguish between a variety of modalities in the manner in which tradition and innovation act – desired or involuntary change, formal or informal, through spontaneous imitation or through instruction.

In a purely auditory music culture, variation can arise through the unintentional deviation from the repeated model, through ‘spontaneous’ errors stemming from failing memory. ‘Tradition’ – which derives from the Latin *tradere*: ‘to deliver, hand over’ – at once resembles a relay race in which the baton gets dropped from time to time. In contrast, in a literate musical culture, the

changes more often take the form of conscious, desired, and direct innovation. In that case, innovation seems to be the only motivation for proposing alternatives to the recorded (whether graphical or phonographical) repertoire – the music culture’s hard disk. It is here that we enter the world of music as ‘art’. One condition for the survival of music as art is innovation, the transgression of the given, the self-aware transcendence by the musical perpetrator. Every deviation is a challenge: ‘deviance-defiance’. The dialectic of the continuation restores the balance: that which was innovative becomes traditional aiming to survive and re-create itself.

When researching the relationship between innovation and the familiar, it is necessary – at a psychological level – to consider that much of what we know of music, we know without knowing it, because it plays within our autonomic-

sympathetic nervous system at a subconscious level without being turned into concepts. The origins of cognition start with unconscious perception and how it contributes gradually to the concept-forming structures. A person's cognitive-psychological development is steered continually by the confrontation with that which is established: the musical idiom, the established genres and styles, and the social and acoustic context in which music usually functions. Music-makers, no matter how original, can do little to escape this system. They are irrevocably confronted with the structure of that which already exists. Through their actions, however, they can allow the structure to evolve.

I whistle – as is known, preferably in the bathroom – a melody from a well-known piece of music which is almost certainly not written to be whistled. But I do contribute to the cultural transference of the music – a form of transference which one could call informal, through a type of spontaneous transcription into another medium. I am part of the oral history. Whistle it on!

The transference of musical memes (muse-memes) takes place among congenerts and from one generation to the next. This process of acquisition can be divided into two stages: 1) spontaneous perception and mimesis including imitation of formal instruction, and 2) the formal, instruction.

Spontaneous acquisition and acquisition through instruction - that which the growing child gets to hear of music and that which she or he hears about the music - combine to form its current state and its evolving states of conditioning of the brain: a kind of integration of all the music to which this brain has been exposed up to this very moment.

And this experiential state determines at every moment how that which is heard is processed. It is the interplay between the received musical information and the listener's pre-existing mental diagrams which determines what meanings it takes on – mental diagrams which themselves,

as described earlier, are the result of preceding music-processing: mental modelling of the human biological, universal ability to listen. The concept of 'the state of experience and condition' allows us to set aside the concept of 'taste', which is a historically charged word, charged with subjective connotations of psychological and sociological importance but which, in the evolutionary perspective, are hardly relevant.

The difference between spontaneous acquisition and acquisition through instruction allows us to draw a distinction between the meanings of music which are accessible to the unpracticed ear and the meanings which can only be gained through instruction; in other words, the expectations acquired through instruction explain the workings of deviation in view of those same expectations, workings that have been brought to light through recent research by measuring brain potentials.

Recent experimental research has also shown that – when subjected to the same music repeatedly – unpracticed, uninstructed, unacculturated test subjects process that music much along the same lines as well-practiced subjects. It then becomes a question of degrees: both categories of listeners carry out the segmenting and grouping through which the listening mind grasps the musical process in a comparable way.

What is more, the commonalities between the mental strategies of the music-maker and the listener are, from an evolutionary perspective, practically irrelevant. So the only real question is, what is being conveyed, and with how much variation?

This essay was drawn from prof. dr. em. Herman Sabbe's *Homo Musicus. Over muziek als evolutionaire adaptatie*, published in 2010 by the Royal Flemish Academy of Sciences and Arts in its series *Academiae Analecta*. In this book, a collection of scientific essays, Sabbe focusses on music as an evolutionary adaptation, combining knowledge from a great diversity of research areas such as neurobiology, genetics, psychology, economics and of course musicology.

Little lion knew little.

2. Yellow lion

Yellow lion was convinced one needed theory. He hated to fly, though. It produced dead tones in his stomach. His research was based on travels by foot. And from time to time he could borrow a string quartet to do the dirty work. He preferred chanting the necessary incantations.

**Yellow lion drank a barrel of wine.
He saw black landscapes every-
where. The world created over
and over again. Quakes shaking.
He was chasing a pig named Ul-
rike. Knowing his spirit could not
triumph over matter. He trembled
and got lost in the woods. The
drum of Hiawatha banging in his
ear. Fuzzy harmony in his head.**

Codetta: Red hedgehog

Red hedgehog loved to read blue books.

Red hedgehog got eaten by a yellow lion.

The yellow lion had to throw up.

Out came a peacock with the tail of a mermaid.

Out came a mermaid with the tail of a peacock.

Left was a little lion.

Little lion knew little.

*Jelle Meander
Homo barbaro, de natione vilissima de Fiandria*

ARTISTIC INVASION

Monika Pasiecznik

BELGIANS IN DARMSTADT

This year's Darmstadt Festival showed that Belgium, with its population of barely 11 million, has truly great artistic potential. There is no country that manifested its presence so strongly at the Courses for New Music as Belgium. The young generation of composers and performers today speaks with a distinct voice that echoes loudly on the international music scene.

For several years now they have been led by Stefan Prins, who is well known in Darmstadt; two years ago he won the Kranichstein Music Prize for Composition. But this year, Belgium was also represented by the following groups: Nadar Ensemble, Besides Ensemble, Ictus Ensemble, Zwerm Electric Guitar Quartet. Each of the concerts stood out against the background of the other events in Darmstadt and was an occasion in and of itself.

STEFAN PRINS — BODY OF ELECTRONICS

Stefan Prins returned to Darmstadt as a star. Well known on the German music scene, honored with a grand prize, quizzed many times for various interviews and radio programs, he had a difficult task: he had to confirm his class. He brought with him a freshly released double album (*Sub Rosa*, 2012), containing compositions from the last few years – above all, three works from the *Fremdkörper* cycle, which is a peculiar artistic manifesto. It is epitomized by the confrontation between body and machine – so, electronics and the acoustic instrument parts contrasted with them. Prins philosophizes on the place of technology in the life of contemporary humanity, poses questions on the quality of the relationship between them. Criticism of technology in Prins' rendition does not, however, boil down to a simple cultural pessimism, if only because he

himself moves perfectly well in the world of new media. He has computers at his fingertips, as can be heard from the first contact with his music. He is an electronics virtuoso, utilizing frenetic cascades of sounds, often overdriven, contaminated by digital errors, defects from which he is able to conjure up miracles.

The album leaves no doubt that Stefan Prins is an original, brilliant composer, very technically accomplished and possessing a sense of humor. His new work, which was premièred on 17 July at Frankfurt LAB in Frankfurt-am-Main, also proved this. *PARK* turned out to be a performance on the borderline between concert and music theater. Prepared in collaboration with the Zwerm guitar quartet, along with theater artists Shila Anaraki (concept), as well as Adva Zakai and Lars Kwakkenbos (dramaturgy), it again took up Stefan Prins' favorite subject matter. What is humanity's place in an era of universal computerization? To what extent do elements of digital logic infiltrate culture and language? Serving the purpose of depicting these issues, Anaraki created a theater of sound, body and speech, peculiarly subjected to time, space and thought matrices.

Six computers formed a communication network managed in real time by six musician-actors. The guitarists of Zwerm, along with Prins and Anaraki, all appearing in dual roles, became part of an invisible network of correlations. They not infrequently moved like computer game figures devoid of free will. Their overlapping, chaotic statements using vocabulary drawn from informatics sounded like information noise.

Language and the thought associated with it is changing at lightning speed under the influence of new technologies; similarly, our perception, hearing and feeling is changing... Watching and listening to *PARK*, one could get the impression that reflection on the linguistic character of these transformations dominated the entire performance, subordinating the music, listening and sound to itself.

Based on Prins' *Infiltrationen (Memory Space #4)*, the purely instrumental introduction for four prepared electric guitars in horizontal

position with which *PARK* opens promised much. Even just the physical 'struggle' with the guitar, sound production using various objects, was able to create a peculiar bodily counterweight for the cerebral dimension of a composition subordinated to language (programming) and its structure. Electronics *à la* Prins is the complete opposite of sterile, ideally pure studio electronics utilizing abstract sound. Even if it is based on algorithms, it has its texture, its weight, its power, its body. This time it was the human being who had the chance to establish control over the machine, which could have resulted in greater virtuosity of playing, a broader spectrum sounds, a yet bolder and more sensual approach to electronics. Why did it not happen this way, why did Stefan Prins stop halfway, jump up on stage and turn into an actor?

NADAR ENSEMBLE

— A HYBRID ELECTRONICS

The concerts in Darmstadt – especially those at the Orangerie – were of predominantly conventional form: an ensemble appeared on stage and played a set of more or less aesthetically independent works by various composers. Never mind that a program comprised of stylistic, generational, geographical monads neither builds new content nor provokes a layered manner of listening. Darmstadt is a mecca for composers from all over the world and a great music 'fair' at which everyone wants to 'promote' their 'product' as well as possible. Composers await their big break, which is the inclusion of one of their works in the festival program. This is not conducive to the construction of original programs, nor to experimentation with the concert form itself.

The ensembles from Belgium managed to overcome this dominating and overwhelming concert practice. The long evening of 18 July at Centralstation in Darmstadt had a clear dramaturgy – and that, in the theatrical sense. Two ensembles performed: Nadar Ensemble

(under the baton of Daan Janssens) and Besides Ensemble (without conductor) – as it were, competing with each other in the area of originality in their program, the manner of its composition and presentation.

The first to perform was Nadar, which is consciously building its own artistic and generational identity. It can boast of collaboration with today's most interesting composers from the 30- to 40-year-old generation, among whom are – aside from Stefan Prins – also Simon Steen-Andersen and Johannes Kreidler (both of whom won the aforementioned Kranichstein Music Prize



for Composition – in 2008 and 2012, respectively). Nadar Ensemble prepared a music-film show for Darmstadt, arranging its program on the basis of a continuum. The combination of music with cinema is, obviously, an extraordinarily charming idea, virtually guaranteeing success. However, for a program continuum to succeed, each work must be at an equally high level and correspond with the rest of them.

Most of the pictures – Norbert Pfaffenbichler's *Intermezzo* (2011), Nicolas Provost's *Long Live the New Flesh Part I/II* (2009) and Martin Arnold's *Haunted House* (2011), as well as Jorge Sánchez-Chiong's music-film mix *Used Redux (from Autocine)* (2012, première) – made use of a 'found

footage' technique, processing and deconstructing, among others, Charlie Chaplin films (Pfaffenbichler), cartoons (Arnold) and horror film scenes (the daring Provost!). The remaining music-film compositions – Stefan Prins' *Piano Hero #1* (2011/2012) and Johannes Kreidler's *Die »sich sammelnde Erfahrung« (Benn): der Ton* (2012, world première) – utilized rather concept and musical rules at the image level.

Among the composers, only Alexander Schubert did not use video; on the other hand, in his work *Point Ones* (2011/2012, première), he did serve up a rock energy drink with distinct percussion, electric guitar and electronics parts correlated by means of sensors with the gestures of conductor Daan Janssens. Played at the beginning, directly after Pfaffenbichler's two-minute film, his work and Jorge Sánchez-Chiong's *Used Redux...* together formed a peculiar rock bracket for the ensemble's performance.

In the middle were works by Prins and Kreidler. *Piano Hero #1* for keyboard and video, by Prins, updates the relationship between pianist and instrument with new elements, such as programming the sound of a digital controller keyboard, separating the sound from its source and assigning it to a virtual performer. The composition forms a peculiar hybrid of human and machine (Frankenstein monster?), capable of inhuman feats. The work utilizes samples of the harsh, overtone-rich, percussive sounds of piano strings being struck by the hand, structured with the aid of, among other things, such means as cuts and loops.

Also standing under the banner of technology and the effects of its use Johannes Kreidler's new work *Die »sich sammelnde Erfahrung« (Benn): der Ton*. Known for his affirmation of the capabilities that the computer gives an artist, the composer boldly transfers them to the ground of music. This yields a result similar to the case with Prins – an instrumental-electronic hybrid, except built on a somewhat different principle ('music with music' / 'Musik mit Musik'). Here, as well, we have a play with the limited capabilities of performers and the un(?)limited capabilities of electronics – especially when we are talking

about speed of data transmission and of task performance. The work is a self-organizing chaos of snippets of musics, a sound splash generated with the aid of algorithms (?) which, however, fascinates the listener from the first sounds with its ghoulish humor and casualness relative to the concept of original composed music.

The term 'hybrid' appears to describe the Nadar Ensemble's entire project, and comes to the fore on at least a few levels: combination of music and video, instruments with electronics, samples (including film) and 'newly' generated sounds (images). This leaves no doubt that the concept for Nadar Ensemble's concert turned out to be a good one.

BESIDES ENSEMBLE — PREDATORY AND MINIMALIST

Doubts did appear, however, during the second half of the evening of 18 July at Centralstation Darmstadt in conjunction with the performance of another Belgian group, Besides Ensemble.

Before the audience took their places, light music, played *sotto voce* and *da capo* by the ensemble itself, was already wafting from the stage. As it turned out, the concept consisted of a peculiar threading of successive works onto a string of these café music sounds. Played back from offstage between the individual compositions on the program, they gave the musicians time to reorganize the stage; they did not, however, give the listener any rest or even a moment of concentration before the next work – not to mention the opportunity to enjoy the music just heard – for a round, melodic, harmonious song immediately took the upper hand.

But there was also nothing to enjoy. The main attraction of the program turned out to be Matthew Shlomowitz, who was to become the Trojan horse of this year's Darmstadt courses. Probably no one rushed onstage in Darmstadt with such momentum and with so many works. Neither, probably, did anyone leave such an

ambivalent impression. Three works on Besides Ensemble's program seemed to be more than just a bit much – all the more so that they were so lacking in content. *Letter Piece no. 5 (Northern Cities)* (2012), *Letter Piece no. 4 (Adams)* (2012) and *Avant Muzak* (2010) were a mixture of cheerful John Adams-style minimalism and mediocre wit in the style of a teenager of average intelligence. The musicians played out a comedy onstage rather than playing their instruments. This did not in any way create convincing instrumental theater.

On the program of Besides Ensemble's concert were two more works: Larry Polansky's *She is Full of Patience* (2012) and Jagoda Szmytka's *For Travelers like Angels or Vampires* (2012). The first of them could have reminded of Morton Feldman's music. Though delicate, recurring and gradually thickening sound progressions have become part of the minimalist concept of Besides Ensemble's program, it would be difficult to say this about the composition of Jagoda Szmytka. Her work clearly diverged from the rest of the compositions with its very scrupulous approach to sound and its careful construction of sound complexes. While *For Travelers* contained a tribute to the ensemble in the form of a discretely rock-type edge and rhythmic sequences, it did not flirt with any of the 'Newest Simplicity'. In reality, Jagoda Szmytka's aesthetic interests lean towards very subtle and complex issues – at the level both of philosophy and of the sound itself. Her ideas normally relate to gesture; she derives them from the musician's work with his or her instrument, which links her at the aesthetic level with Simon Steen-Andersen.

No doubt there was some sort of misunderstanding, that a composer writing a work as part of the Staubach Honoraria 2012 was assigned to an ensemble with such distant aesthetic propensities. Finally, we should also mention the amplification of Besides Ensemble's concert, which was characterized by overdrive and *de facto* sound distortion, not always favorable to the music. It was no doubt dictated, however, not so much by the good of the compositions being performed, as by the ensemble's predatory rock image.

LIQUID ROOM
—
**LISTENING AND
DRIFTING**

The culmination and, at the same time, crowning of the Festival in Darmstadt took place on 28 July in the Darmstadium with a performance by Ictus Ensemble and guests: Jennifer Walshe, Matthias Koole and Stefan Prins. If the concerts of the Nadar Ensemble and Besides Ensemble were a manifestation of different, original thinking about music and the manner of its presentation, then Liquid Room was additionally a fulfillment of the idea of music in a space (as in a gallery?) which permits the audience to move about freely, permitting it to decide independently when and where it will join in the musical stream.

It is also an invitation to another kind of listening, more diversified, fragmentary, of differing intensity, full of associations and free drifting of thoughts. By contrast, the concerts at the Orangerie demanded a completely committed form of listening, which sometimes took on the hallmarks of repression (for example: the complete set of Cage's *Freeman Etudes* in the rendition of Irvine Arditti). The artists of Liquid Room accentuated the difference in mode of listening, citing in the program notes Peter Szendy's rhetorical question:

“And once again we can ask ourselves whether the vaunted total [structural] hearing isn't really a form of deafness on the part of the listener. Listening without the least deviation, without ever being distracted by the noises of life – is that even listening at all? Mustn't listening permit certain shifts in focus?”

In the expansive space of the Darmstadium, four stages were arranged facing the four corners of the globe, while in the middle stood a mixing table and the sound engineers' stations. The audience took their places on portable cardboard seats in the space between the four stages and the sound engineers. Constantly changing sound vectors, flowing from different – and sometimes several – directions, immediately obliged the audience to become mobile.

It is difficult to reconstruct all twenty works performed at the Darmstadium in their detailed structural and aesthetic properties. The idea of Liquid Room's artists did not consist, however, in dividing up, differentiating or pigeonholing music. The artists created a space which in and of itself became a work. The diversity of the elements forming it (among them, compositions by Clinton McCallum, Magnus Lindberg, John Cage, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, Benjamin de la Fuente, Alvin Lucier, Eva Reiter, Jennifer Walshe, Leopold Hurt, Larry Polansky, Alexander Schubert et al.) yielded a surprising unity of musical idea. In Liquid Room, stylistic, genre and generational boundaries have dissolved. Classical composition, musical conceptualism, postmodernism and experimentalism, minimalism and maximalism, with an edgy avant-garde rock as a finale, turned the concert into a total sensual and intellectual experience. This kind of 'experiments' with a different mode of listening, as well as a different, non-obvious contextualization of music, open up one's perception to new experiences and sensations; they permit one to perceive the subtle relationships in art and enjoy it more fully.

Where did the Belgians get their ideas; where does their musical vitality come from? This year's Festival and Courses for New Music in Darmstadt showed that today, they are a force to be reckoned with. Belgium is growing into an important center of contemporary music which, in the future, will have yet many surprises for us.

INSTRUMENTS

Paul Craenen

FOR NEW EARS

Live electronics, movement sensors, new interfaces and instruments: we can no longer imagine contemporary music composed or improvised without them. And yet in ordinary music education they still only play a minor role, if any. The possibilities offered by new instrumental technologies today are hardly broached in the education on offer to children and amateurs. When they do crop up, it is mainly outside the musical curriculum under alternative names such as sound art, sound de-

sign or media art. The growing attention paid to such disciplines is praiseworthy. However, their emancipation weakens the need to consider new instrumental approaches within existing music education programmes. It is far from unthinkable that musical sound explorers of the future are more likely to be guided towards new, autonomous disciplines that keep a safe distance from the musical canon. Conversely, splitting into new specialisations entails the risk that future generations of sound or media artists will no longer come into contact with musical expertise.

This is what makes it worthwhile to rethink the position of the musical instrument in arts education as a whole, across disciplinary borders and styles. First and foremost, we need to analyse the way present-day music education thinks about instruments. My point of reference for this is Flemish part-time arts education (the official, state-subsidised schools providing non-compulsory arts education to children and adults, called Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs and abbreviated to DKO). This is where the vast majority of amateurs and pre-professionals receive musical training in Flanders. Then I will investigate what space might be found in the music education of the future for new instrumental approaches and technologies that are already commonplace in today's composed or improvised music.

LEARNING MUSIC

Ask beginning musicians why they have enrolled in the DKO and you are bound to hear about musical instruments: they want to learn to play the guitar, or the saxophone, or another of the instruments on offer. With young children the choice has sometimes not yet been made, but for older students the desire to learn music is usually embodied in an instrument that is immediately familiar to everyone: a characteristic sound, the way it is played, a musical genre. People go to music school to learn music, but above all to learn to play an instrument. Composing and improvising can also be motivations, but most people only feel that desire after several years, once they have instrumental training behind them. Hence learning to compose usually means learning to make music for an array of familiar instruments. Consequently we can state that instrumental identity and idiomatic playing culture precede musical creation at the DKO. Music education mirrors musical culture here. Despite certain beliefs about music as a universal language or an abstract art form, it is generally very difficult to think about music without immediately imagining the sound of very real instruments or mentally seeing them played.

After all, a musical instrument is more than just a means of making musical ideas audible. It is the carrier of a cultural identity and embodies both a characteristic sound profile and a model of sound interaction (striking, bowing, strumming, blowing etc.) In this capacity, standardised music instruments act as inspiring models that constantly challenge and delineate musical creativity.

If we link this train of thought back to music education, the question arises as to whether musical instruments are only seen as a tool within broad-based musical schooling, or whether they are the lens and mould by means of which students learn to think about and experience music. Most righteous musicians and educators will defend the view that it is ultimately about the music, not the instruments. And yet it is abundantly clear that both in terms of the time invested and curriculum contents, the structure of current music education is for the most part constructed around the nature and requirements of a limited range of historical instruments that require craftsmanship to master. Other optional or compulsory subjects such as reading music, music theory or general musical culture are usually seen as supporting elements, necessary or not, to the core of the music education business: learning to play one instrument, or a couple at most. The students themselves certainly take this view.

We seldom consider the impact that the presence of instruments in music education has on the musical development of students. It is only in confrontation with new technologies and alternative instrumental approaches that it becomes clear how thoroughly musical thinking has become entangled with the characteristics of a historic set of instruments.

THE INSTRUMENTAL LENS

A strengthening factor in the link between standardised instruments and musical curricula is that the instruments learned have a stable identity, both in terms of their construction and the techniques used to play them. This stability enables

a long-term learning process with a powerful motivational structure: students have to practice for years before they really get the hang of an instrument, but from the outset they are surrounded by inspiring, living and breathing role models, beginning with their teachers. The latter provide living proof that practising hard can lead to success over time.

Moreover, the instruments in the DKO are almost without exception those of the nineteenth century or earlier, with a correspondingly well-developed performance culture and an idiomatic repertoire. There are a few borderline cases such as accordions and drums, and there are the electric versions of guitars and keyboards, but even these are generally – and sometimes even more emphatically – taught in a way that emphasises craft and the conservation of culture. The combination of stable, standardised instruments and the idiomatic repertoire that surrounds them creates an environment into which you need to be initiated by experienced experts, by ‘masters’ who teach you all the virtuoso tricks of the trade and special fingerings, and help you to decipher hidden musical messages. Instrumental culture provides numerous points of reference for listening and playing techniques, making it easier to recognise the progress you are making. Consequently it is an environment well-adapted to placing markers of educational achievement, to progressive paths of learning, competitions and examinations.

The progress made by a student in classical instrument lessons can be measured thanks to the stability of the instrument. If we compare musical results after one year of musical schooling with what the student can present at the end of the course, it will be clear that they have come a very long way. However the instrument itself will have remained more or less the same. Over the years it takes to learn an instrument (in the DKO it currently takes nine years under normal circumstances), it is therefore only the instrument player who adapts. A bird’s eye view of that learning process could resemble a slow bending and ‘tuning’ of the student’s body to the form of

the instrument, until ultimately, in the best case, the instrument is experienced as an extension of the body.

When students choose an instrument, they are also opting for a specific musical repertoire. An instrument does not only embody a typical sound, but a specific musical style as well, a musical identity. That is not just a question of cultural developments, but also a result of the interaction between cultural preferences, physical limitations and technological developments. Mechanical, acoustic instruments have certain sound and playing possibilities built into them, but above all they exclude many others. This is expressed in an idiomatic repertoire with a larger or smaller range of variations in style, depending on the instrument and the culture in which it developed. Pianists are the most richly endowed, whereas recorder players or accordionists usually have to make do with a much more limited repertoire of early, folk or contemporary music. Given that in Flemish music education, playing two or more instruments is a privilege for the most talented students, choosing an instrument has an enormous impact on the development of children’s musical frame of reference. Each instrument gives a specific perspective, a narrow focus through which children learn to listen to and ‘speak’ the language of music. Both hearing and musical imagination are to a great extent developed by playing an instrument oneself (including the voice).

From a contemporary perspective, then, it is strange that instrumental education pays so much attention to the analysis of learning problems, adapted working methods and practice schedules but that the musical instrument itself is rarely a subject of discussion. Technical problems in music performance have to be solved from the user’s side, by the student, for whom suitable exercises need to be provided. It is clear that such an attitude is completely at odds with current social developments in which technology is becoming more and more human, turning invisible and adapting itself to the possibilities, limitations and preferences of individual humans.

It is a development that severely erodes the bedrock of long-term, dedicated practising.

Of course people in music education are well aware of this shift in the bedrock. This is why the repertoire is adjusted more and more often. An enormous market has (once again) grown up in musical transcriptions and adaptations that circumvent the problems caused by less adept bodies and can give the players of historical instruments the experience of 'real music' with as little effort as possible. This amateur-friendly market is understandably mainly oriented towards arrangements of film music and pop music that are easy on the ear, plus a limited number of hits from the classical repertoire. Simplified arrangements of classical music still encounter resistance from instrument teachers educated in a tradition where respect for the repertoire remains important. The result is that the 'iron repertoire' becomes more and more exclusively accessible to the few students who can manage the necessary perseverance.

Things are perhaps even worse with twentieth century or contemporary composed music. Schönberg and Webern in any case have never got a foot through the door of music school, but the same applies to most contemporary composers – unless they are active in lighter music. The reasons are obvious: not only does the sound profile of contemporary composed music usually fail to resonate with the world students live in, but most instrumental music that we can classify as 'contemporary composed' music is simply unplayable for amateurs, even advanced amateurs. This had also been the case earlier, in the Romantic virtuoso tradition, but in contemporary composed music, production is oriented towards professional performers in an extremely exclusive way.

Nonetheless, there is one contemporary element that does sometimes pop up in instrumental teaching and which is strongly associated for many people with instrumental experimentation in musical modernity: what are called 'extended

techniques': percussive sounds on string instruments, clusters on keyboards, preparations for the piano and guitars, noise and multiphonics on wind instruments etc.: everything that might be considered 'improper use' of the instrument.

EXTENDED TECHNIQUES

In the context of music education, extended techniques can shatter or nuance quite a few instrumental dogmas and prejudices in a direct, physical manner. In traditional music education ideals of sound production can be highly compelling and even take on mythical allures. Just think of the cultivation of a certain 'touch' for pianists or voicing for singers. The potential of extended techniques for instrumental music education is therefore not only an extension of sound possibilities, but above all in the possibility to put instrumental culture temporarily aside. It can be a liberating impulse for the student to experience their instrument with 'new ears', to discover its sonic potential by groping and experimenting.

Extended techniques can be integrated into instrument lessons right from the start. Playing clusters on a keyboard instrument is an obvious starting point for the beginner piano student whose motor coordination is not yet highly developed. The same applies to producing noise sounds on a wind instrument or scraping, scratching sounds on a string instrument by varying the bow pressure. Although only a few instrument teachers will encourage such playing techniques in beginners who have not yet got the 'correct' position and tone under control, there are enough arguments for allowing 'incorrect' playing techniques in instrument lessons from early on and for approaching them from their own sound potential. The conscious exploration of alternative playing techniques leads to a better understanding of and feel for the instrument, a more direct and physical comprehension of the relationship between physical effort and tone production, and in this way can even reinforce feeling for conventional tone production.

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The relationship between physical input and sound production remains linear with extended techniques. Change in tone quality can only be achieved by changing the motor input. From an educational perspective, the extended techniques approach does not therefore need to differ fundamentally from 'normal' tone production. The tone possibilities of extended techniques are equally within the physical limitations and possibilities of the instrument and player, which also means that they are just as susceptible to canonisation and optimisation. Just as with the production of a 'good tone', there are better and less efficient ways of playing noise on a cello or getting a clarinet to produce a specific multiphonic.

And yet the context of alternative tone production usually allows far more room for variation and experimentation. And this is precisely where the educational relevance of extended techniques in instrumental education may lie: the discovery of alternative sound possibilities demands an adventurous attitude of students. It takes them into sound terrain with other norms and values, often leaving them far more reliant on themselves. Furthermore, the sound results of an alternative playing technique may be different from one instrument to another (more than with conventional tone production for which the instrument has been optimally constructed). This means that extended techniques also require closer listening to the relationship between action and sound result. This need for attention to the intimate interaction between the instrument and player is where a task for the teacher lies.

Extended techniques will never replace the 'proper' way of playing the instrument. The desire mainly to make the instrument sound the way its construction intended, to produce a sound that is already familiar to students from their musical culture, will usually remain stronger than the desire to discover new ways of playing. Pleading for a better integration of extended techniques into instrument teaching does not therefore necessarily imply equal attention to normal and alternative tone production. It is in relation to existing instrumental culture that ex-

tended techniques can prove their worth. Above all, extended techniques provide access to musical terrain where factors other than the familiar tonal, melodic and harmonic parameters play an important role. They open the ears to the timbre and sound envelope and stimulate consciousness of the relationship between action and sound result. In doing so they increase students' sensitivity to parameters that have gained enormously in importance in contemporary composed music. Examples from twentieth-century music literature (such as John Cage's compositions for prepared piano or Helmut Lachenmann's *Musique Concrète Instrumentale*) can help make it clear to students that alert ears and an investigative attitude can make musical creativity possible beyond the traditional ways of playing. Extended techniques can be introduced through existing compositions, but mainly provide enticing work material in improvisation or creation. Making room for other forms of tone production also belongs within any ambition to give improvisation and exploration of aural, non-score-based approaches a more important role in the instrumental learning process than is usually the case, and to do so right from the start.

LIVE ELECTRONICS

It is only a small step from extended techniques to connecting the acoustic instrument to 'live electronics'. Applications for live electronics are seldom covered in traditional music education. Although they have been commonplace for decades in contemporary music practice, the transition to amateurs has not occurred. Yet there are few obstacles beyond the technical equipment and the knowledge required of the teacher. In theory it is possible to work with live electronics right from the first year without students needing much extra knowledge. A contact microphone on the instrument body linked to a sound card and a laptop with appropriate software is enough to make the acoustic instrument the source of potentially unlimited sound effects of all kinds: from adding reverb, echo

and distortion to the whole array of electronic techniques: modulations, granulation techniques, (live) sampling etc.

Just as with extended techniques, the familiar instrument can remain the starting point for live electronics. The advantage of live electronics here is that the way they are played does not necessarily need to be adapted in order to explore new areas of sound. They can also be very simply applied to playing techniques that have already been acquired. The main obstacle to using live electronics in music education is not down to the student, but the teachers. Electronic sound techniques are absolutely not part of the basic training of music teachers.

And there is another problem that is intuitively felt. Classically trained musicians who come into contact with live electronics for the first time sometimes experience them as ballast, a technological intervention that distances them from their instrument. You don't need to look far for the cause: live electronics force a 'black box' between the instrument and speakers, thus theoretically – and often also in practice – disrupting the direct relationship between action and resulting sound. Linking live electronics to acoustic instruments therefore requires a clear consciousness of the impact of electronics on the relationship between performance and sound result. In the last decade the youngest generation of composers and musicians have greatly developed this consciousness. The one-sided associations that some classical musicians still make with live electronics as an alienating environment that ties musicians up in complex wirings and takes away all their musical freedom (think of the use, all but archaic now, of 'click tracks' intended to help performers synchronise with a tape or electronics) are nowadays outdated.

Live electronics even have didactic potential to increase consciousness of the relationship between action and sound result. For example, the student's sound input can be used directly to control electronic sound effects. Sound itself, rather than extra hardware, buttons or mixers, can be used as the interface. Audio software can be programmed so that a specific sound

effect only occurs when the input reaches a specific volume, pitch and duration. The intensity or modulation of digital sound processing can be controlled in real time by the input of an acoustic instrument. The extraction of relevant musical patterns out of acoustic data is a feature not yet available in commercial software programs, but even that will come increasingly within reach of the average music user in the near future, with the result that even more intuitive forms of musical interaction become possible.

Admittedly, even in new music such an approach is still far from established, but the technological possibilities and computing power are available today. Already some composers are experimenting with interactive software that does not limit the freedom of the musicians but instead reacts flexibly to the musician's creativity and allows him or her to generate different results each time within the same environment. Digitally controlled interaction models can stimulate listening and musical interaction between musicians in collective improvisations. Live electronics have the potential to become a musically 'intelligent' factor that supports and inspires performances and provides compositional form.

It is clear that there is still a long way to go before such use of live electronics can find its way into music education. The example of the model where the student's sound input is used to control the electronics (the principle of sound as interface), does show, however, that live electronics do not necessarily form an insurmountable obstacle for the students themselves. From a technological perspective, all the possibilities are available to develop educational instruments that can intuitively provide direct inspiration for the student's playing and listening through aural feedback.

Up to now we have concentrated on new instrumental approaches and technologies where the presence of standardised music instruments is still the starting point. The greatest benefit of integrating live electronics into music education is elsewhere, however. Live electronics create a context in which the entirety of sound production can

be understood as an input-output model. Unlike traditional instrument teaching where practice is always aimed at optimising motor input in relation to auditory feedback, what is between input and output becomes important here: how the instrument is connected to the speaker and what sound processes occurs between them. This intermediary area becomes a free playground for the student's design and conceptual thinking, where the familiar relationships between physical input and sound output can be completely rethought. Obvious relationships can be turned upside down: small actions can have big effects and vice versa. Playing very short, isolated notes on the instrument can generate long drawn-out drones or, conversely, long sustained notes can cause percussive sound effects.

As soon as you give students the freedom to intervene in the familiar sound relationships of a mechanical, acoustic environment, theatricality, a sense of space, audiovisual aspects of musical interaction and even humour come into view. This broad application potential makes it clear that live electronics do not have to be restricted to technologically-minded students. However, learning to work with live electronics does require specific technical training that is generally lacking in musical education for amateurs today. The integration of live electronics requires a structurally extended range of courses in electronic sound techniques and digital sound processing, and also greater attention to the basic scientific principles of acoustics and perception.

INSTRUMENTAL DESIGN

Once the student is familiar with an input-output model over which he or she has full control, it is possible to consider not only the interface between the instrument and output but also the sound source itself that is required to generate input. And then it soon becomes clear that the acoustic instrument, with all its finesse and historically evolved characteristics, forms a fairly arbitrary source of sound in combination with live electronics, that does not necessarily

produce richer or musically more interesting results than any other objects that can be used to produce sound. The neutrality of the digital medium means that just about any form of input, any form of information can be translated into a musical context. Game technologies (Wii, kinect etc.) nowadays provide the tools for converting physical movements directly into sound, just as all kinds of sensors (heat, infra-red, brainwaves etc.) can provide controlling signals for sound production.

And there we make the ultimate U-turn: the flexibility of the digital medium puts the definition of both input and output up for debate. As soon as the input model can become part of musical creation processes as well, we will be dealing with a learning process that may incorporate aspects of instrumental design (both in the technical aspects of sound design and interaction concept) as well as live electronics, musical interaction, composition, design or choreography. An open instrumental learning process in which all these aspects can be exposed to the student's creativity demands a completely new pedagogical and didactic framework. An important point of attention is that there is no longer any question of a hierarchical learning process where the instrument, repertoire and educational targets are necessarily set in advance, as they are in traditional instrument teaching. Hence the students may come into contact with numerous input models over the course of their education, instead of devoting years to learning to play a single instrument. This clearly has important consequences for the results of such a learning process. As we stated above, in traditional music teaching the stability of the mechanical, acoustic instrument forms an important factor in the development of progressive, quantifiable paths of learning. From a traditional instrumental perspective, giving up that stability may potentially lead to a loss of efficiency: the results of open instrumental learning processes are far less clear, and relatively less virtuosity will be achieved (overall less time is spent practising with one type of input), the path followed from the choice of input model to

a musically relevant result is complex, and the chances of success are not certain in advance. One does not build systematically and step-by-step on previously gained skills and knowledge as in conventional instrumental education, but nonetheless connection points are constantly possible with a wide range of technical, artistic or interdisciplinary skills.

However, it goes without saying that it is not possible to work in all areas at once when one is learning. Taking an undefined instrumental model as a starting point requires choices and limitations of the playing area depending on the target group and time invested. A musical learning process with young children can, for example, begin with the children themselves searching for appropriate sound objects and ways of making a noise with things. The interface between input and output can remain the responsibility of the teacher here, who can optimise the translation of input into output by observing the preferences and talents of the children. Some children might opt for small, concentrated manipulations (for example using objects amplified with contact microphones), others for a large action as their input model (e.g. movements of the arms and legs picked up by sensors). It is then up to the teacher's initiative to investigate with the children how these different actions can be converted into sound. After that the improvising, experimenting and composing group can aim for a musical result that is almost literally tailored to each child.

The greatest obstacle to such an approach is, again, the schooling of the teachers themselves. Insight into acoustics, electronics, motor coordination, audiovisual and theatrical effects, along with the ability to manage musical improvisation and creation: this might be an almost impossible task for the average music teacher. It should be clear that we are talking about a completely new approach here, that only has long-term chances of success when talents can be pooled. The multidisciplinary nature of the learning processes described above implies support from a team

rather than an individual instrument teacher. The question of how such a framework can be structurally implemented in the DKO in a realistic and feasible way is an issue for discussion. In any case, it is clear that a redefinition of musical learning goals will be required if we want to do more than look backwards, and instead to arm ourselves for the music of the future: music that, by definition, we do not yet know. Attention to the role and place of the instrument in music education seems to be vital in this debate. Numerous tendencies indicate that instrument design in the broad sense of the word is occupying an increasingly important place in the thinking of new music makers and sound artists. If music education wishes to connect to these developments, people need to become more aware that learning music does not need to be limited to learning to play a piece well or to place notes and rhythms correctly above and beside each other, but that the entirety of sound production right up to the design of the instrument can become part of the artistic learning process.

SIX BELGIAN COMPOSERS

Maarten Beirens & Maarten Quanten

ON MUSIC TODAY



fter a turbulent 20th century full of innovations, interesting turns, currents and evolutions, new music is no longer the self-evident, prestigious and trend-setting art that it may have

been once. Aesthetic premises have become more and more diverse (and in some cases even explicitly antagonistic), 'classically' composed music has to find its position in a landscape in which music genres that are not-composed and not-'classical' become increasingly prominent. The making of aesthetic choices, the assimilation of influences or the development of 'a musical language of its own' has become a more complex question.

Technological evolutions offer new ways to generate musical materials, to manipulate and use them, concurrently influencing the mode of thinking about the constituent elements of music. In a contemporary praxis which ranges across

the whole gamut from laptop virtuoso to author of symphonic scores the profile of a 'composer' becomes ever more versatile. Connected to this, the question of the commitment of the composer comes to the fore: what is the societal relevance of a commitment to the creation of music? There, too, the whole field is open, from withdrawal into autonomous beauty and 'art for art's sake' to active involvement in contemporary societal developments and challenges.

With these considerations in mind we approached a handful of Belgian composers with a view to picking their brain about their opinions, dreams, complaints and desires concerning these themes. In other words: What does composing mean to them in Flanders or Wallonia at the beginning of the 20st century?

From the answers of the composers always emerged by and large the three great themes

that are distinctive of composing in the early 21st century. However, the attitude vis-à-vis these themes is very varied, which may be small wonder for those who are familiar with the wide range of stylistic characteristics that typify the compositions of these six divergent composers. If you expect to find an unequivocal image of 'the' Belgian/Walloon/Flemish music, you will be disappointed. It does not look like stylistic chalk lines or even common underlying aesthetic principles with a kind of 'national identity' inherent in them are applicable to this generation at all. But perhaps this is exactly what characterizes the young generation of Belgian composers: a diversity of stylistic and aesthetic points of contact, a field of possibilities where a young composer, without the constraints of coercive dogmas or musical aprioris, is in a position to develop his own frame of reference and to prove his mettle by doing so.

Cédric Dambrain (b. 1979)

Studies

- Electroacoustic composition at the Royal Conservatory of Mons with Annette Vande Gorne
- Courses in computer-aided composition (Centre Acanthes, IRCAM)
- Courses in real-time processing (Benjamin Thigpen)

Recent compositions

Home (dance production with Louise Vanneste), Tales of the bodiless (music theatre with Eszter Salamon), plq for 4 guitars, drums & live electronics

Performed by

Ictus, Françoise Berlanger, Arne Deforce, Zwerm, Bart Maris

And also

human-machine interface developer

Stefan Prins (b. 1979)

Studies

- Electrotechnical engineer (specialization: applied physics & photonics)
- Composition at the Royal Flemish Conservatory in Antwerp with Luc Van Hove
- Sonology at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague
- PhD in composition at Harvard University under guidance of Chaya Czernowin (2011-2016)

Recent compositions

Infiltrationen (Memory Space #4), Fremdkörper #3 (mit Michael Jackson), Piano Hero #1-2, Hybridae

Performed by

Klangforum Wien, ChampdAction, Nadar Ensemble, Ictus, Nickel Ensemble, Ensemble Mosaik, Zwerm Electric Guitar Quartet, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Matthias Koole, Mark Knoop

And also

- Composer in residence, live-electronics specialist and member of the artistic board of Nadar ensemble

SOCIETY

The relationship between the arts – including contemporary music – and the surrounding society has always been ambiguous. Of course a purely musical level can be discerned in music – a major third is a major third and that's it – and certainly for more abstract compositions it is hard to conceive how they can concretely relate to society at all. Even so, the composer takes a stand in that society. What is the locus of a composer who does nothing else but 'creating beauty' in a society where productivity and economic return are valued high? What are the impressions and the impulses like that inspire a composer; is it possible for a piece of music to be to a certain extent a reflection of the world in which we live; and is it a duty of a composer to deal critically with this? Even though some of the composers interviewed cherish very pronounced vantage points about the social dimension of their artistic work, the complex question of the societal legitimizing of contemporary music keeps provoking questions and, perhaps, also doubts.

"A difficult point is the societal relevance of music", **Daan Janssens** says. "The crux is the term relevance. Is new music relevant? How can it acquire this relevance? Probably society can keep going without new music. Admittedly a couple of hundred people in Flanders would become very unhappy. But in economic terms this number is negligible..." Janssens also mentions the curious position of so much contemporary music that reaches only a relatively small audience, while its intrinsic attraction should ideally appeal to a much larger public. "New Music often has a much more numerous potential public than it often actually gets access to. It seems to me that a piece by Alexander Schubert such as the one we recently played (with the Nadar Ensemble) in Darmstadt would in all likelihood be as successful on a cutting edge rock stage than during the Darmstädter Ferienkurse. So there are still many opportunities to be explored in that respect."

Bram Van Camp links this up with the idea that the status and position of a composer (and by extension a musician) have become totally different from the situation in the past. "Societal changes in the past century have resulted in the impracticability (with only a few exceptions) to double up in the composer-performer combination that was once so self-evident. Only the well-paid jobs that a performer can secure (soloist, conductor) enable him to subsist on the basis of those fees and to save *sufficient* (hardly paid) time for composing purposes." For him this is not an economical question, but also a limiting condition for the *métier* of the composer: "I stick to my guns that a composer should be a performer, or at least play an instrument to the extent of understanding the mechanisms of the rehearsal process, of differentiating between the feasible and the impracticable in his composition process. However, it is not an enabling condition anymore to perform on stage every week with a view to achieving results as a composer. What is really needed, though, is the restoration of a better rapport with the public to make up for the increasing absence of the composer-performer." With a view to counteracting the isolation that the contemporary composer so often ends up in, Van Camp recommends first and foremost a role as educator: "Exactly to secure the privilege of absolute freedom – both financially and artistically – a pedagogical function is ideal for the composer as well as for the world surrounding him. Composers should not adapt their style to the public, but the public has to be educated in such a way that it is eager to listen to new music. Therefore the societal function of the composer is to be found in education. Not only at the conservatories, but even more so at music schools and in general education, where our future concert audience has to be prepared by strong composing personalities inspired by clarifying passion.

On the one hand this societal duty is not only essential for the survival of our discipline, on the other hand it is a matter of integrity to provide a return to the same community that subsidizes us with the taxpayer's money."

Whereas Van Camp and Janssens boldly establish a link between composer and public, other composers are more prudent in their statements about societal and certainly political dimensions in their work. “Moreover, I don’t feel that it is the role of the artist to wonder about his utility or his function in society. Such concerns could even interfere with the creative activity”, as **Cédric Dambrain** explains that in his view what lies outside the creative musical domain is not necessarily an important source of solicitude.

“With my music I attempt in the first place to develop a coherent musical discourse”, **Annelies Van Parys** says about the primordial artistic dimension as her driving force. “Art for me is essentially apolitical. It tries to transcend its era.” Nevertheless the potential critical dimension of music is a possibility: “This does not imply that music cannot *concurrently* be a critical reflexion on its epoch. All the same, the most important thing is for music to be as good as possible. A good message with weak music is no interesting match. As you can guess, I’m not a barricade hopper.”

Much more outspoken in that critical dimension are **Gilles Gobert** and **Stefan Prins**. The former firmly maintains: “It is our role in society to suggest new ways of thinking, acting, expressing ourselves, of interpreting the world in which we live, of proposing kinds of music that are today unprecedented, if not impossible.” According to Gobert contemporary music must encourage reflection: “It is vitally important both to offer pleasure and concurrently to unsettle people with uncertainties, alternatives, contesting, questioning with a view to causing the audiences, the listeners, the spectators, to confront themselves with the essential questions about the meaning of our contemporary society. (...) As far as I am concerned, composing, like in all previous periods for that matter, creating today is above all feeling the pulse of one’s own epoch. It means refraining from rejecting the contemporary era and the art forms of today, and capitalizing instead on whatever our epoch offers in terms of formidable sonorous and visual

- Composer in residence of ChampdAction
- Performer of improvised music (laptop), a.o. with collectief reFLEXible; an ensemble that focuses exclusively on free improvised or instant composed music

Gilles Gobert (b. 1971)

Studies

- Composition at the Royal Conservatory of Mons with Claude Ledoux
- Courses with Lachenmann, Murail, Lindberg and Harvey
- Musical data processing at the IRCAM

Recent compositions

Pièce pour piano et électronique; Pièce pour piano, percussions et dispositif électronique; Pièce pour deux voix, flûte, violoncelle, piano et électronique; Pièces pour duo de laptop

Performed by

Quatuor Danel, Musiques Nouvelles, Nao Momitani, Arne Deforce, Izumi Okubo, Kwartludium+ ensemble, Syntax ensemble, Nahandove, Tallin Sinfonietta

And also

- Professor in electronic composition at the Royal Academy of Music of Liege
- Lecturer in composition and computer-aided composition at the the Royal Conservatory of Mons
- Musical director of ensemble OI\I and member of the laptop duo KNAPP

Daan Janssens (b. 1983)

Studies

- Composition the Royal Conservatory Ghent with Frank Nuyts
- Lessons and masterclasses with Godfried-Willem Raes, Filip Rathé, Peter Eötvös and Luca Francesconi
- Conducting lessons and seminars with Ensemble Modern, Johannes Kalitzke, Marco Angius and Lucas Vis

adventures, to be unceasingly renewed and rethought." Stefan Prins, too, sees the critical involvement of the artist with the surrounding society as a real responsibility, taking his cue from Marshall McLuhan:

"Now that our specialising technologies have created a whole new set of new environments, one becomes aware of art as an 'anti-environment' (...) giving us the tools to become conscious of the environment itself. Because (...) people never are aware of the basic rules of structure and culture of their own environment. Art as 'anti-environment' is more than ever a tool to practice our perception and judgement. Art as an object to consume without the purpose to practice our perception, is as ridiculous and snobbish as it has always been."

For Prins one of the keys for this purpose is the use of technology and new media: "I am with McLuhan when he differentiates between art that "challenges perception" and art that doesn't do that (entertainment?), and when he says that it is the responsibility of the artist to produce art that is not merely a (sophisticated) 'consumption product', but art that instead builds an "anti-environment". The latter kind of art makes our technological environment, albeit almost become invisible, perceptible again, questioning it and subverting it: art that in other words engages in direct interaction with the world in which we live."

AESTHETICS

If topics such as the position of a composer in society and the role played in it by him or her, whether it be active or not, yield already a varied series of stands, this is even more the case with the question about aesthetic premises. The connection with the tradition(s) from the past, the options of composition techniques, idioms, instruments, playing techniques and technology are perhaps greater than ever. As a consequence *aesthetic* choices are often personal choices, but for each of the composers that we confronted with this question it transpired this was a problem that they deal with very thoughtfully, though also in different ways. "From an aesthetic point of view I believe in composing on the basis of personal fascination with sound", says Bram Van Camp. "No matter how broadly this can be defined, it remains a personal fascination that only the composer himself has to account for individually." However, this does not imply that sound is merely an autonomous given, for – as he indicates – the relationship to tradition keeps playing a crucial role: "A composer has to be serious about his discipline and its tradition, realizing that transcending all styles and periods some universal principles have persisted (principles such as layering, dealing with limited materials, the transmission of a core message – whether abstract or not...). A composer only makes himself master of these principles through a solid training in music history, analysis, harmony and counterpoint. Meantime it has been made possible to concurrently take composition along with the course in harmony and counterpoint, a good evolution indeed. Another asset is that electronic music composition is offered as part of the coursework.

However, a drawback is the diminishing importance of the classes in harmony and counterpoint in terms of quality and contact hours, even to the extent of being considered irrelevant by the contemporary composer. Only a thorough, in-depth knowledge of these fundamentals can enable a composer to transcend the 'old rules' and to grasp the great story that the

composition of music is all about. The training in harmony and counterpoint deals essentially with ‘learning to think musically’, not with the making of pastiche compositions. Only after sound formative years including writing and counterpoint courses will a composer be in a position to deal with the endless possibilities and stimuli that we are inundated with today. It seems to me that this basic option will make a difference in the long run, separating the wheat from the chaff.”

For Daan Janssens too a conscious relationship to the past and to tradition belongs to the core of composing: “Also today a composer is obliged to make choices. The most evident choice is perhaps the stylistic one. A composer chooses to use some elements, or not. Basically such decisions can be seen as *political* or at least *ideological*.” To deal with these choices in active and intelligent ways is one of the crucial challenges for a composer today.

“The twentieth century has generated an abundance of new musical techniques”, Janssens specifies. “These techniques are certainly not a reservoir a composer can take his cue from in an unbridled way. Because everything refers to something else: a period (scratching on string instruments à la Lachenmann), a musical style... As a composer you have to be aware of your choices of your materials, of the intrinsic references and of its significance for music history. I’m afraid this consciousness is often absent, which may result in some techniques coming across as new music clichés. Something becomes a cliché if it refers to a style or a composer without being properly put in a framework, something is pasted into a new context without being integrated, so the pasting remains conspicuous.”

The question is also whether a composer can elaborate on elements with a past inherent in them. “And what’s more, the ‘testing of materials’ which was on top of the checklist in the modernist project has been largely completed today”, Stefan Prins says. “At least as far as the traditional instruments are concerned. Of course there are still new playing techniques, instrumental preparations or combinations conceivable,

Recent compositions

(Paysages – études) IV & V, (Douze écrits), (trois études scénographiques), Les Aveugles

Performed by

Spectra Ensemble, Arsis4, Goeyvaerts string trio, Aton & Armide, Ensemble Orchestral Contemporain, Neue Vokalsolisten Stuttgart, Ensemble Musiques Nouvelles, VocaalLAB, Jean-Guihen Queyras, music theatre LOD

And also

- Principal conductor of Nadar Ensemble since 2006
- Research assistant at the University College Ghent (former Conservatory) since 2007

Annelies Van Parys (b. 1975)

Studied

- Composition at the University College Ghent, Royal Conservatory with Luc Brewaeys
- Masterclasses and seminars with Jonathan Harvey, Thierry Demey, Luca Francesconi, Jean-Baptiste Barrière, ...

Recent compositions

Second Symphony *Les Ponts* (orchestral), An Oresteia (music theatre), Drifting Sand (string trio), 5 Frammenti (vocal ensemble)

Performed by

Asko|Schönberg Amsterdam, Ensemble Recherche Freiburg, Spectra ensemble, SMCQ Montreal, Cantus Zagreb, NYNME New York, Sian Edwards, Otto Tausk, Brussels Philharmonic, Belgian National Orchestra

And also

- Teaching formal analysis and orchestration at the University College Brussels, dept. Royal Conservatory
- Honorary ambassador for the Ghent Royal Conservatory
- Laureate of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Arts and Sciences

but structurally speaking that project has been essentially completed since Lachenmann. The search for 'new materials' is to be found today in different areas, as the visual arts have already realized quite some time ago. The battlefields have shifted to the new media, to the new technologies, to new ways of dealing with information, imposing a new mode of making and handling art (and in the case of music: composing)."

But is the radical search for new and consequently as yet unheard material a necessity? Annelies Van Parys is very much aware of the specific style that she wants her music to align with: "As far as my musical language is concerned, I'm not a revolutionary. My language places itself in the direction of the spectral/French school. I am trying to connect to a tradition rather than toppling everything or fastening my teeth into the newest technologies, which I look at somewhat diffidently. On the one hand because they change with lightning speed (and consequently age equally rapidly), on the other hand because they easily get bogged down in tricks and some superficial 'cosmetics'."

As important as the composer's choice to align himself with certain traditions and idioms is the question about what his music wants to achieve. Daan Janssens does not beat about the bush in this respect: "The music that I write does not intend to impress musically (for example through virtuosity, radically new techniques and sounds, the creation of volume or a combination of these elements). In the first place I want the listeners to listen (in this respect I may be close to Nono's last phase): to listen to subtleties, minuscule sound shifts as well as 'references' both to other works by myself and by other composers." However, like with the question about the societal context there may be a danger of paralysis in thinking too much about the aesthetic question. Cédric Dambrain indicates how a radically different way of thinking can have a pleasantly liberating, creative effect: "I love to approach creation as if music never existed before. Like if someone told you: "There exists something called music, conceived on the basis of sounds and capable of generating terrific pleasure and

excitement." It's this type of creative energy and of pursuit that interests me. I believe that this 'primitivist' point of departure can produce the most surprising kinds of music, as well as the most speculative and authentic ones."

TECHNOLOGY

We have already mentioned the topic several times in passing: the many technological developments and the new media of the last decades have dramatically changed the possibilities for composers. Computer technology has brought electronic elements within easy reach. From traditional writing with pencil and paper for acoustic instruments to direct programming in Max/MSP (and everything in between): the opportunities are dazzling. But the opinions about what technology can offer intrinsically are widely divergent. Cédric Dambrain relativizes the function of technology as a panacea: "From this point of view, all the tools – whether new technologies or not – are interesting to use: I believe that a mixed piece can be extremely academic, while an acoustic piece can be gripping and brimming with inventiveness. Technology does not answer any question per se." But on the other hand the new technological possibilities result in a totally different way of dealing with musical materials, and by extension of thinking about music. Witness Gilles Gobert's statement: "Certainly technology is important in my work as a composer. The electro-acoustic techniques available today enable me to conceive instrumental music differently, 'playing the laptop' also put me in a position to re-think the traditional instrumental gestures." Moreover, Gobert says, this situation increases the composer's autonomy: "I feel more at liberty to compose for a reduced ensemble with electronics than for an orchestra, for example. To be sure, not because an orchestra would be less interesting, for it is a tool that still possesses an infinity of resources, but because the present socio-economic situation does not allow for the creation of really new pieces, I feel. Indeed, how could you justify taking some risks in the

knowledge that you will get only two or three rehearsals before the concert? Whereas for me taking risks (and consequently the courage to fail) is essential for making progress.”

While Gobert still approaches this question on the basis of the prior conditions of the classical music world in which the composer functions, Stefan Prins connects the embracing of technology to the function of social criticism mentioned already above. Direct interaction with the world in which we live presupposes interaction with the media that both reflect and shape the world. “Such interaction will be optimally facilitated by specific uses of those technologies (or their underlying concepts), as they shape our society today. In the world of the visual artists this is already the *modus operandi*. It is vitally important for an artist to engage in an active dialogue and confrontation with those technologies, to search for the ‘blind spots’ in those specific technologies, and to operate subsequently from that locus, the same way that a computer hacker uses the vulnerabilities of a system to send his virus, infecting the system. My artistic trajectory today can be put into that kind of framework. An important focus in my work targets the interaction and tension between humankind and technology, between reality and virtuality.” Technology is for Prins not a purpose for its own sake (as Gobert said too), but an existential means to maximally empower contemporary music to take up its critical function: “This way the artist can reclaim an individual freedom that (deterministic) technologies had screened off from him. By structurally and subversively engaging in the confrontation with the new technologies of today, the artist (hence also the composer) can demand again a societal relevance that had crumbled away during the past decades, because many composers were entrenched in a testing of materials which mainly referred to the past and to tradition.”

Bram Van Camp (b. 1980)

Studies

- Violin and Chamber Music at the Royal Flemish Conservatory of Antwerp
- Composition, analysis, counterpoint and fugue at the Royal Flemish Conservatory of Antwerp with Wim Henderickx
- Composition and conducting at the Conservatory of Amsterdam with Theo Loevendie

Recent compositions

The Feasts of Fear and Agony (after Paul Van Ostaijen), Improvisations for violin solo, Music for three instruments, Violin Concerto

Performed by

deFilharmonie (Royal Flanders Philharmonic), Hermes ensemble, Het Collectief, I Solisti del Vento, Hommages Ensemble, Wibert Aerts, Nikolaas Kende, Piet Van Bockstal

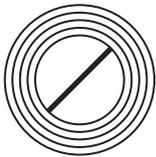
And also

- Composer in residence of Het Collectief and Hermes Ensemble
- Harmony and composition teacher at the music academies of Schoten and Merksem (Antwerp)
- Coaching young composers in composition projects

HUMUS

Klaas Coulembier & Rebecca Diependaele

ON TALL TREES AND FLOURISHING UNDERGROWTH



On 27 June 2011, oKo (Overleg Kunstenorganisaties), the official representative of the arts sector in Flanders, went to the Dutch embassy in Brussels with a bag of compost, seeds and a manifesto entitled *Solidariteit en potgrond* (solidarity and compost).¹ Their reason for doing so was the decision by the Dutch government to axe financing for the arts, cutting back by a good 200 million euros from 2013 onwards. *Solidariteit en potgrond* does not just express the bewilderment felt by artists and arts organisations in Flanders and Brussels towards our northern neighbours. Those who signed the manifesto emphasised that the planned savings would knock the ground from under the feet of the Dutch arts scene: the growth and development of high-quality arts would become impossible and there would no longer be opportunities for emerging artistic talent. They asked how successful and relevant art could be reaped if there was no prior investment in young artists and experiment. The

little that remains was compared to a handful of flowerpots on the patio, cut off from a genuinely flourishing garden where plants grow well.

But, in the meantime, how is the artistic ecosystem doing in Flanders? In this discussion, we will look at the places where new ideas can take root, grow and bloom, more specifically in the field of contemporary music. Which gaps are filled by new shoots of undergrowth and how do they relate to the tall trees? How vulnerable is the soil, and how can we ensure there is a rich, nutritious layer of humus?

ON TREES, UNDERGROWTH AND CLEARINGS IN THE FOREST

When we talk about the ecosystem of the new music landscape, we have to begin with composers. They are the ones who quite simply provide the necessary conditions for a new music landscape to be possible: new music. What particularly interests us in this discussion is the colourful

area between the most fundamental musical foundations and the presentation of a successful composition, played by top musicians, to a full house in a national arts centre. The undergrowth, let's say, that is closest to creation, that creeps into small spaces and reaches upwards to the light. When we look at the new music landscape in Flanders, we quickly realise that there are all sorts of brand new, young, small-scale and/or specialised initiatives that we can classify as undergrowth. The forms they take are as diverse as their aims and motivations. In the first part of our discussion, we would like to sketch this diversity without aiming for completion.

Festivals & concert organisers

Between the domains covered by the new music programmes in large venues and festivals, there is a large area of fallow ground that is being colonised with great enthusiasm by smaller initiatives. The lack (and even disappearance) of playgrounds for young ensembles – necessary places where they can gain experience and show off their abilities – has led to a handful of new festivals emerging in recent years. In 2009, a group of musicians (Toon Callier, Matthias Koole, Fabian Coomans, Sam Faes and Jutta Troch) organised the one-day What's Next festival in Brussels for the first time. The second edition of the Tik Tak Toe festival was in July 2012, an initiative by composer Frederik Neyrinck, cellist Seraphine Stragier and double bassist Tim Vandenberg held in an art gallery in Meigem (a village near Deinze in East Flanders). A different motivating force is behind the two-day Voortwaarts Maart/En avant Mars festival in Ghent. Composer Frank Nuyts has been running this festival since 2010 to provide a stage for aesthetics that get less of a response from the larger concert halls in Flanders, in this case mainly work that can be situated within certain manifestations of the post-modern and neo-styles. Moreover, not all the initiatives in this context are young. The Logos Foundation has provided a permanent stage for young, lesser-known, experimental or otherwise exceptional contemporary music since 1968. It is the only

concert organiser that presents a concert of new music almost every week, all year round, in a context that enthusiastically supports musicians (and audiences) in their journey of musical discovery. Despite its relatively small scale, this centre is home to a treasure trove of expertise and a network that extends around the world, making Logos – along with its radical artistic choice for the newest of the new – a crucial player within the ecosystem of new music in Flanders. The deep commitment of founders Godfried-Willem Raes and Moniek Darge and their team of young colleagues who currently run Logos can certainly be called exceptional. Finally there are also a few 'workplaces' in Flanders: small, specialised organisations aimed at offering composers, musicians and other artists a place and context to work on new concepts without the pressure of deadlines or the demand that their work result in a saleable production. In particular, the Brussels workplace Q-O2 deserves a mention here.

Ensembles

As already mentioned, we can state that composers form the core of musical humus. The same can be said of the musician in search of something exciting, new repertoire, a different approach, a place to develop and give shape to his or her ideas. Where musicians meet, ensembles spring up like mushrooms. It sometimes looks like an experimental jigsaw puzzle: collaborations and instrumentations are tried out, often in response to a specific occasion, and the best match is explored further. This leads to numerous new ensembles, often with a pronounced individual identity. In recent years, for example, we were able to make our acquaintance with ensembles including the string quartet Arsis4, chamber ensemble Besides, electronics duo Jasper&Jasper, mobile ensemble Nadar and electric guitar quartet ZWERM. What is striking about these ensembles (and the same often applies to established ensembles focusing on new music) is the close relationships they maintain with composers. New compositions are often the result of an intense collaboration. Compositions

are made to measure for specific musicians or groups. This phenomenon can (in parentheses) also have a negative aspect, when a composition is so closely linked to the style and characteristics of a musician that it is difficult for other performers to pick up. In any case, the personal interaction between composers and performers is a particularly good fertilizer for the layer of humus in the soil. The composer is confronted with the possibilities and impossibilities of the instruments, whereas the musician is challenged by the composer's possible and impossible ideas. The atmosphere of spontaneity, idealism and independence unique to this type of initiative is perhaps its greatest advantage.

New music and (new) media

In the world of music, the media plays an important role. But is that also the case if we concentrate on new music? Does the rainforest of contemporary art/music get coverage? If we go in search of new music, we have to admit there are few, if any, high trees to be seen. On Klara, the classical music radio station run by the public broadcasting service, new music only occupies a tiny place. The same applies to the other stations and channels of the Flemish Radio and Television service (VRT) (although its online culture platform Cobra.be has considerably increased its attention to the arts) and the regular written press: here, too, new music is only covered exceptionally. In the undergrowth, however (that is mainly flourishing online here), we do find various inspiring initiatives. Since as far back as 2006, the blog Oorgetuige has been bringing together all announcements for 'contemporary music and other new sounds' in a handy summary, with lavish amounts of background information and an impressive news archive. In this context the website Kwadratuur also deserves a mention: it focuses on innovative tendencies in all kinds of musical genres. Contemporary art music is regularly given space on this website in CD discussions, interviews, reviews and concert announcements. New music is sometimes presented in a few art magazines as well, although still less than other art forms and classical music (e.g. *Kunsttijdschrift*

Vlaanderen, Staalkaart). On the airways, it is remarkably enough two of the last free radio stations that give new music a fixed slot. Joris De Laet, a composer of exclusively electronic music, has had a fortnightly programme for years on the Antwerp radio phenomenon Radio Central, a station where new music is regularly featured on other programmes as well. In Leuven a group of musicology students make the weekly programme Kontakte about new music on Radio Scorpio. In media land new music seems to be almost entirely dependent on such initiatives.

IT TAKES MORE THAN A FEW TREES TO MAKE A FOREST

Without lowly undergrowth there are no tall trees. That message has been put across more than once in articles, opinion pieces and books published recently in the context of the social debate on the current cultural budget and the accompanying plans to make savings.² We have already mentioned the *Potgrond* manifesto, and Rudi Laermans recently wrote in the arts magazine *De Witte Raaf*³ (in a discussion of Bart Carons book *Niet de kers op de taart*⁴) that "the strength of the regulated cultural field is precisely in its pairing of a few large players with quite a lot of medium ones and very many small ones. If you cut back the latter hard to strengthen the middle level, you will inevitably take all the dynamics out of the Flemish culture system".⁵

The big players – concert halls, festivals, ensembles – are expected to play at international level, follow up major developments and contribute to shaping them. It is certainly no easy task to combine this mandate with major artistic risks: the hall needs to be filled and the audience expects undiminished quality, a form of security. The presence of small allotment gardeners is vital in this light to the artistic leaders of larger organisations. They offer the opportunity to see new ideas in practice, to discover what is 'ripe' for the large venues, to get inspiration. Various medium and large organisations implement a



noteworthy policy through which they become acquainted with and support new initiatives and ideas and thus help to ensure healthy connections between the different layers of the forest. The most common route is probably that of the larger venues which periodically make room for work by young composers – as is the case each year, for example, at the opening concert of TRANSIT – or established ensembles that offer upcoming talented composers a residency. The annual call for works by ISCM Flanders also offers young composers the opportunity to present their work to an (international) jury, which may give their careers a kick start. Beginning ensembles have various sources of support, including the Flemish Government. The Kunstenloket offers a wide range of practical advice, and a very simple application form allows ensembles or soloists to have a concert programme included in a government database under the name Podium (stage) or Nieuw Talent (new talent). The government then provides a contribution to the fee paid by concert organisers who are registered with this initiative. A somewhat more recent phenomenon could be described as ‘kangaroo ensembles’: established groups who take young musicians under their wing and coach them in artistic and organisational matters. B!indman’s method is a good example of this. They began as a saxophone quartet and, years ago, took on young counterparts who now stand squarely on their own feet as [sic]. Later a string quartet was added that grew up into Arsis4. In the meantime, B!indman has grown into a collective of four quartets (saxophones, strings, percussionists and singers). ChampdAction provided the electric guitar quartet ZWERM with the necessary care for a few years and has made a permanent place for young green shoots with LAbO (a two-year scheme for young creators in co-operation with Artesis University College and deSingel).

Finally, we should mention the alternative management bureau Cohort set up by Ictus. Cohort offers business and administrative support to young and small-scale organisations and ensembles active in new music, such as Aton’ et

Armide, Besides, Mangalam!, Nadar, What’s Next and ZWERM, but that is not all. Besides a shared back office, Cohort acts as a platform to exchange knowledge, experience and ideas.

A factor that may be even more important for a healthy ecosystem is care for those at the source: the composers. It has been a long time since composers worked for one patron or another. They are independent and emancipated, but in practice highly dependent on these very same organisations and ensembles – and so indirectly also on subsidy policy. Commissioning compositions and playing work by (young) local composers is therefore also an important part of the work of many organisations. However, the creation of new music is a good example of the ‘loss factor’ that is inherent in natural growth and development. A great many compositions are performed once and are then consigned to oblivion. Ensembles and organisers are the ones who decide which compositions will be performed again later and have the chance to become part of the canon. Their attentiveness and daring, each within their own field, are fundamental to the opportunities for young composers and new work to continue growing, and so also to the rich musical humus in which they too are rooted. Thus all the layers of the forest play their own role, in which each bears its own share of the responsibility for the growth of the music itself: small and specialised ensembles and centres that work with composers and provide presentation space, the government which finances (or helps to finance) compositions, major concert organisers and established ensembles that give composers and musicians attention, support and opportunities.

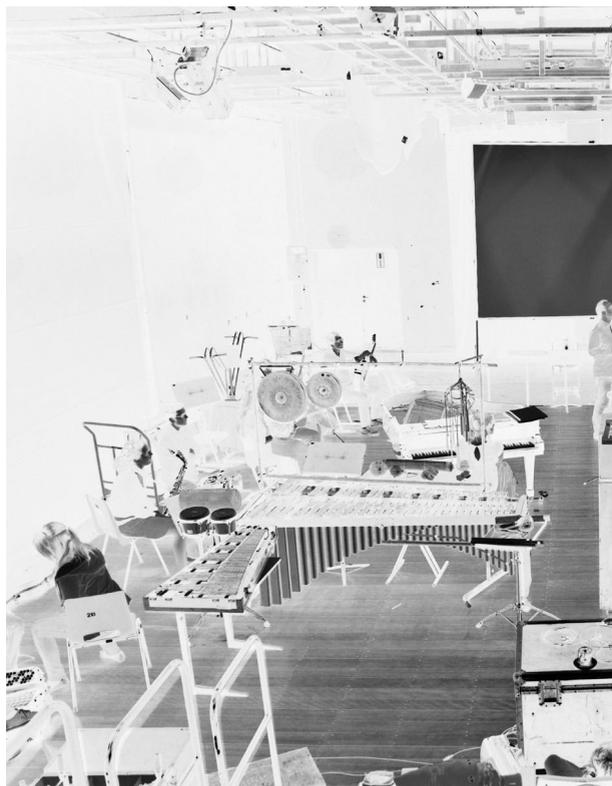
Hence the major players in our musical landscape certainly do contribute to supporting smaller initiatives. But we also have to note that new music often remains a relatively marginal phenomenon in large venues’ own programmes. There is a rich supply of new music to hear in Flanders, but all too often this music is pigeonholed as ‘contemporary’ or ‘new’ at festivals, events or workshops. Maybe the greatest assistance to small players could be provided if the

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major venues included today's music in their programmes as a matter of course, giving it the same attention (at least) as the overwhelming offer of 'classical' music. In the world of dance and theatre, after all, this is standard practice. If new music (and that might even be music that is almost a hundred years old) were central to the programming and freed of its image as 'difficult' and 'exotic' or even 'experimental', a far greater supporting base would be created as a matter of course, and the humus layer would automatically get new oxygen.

A fine example of how a small seed can follow an organic pattern of growth through all the layers of the forest can be found in the career of the – still young – composer Daan Janssens (°1983). In 2005 De Nieuwe Reeks, a small-scale concert organisation for contemporary music that was operating in Leuven at the time (and was entirely run by volunteers) came across a collaborative project between Ghent Conservatory and the Goeyvaerts Trio. The latter had committed themselves to performing work by a considerable number of composition students at a few of their concerts. In that context they played *Gegeven/... (Beweging)...* (2004/2005) by Daan Janssens and *Caro-Kann* by Maarten Buyl at the TRANSIT festival alongside work by Jörg Birkenkötter, Peter Swinnen and Sami Klemola. In the autumn of 2006, the Goeyvaerts Trio found themselves at De Nieuwe Reeks for the second edition of their project for young composers. The names on the programme that particularly ring a bell today are Frederik Neyrinck and Fabian Coomans. De Nieuwe Reeks also decided to give the very young Daan Janssens a commission for the Spectra ensemble for the following season (spring 2007). It turned into (...*nuît cassée.*), which was nothing less than the young composer's first chance to work with a large, experienced ensemble. In 2008 Daan Janssens received a commission from the TRANSIT festival for new music, specifically for the opening concert (with the Spectra ensemble) that is traditionally devoted to promising young Flemish composers. In the same period, De Nieuwe Reeks gave Daan Janssens a second

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commission for his first string quartet (*Passages III*). For the première in the spring of 2009, the equally young Arsis4 ensemble was called in. (...*nuît cassée.*) made the ISCM Flanders selection in 2008. Daan Janssens has since come up with his first opera, *Les Aveugles*, (a production by LOD), which has been performed twelve times to date in Belgium and abroad and is on the programme at La Monnaie in April 2014.

**EVER TRIED. EVER FAILED.
NO MATTER. TRY AGAIN.
FAIL AGAIN. FAIL BETTER. ⁶**

New, young and small initiatives are often vulnerable. In recent years, November Music Flanders and the Leuven concert series De Nieuwe Reeks have given up the ghost, and others have to do their utmost every day to defend their existence and keep afloat financially. On the one hand a certain amount of decay, of (partial) failure, is inherent to the lowest levels of an ecosystem. Whether it is a question of a very young ensemble, an experimental composition or a specialised concert series: artistic innova-



tion remains a leap in the dark and the chance of failure is inextricably linked. On the other hand, there are many factors besides artistic ones that can determine the survival chances of the very newest phenomena. It is not unusual for the smallest players in the field to take the biggest artistic risks, which makes the audience size difficult to predict and the finances correspondingly uncertain. They often work on a project basis, usually with a small budget. Moreover, they are often highly dependent on collaborative partners and the personal commitment of a handful of individuals. A critical point in the development of such initiatives often turns out to be the transition from a volunteer project rooted in idealism and ideology to a semi-professional or professional organisation with one or more paid employees and a workable budget. It is all but impossible for new and therefore unknown initiatives to generate a high proportion of their income themselves. Takings from ticket sales are extremely uncertain and it is almost impossible to bring in sponsoring. After all, the primary concern of potential donors is to reach as large an audience as possible. And reaching a large audience is precisely the problem in new music.

Furthermore, it is characteristic of the humus layer in this sector that it wants to commit fully to the artistic project and devote as much time and money as possible to the music itself. Expensive promotional material and labour-intensive communication work, then, is often a lower priority. This choice is logical (and intellectually honest), but it also makes further audience generation more difficult and creates a vicious circle. The role that the subsidising government body can play for the humus layer here is not to be underestimated. By paying attention (i.e.: hard cash) to these often modest initiatives, the government can play a corrective role to counteract the levelling of market-based thinking and hence create more space for diversity and innovation.

Project subsidies thus constitute an essential source of income for many initiatives. Hence the recent extension of the project subsidy budget from 3 to 10% of the total subsidy budget for the Arts Decree is gratifying news.⁷ However it is often difficult to evaluate the chance of success for an individual funding application. In practice, financial uncertainty and instability are the Achilles heel of many projects. Even structurally subsidised organisations have difficulty escaping this. After all, the relative financial security of structural support is set against the large number of obligations stemming from the rules imposed by the decree, including those concerning the income that an organisation must generate for itself. Fluctuating audience numbers can rapidly play havoc with the accounts. Moreover, the combination of artistic and financial risks makes these initiatives extra vulnerable in times of austerity. It is not infrequent for the complex, not always very transparent tangle of evaluation criteria, budgetary cuts and other manoeuvres to hit the most vulnerable players hardest. The fact that they cannot put forward many 'guarantees' makes it that much more difficult to defend their position and plead for the right to take risks. For example, in the latest round of evaluations the Logos Foundation was criticised for the vagueness of its concert planning for the coming four years, with only a few theoretical agreements and not enough detailed concert programmes. However

it is fundamental to the Logos Foundation that concert programmes follow current developments in the international scene and this means that they are often put together very late or even on the spur of the moment. This is likewise appropriate to their function as an 'experimental lab'. This risky artistic policy aimed at the humus layer of today's music was seen in this case as a weakness rather than a possible and even very probable asset. The foundation ended up needing a petition with more than 1700 signatures worldwide to convince policy-makers otherwise.

Those who want to bring a new idea to life are well-advised to be acquainted with many markets. It is not uncommon for a whole project to rely on the personal commitment of one or a few enthusiastic people who are supposed to deal competently with a very wide range of tasks. It goes without saying that it is often not easy to make every facet of a project or organisation run smoothly with only a very limited staff. Strong

partners can make all the difference for healthy humus. By applying their knowledge, experience, technical assets, infrastructure or communication channels in collaborative projects, the large(r) trees in the forest can do a lot to help smaller or younger initiatives. We can comfortably state that a festival like What's Next, for example, could not have flourished without the decent collaboration it has had first with Espace Senghor, then Flagey and now Ars Musica. Voorwaarts Maart/En avant Mars found a good base in a partnership with Muziekcentrum De Bijloke Gent, which had previously provided space for November Music Flanders. Kunstencentrum STUK brought De Nieuwe Reeks under its roof at the time and still provides space to Radio Scorpio, for example. It goes without saying that such collaborations do not always run smoothly and are not automatically guaranteed a long life, but it is the case here as well that undergrowth can only grow if it keeps trying, and is sometimes allowed to fail.

Notes

- 1 *Solidariteit en potgrond*, Overleg Kunstenorganisaties vzw, 27 June 2011, www.overlegkunsten.org
- 2 Ultimately these plans were considerably revised; in June 2012 the Flemish Community budget for subsidies within the Arts Decree (i.e. official government subsidies) was raised from 96 million euros to 104 million euros.
- 3 www.dewitteraaf.be
- 4 Bart Caron is a double bassist and worked on the advisory committee to the previous Minister of Culture, Bert Anciaux. He is currently a culture specialist for the Flemish Green Party.
- 5 Laermans, R., *Cultuurliefde maakt nog geen cultuurpolitiek*. Over Bart Carons Niet de kers op de taart, in *De Witte Raaf*, year 27, no. 157, May-June 2012, p. 23.
- 6 Quote from Beckett, S., *Worstward Ho*, 1983
- 7 Within the Arts Decree, which regulates the subsidising of artistic initiatives in Flanders, there are two distinct types of subsidy. More established organisations in the artistic

landscape can apply for structural working subsidies (for two or four years). It is also possible to apply for a project subsidy for a new, one-off, short-term or small-scale initiative. Applications for such projects are dealt with twice a year. More info: www.kunstenerfgoed.be.

More information about the initiatives, organisations and bodies discussed

- Arsis4, www.arsis4.be
- Aton' et Armide, www.aton-armide.com
- Besides, www.ensemblebesides.be
- Blindman, www.blindman.be
- ChampdAction, www.champdaction.be
- Cobra, www.cobra.be
- Cohort, www.cohort.be
- Goeyvaerts Trio, www.stringtrio.net
- ISCM-Flanders, www.iscm-vlaanderen.be
- Jasper&Jasper, [jasperandjasper.be](http://www.jasperandjasper.be)
- Klara, www.klara.be
- Kunsttijdschrift Vlaanderen, www.kunsttijdschriftvlaanderen.be
- Kwadratuur, www.kwadratuur.be
- LABO, www.champdaction.be/nl/labo-iv

- Logos Foundation, www.logosfoundation.org
- Magalam!, www.magalamtrio.be
- Nadar, www.nadarensemble.be
- November Music (Dutch version), novembermusic.net
- oKo, www.overlegkunsten.be
- Oorgetuige, oorgetuige.skynetblogs.be
- Podium/Nieuw Talent, www.aanbodpodium.be
- Radio Centraal, www.radiocentraal.be
- Radio Scorpio, www.radioscorpio.be
- [sic], www.siconline.be
- Staalkaart, www.staalkaart.be
- Tik Tak Toe, www.dapostrof.be
- TRANSIT festival, www.transifestival.be
- Q-O2, www.q-o2.be
- Voortwaarts Maart/En avant Mars, www.hardscore.be
- What's Next Festival, www.whats-next.be
- ZWERM, www.zwerm.be



MYSTERIOUS WOODS

Laura Maes

AND UNEXPECTED URBAN SOUNDS

SOUND ART IN BELGIUM

THE OUTLINES OF AN AMORPHOUS ART FORM

Exhibitions focusing on sound often include a broad variety of art forms. Some exhibitions include a listening room where the audience can listen to music, whilst the content of other exhibitions solely exists of music. The exhibition programme is regularly extended to include a series of performances, sometimes of artists whose work is included in the exhibition, sometimes of artists who have nothing to do with

the exhibition itself. Besides performances, radio broadcasts or film projections can be part of the exhibition programme. The exhibition itself can contain experimental music, sound installations, sound sculptures, documented performances, radio broadcasts, visual installations, mail art, project intentions, kinetic sculptures, experimental instruments, antique instruments, video art, poetry, conceptual art, paintings and sculptures with musical themes, musical automatons, technological demonstrations, sound weapons and graphical scores (Maes, 2007). Sound art seems to be a trend in art which can include anything

which produces sound or, in some cases, things which do not (Neuhaus, s.d.).

The explosion of high profile exhibitions since the seventies has made the term 'sound art' familiar, but it has also created a lot of confusion as to what it actually refers to. Although sound art can incorporate nearly all of the artistic expressions¹ mentioned above, it is far too easy to label anything that deviates from traditional music practices as sound art.

The designation 'sound art' is uttered indiscriminately in a similar way to how the designation 'environment' was used in the sixties. As a hot and catchy term, the label 'environment' was employed for a variety of works that had nothing to do with being an environment.² Similarly, the designation 'sound art' is used for anything that is somewhat related to sound and as a consequence the appellation sound art loses its meaning.

The confusion increases as a work of sound art can also produce music. Sometimes records are released with – processed or unprocessed – recordings of sound works.^{3/4} On top of that many sound artists are also active in other art forms. Max Neuhaus makes drawings of all his installations and also exhibits these (*des Jardins*, 1994), Peter Bosch and Simone Simons do not only display sound works, but also videos of their work and graphical scores (Bosch & Simons, 2011) and Pierre Berthet often performs on his sound installations and uses them as a musical instrument (Berthet, s.d.).

'Sound art' exhibitions that seem to include nearly everything that is in some way related to sound, sound works producing music and the multidisciplinary of many sound artists add to the confusion surrounding the designation 'sound art'.

Moreover, the diverse appearances – in the auditive as well as the visual domain – that sound art can adopt, do not help to create a well-defined image of this trend in art.

The auditive appearance of sound art

The amplitude of the sound produced by a sound work can differ immensely. It can be

deafening such as the sounds up to 100 dBA produced by the organ pipes of Stephan von Huene's *Totem Tones* (Grayson, 1975), but it can also be nearly inaudible like the 16 hertz bass produced by the impressive organ pipes of Gunter Demnig (Schulz, 1988). It may seem contradictory at first sight but sound works do not necessarily produce sound. Some works are based on the idea of reflecting or muffling sound generated by the audience or its surroundings such as Michaels Asher's installation for the exhibition *Spaces* (1969) in which Asher covered walls, ceiling and floor with drywall to increase the sound absorbent characteristics of the room (Licht, 1969; Asher, 1983).⁵

Whilst most sound works employ frequencies within the human audible range (20-20,000 Hz), other works explore the borders of the humanly audible, either above (ultrasound) or below (infrasound) the audible range. Works that make use of sounds below the audible range do so to create sensations⁶ or to visualise these inaudible sounds⁷.

Works utilising ultrasonic sounds are rarer. Ultrasound technology has been used in many different fields as a measuring or imaging tool. In the arts ultrasound has been employed to measure distances or to determine position. In the *Holosound* installation by Godfried-Willem Raes the reflection of ultrasonic sound beams is used to convert the position of human bodies into audible sound (Raes, 1978).

The visual appearance of sound art

Although there is not necessarily a physical object in sight, there is always a material aspect to a sound work. This aspect can take the form of a location, such as in numerous works by Max Neuhaus who creates site-specific works and always hides his sound producing elements so that "the system producing the sound doesn't become a physical reference" (Neuhaus, 1992/1994, p. 11). In most of his works there is nothing to see apart from the pre-existing environment. The surroundings and noises present in the location where the work is situated form an essential part of it. The sounds Neuhaus adds

comment on or question the existing sound environment.

The works based on electromagnetic induction by Christina Kubisch stand in contrast to most of Neuhaus' oeuvre. In these works by Kubisch, the electric wires through which sound is sent sometimes take specific forms⁸ such as a triangle or a labyrinth; sometimes the form is abstract or follows the architecture of a space or the contours of trees (Claassen-Schmal, 1985). These wires are not only essential to produce sound, but become a visual element by putting them in specific shapes.

However, the physical shape sound art can acquire is not inevitably linked to the generation of sound. Sometimes external visual elements that are not necessary for the production of sound are added to the work. For *Mausware* Christina Kubisch placed ten computer mice in a star on a round table and, at regular intervals around the edge of the table, ten real mice cast in resin that she had borrowed from a museum of natural history. The visitor hears a composition for 10 channels of soft clicking noises that evoke the clicking of PC mice as well as the rustling of real mice (Kubisch, 2000).

The characteristics of sound art

Although sound art often leans towards different disciplines, it distinguishes itself in various ways.

Sound art, a hybrid of music and visual arts, always has an aural as well as a visual aspect. In both museums and concert halls a secure distance is commonly kept between the spectator and the work of art or the performer(s). This distance largely evaporates with sound works as the visitor can often walk around or into the work or is even encouraged to touch it. As a consequence the works have no fixed beginning or end. The time dimension is partly exchanged for the space dimension. The visitors come and go as they please and can determine independently how long they attend the 'performance'. Sound art is like a performance lasting 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As a result most sound works are not narrative and very few make an appeal to performers to

produce sound. Instead sounds are generated electronically, electro-acoustically or acoustically. The sounds are automated or activated either by natural sources or by acts by the visitors.

The auditive component is always the point of departure. Where that is not the case, where sound is used illustratively or atmospherically, we can usually speak of other art forms.

SOUND ART IN BELGIUM, THE EARLY YEARS

The Philips Pavilion

At the Brussels World Fair in 1958, the peaked Philips pavilion designed by Iannis Xenakis, assistant to Le Corbusier, housed a spectacle of sound and visuals. The pavilion has often been listed as one of the forerunners of sound art (De La Motte-Haber, 1996; LaBelle, 2006; Gibbs, 2007).

The tape composition comprising of electronically processed sounds of voice, percussion and melody instruments, bells, sirens, electronic tone generators and machines (Chadabe, 1997) could be heard through more than 400 loudspeakers distributed in space. As the space held around 400 visitors (Blessier e. a., 2007) the actual experience was different for each listener. Edgard Varèse composed his music at the Philips Laboratories in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Willem Tak, the lead sound engineer from Philips designed a system so that

"The listeners were to have the illusion that various sound-sources were in motion around them, rising and falling, coming together and moving apart again, and moreover the space in which this took place was to seem at one instant narrow and 'dry' and at another to seem like a cathedral."

Blessier e. a., 2007, p. 166

As a little boy Godfried-Willem Raes, who later founded the Logos Foundation, was regularly dropped by his parents at the Dutch pavilion during their choir rehearsals. The whole experience made a huge impression on him and influenced his later work (Raes, 2012).

Logos Foundation

Logos has been at the forefront of experiment since the end of 1968. The organisation was originally established as an artists' collective. From the outset, the blending of media formed a focal point of the organisation, which did not only incorporate musicians and composers, but also visual artists, poets and scientists.

From 1969 onwards the Logos group invited like-minded musicians and collectives and started to organise concerts and events. In 1971 the first edition of the Mixed Media festival took place. The festival was organised for ten successive years. For its fifth edition, in 1975, an exhibition comprising collaborative work by Godfried-Willem Raes, who provided home-built circuits and ceramist Lieve De Pelsmaecker was set up in the corridor of the Zwarte Zaal in Ghent. This idea was expanded during the three following editions of the festival. International artists such as Walter Giers, Michel Waisvisz, COUM, Linda Walker, Ulrike & Wolf-Dieter Trüstedt and Hugh Davies were invited to exhibit their work in these so called Sonomobiles⁹ exhibitions.¹⁰ The term Sonomobiles was launched by Logos as a collective noun for these exhibited works combining sound and other media. The exhibition catalogue notes that Sonomobiles address visual as well as auditive senses. They cross borders and are not limited to one discipline (Stichting Logos, 1976). "A 'silent' sonomobile is an 'unfinished' object." (Darge, 1977, p. 6) By shifting the emphasis from the final saleable product to the actively engaged process whereby the visitor has to actively explore the object (Darge, 1977), the Sonomobiles exhibitions aimed to detach themselves from commercialism.

This participative character is also present in the sound works created in the Logos lab. *Singing bicycles*¹¹, *Pneumaphones*¹² and

*Holosound*¹³, for example, all demand input from the audience to show how they work.

In the early eighties, when Logos had moved to its new location in the Kongostraat in Ghent, the Logos lab creations were regularly on display. From time to time sound works by other artists, including Richard Lerman, Martin Riches, Frédéric Le Junter and Peter Bosch & Simone Simons, were exhibited (Logos Foundation, s.d.).

Since 1971 the Logos Foundation has offered a stage to artists exploring sound such as Max Eastley, Michel Waisvisz, Lorenc Barber, Richard Lerman, Hugh Davies, Annea Lockwood, Jon Rose, Paul Panhuysen, Alvin Lucier, Baudouin Oosterlynck, Pierre Bastien, Pierre Berthet, Horst Rickels and Erwin Stache (Logos Foundation, s.d.). Most of them have in common that they do not only build sound sculptures and installations but that they also perform on them. A similarity that can also be found in the work of Logos founder Godfried-Willem Raes. Their presentations at Logos were, in most cases, not exhibitions, but performances on home-built installations, sculptures or instruments. With the current concert series *Sound Exploration* Logos continues to support music created by sound artists.

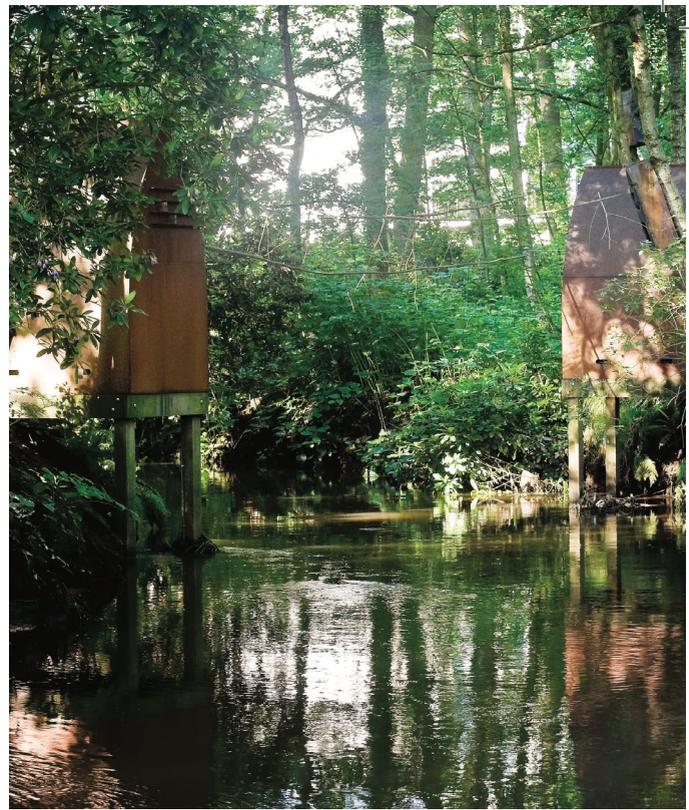
This fascination for experimental instrument building shows in the work of Godfried-Willem Raes as well as in the programming at Logos. For the last edition of the Mixed Media festival in 1980, no Sonomobiles exhibition was organised but an instrument building festival instead.¹⁴ This initiative was reintroduced in 1994. The Automata festival, organised yearly from 1994 to 1996, brought the *crème de la crème* of experimental instrument builders to Belgium, including Trimpin, Jacques Rémus and Christoph Schlaeger¹⁵ (Logos Foundation, s.d.).

At the end of the nineties and in the 21st century exhibitions became rare. The majority of the works produced at the Logos workplace were musical automata – additions to the Man and Machine (M&M) orchestra¹⁶ – that was showcased at the monthly organised M&M performances. While the Logos concert hall gradually became filled up with the expanding



M&M orchestra, the acquisition of an adjoining building at the end of 2011 opened up new opportunities. A first exhibition, including work by Moniek Darge, Helen White and the author was organised during the summer of 2012. In their planning for the forthcoming years Logos intends to organise exhibitions on a regular basis and open up the Logos workshop to sound artists and experimental instrument builders (Raes, 2012).

Logos is not only important as a production and presentation centre but has always been a breeding ground for sound artists. Former employees such as Maria Blondeel, Guy De Bièvre and Peter Beyls have continued to create multimedia works after their career at Logos.



PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

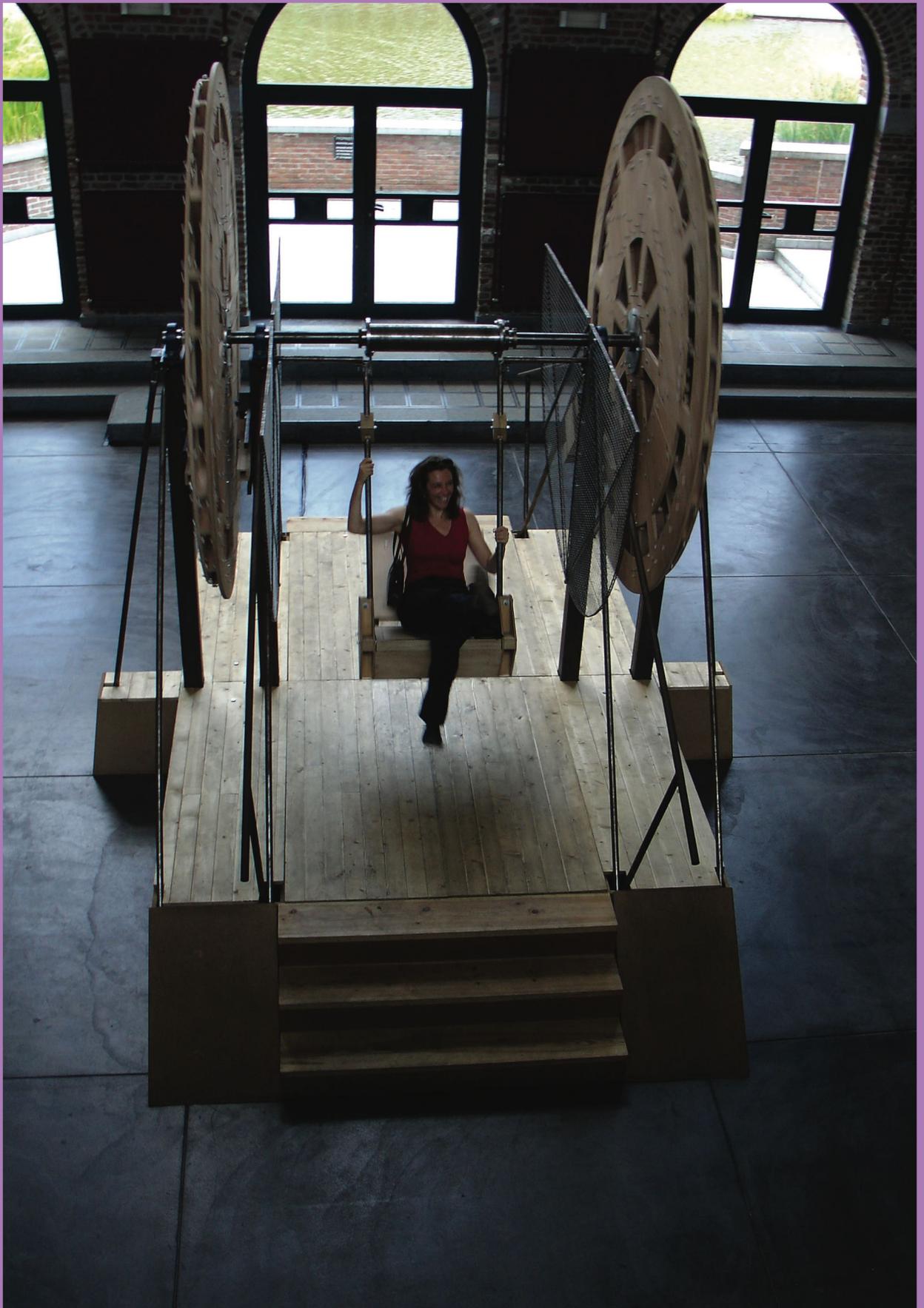
▲ Pierre Berthet, Houses of Sound, Klankenbos

Sound art is often temporary by nature, commissioned for a specific place during a specific time or period. In two places in Belgium sound art can be found which is meant to last permanently or semi-permanently: the Klankenbos in Neerpelt and the Sound Factory in Bruges.

Klankenbos

The Klankenbos in Neerpelt, run by the educational organisation Musica, houses a collection of three mobile sound works¹⁷ and 15 sound works spread over and integrated in the provincial Dommelhof domain¹⁸. It is freely accessible from March till October and is not only a unique project in Belgium, but also abroad.

The project took off with the aid of an Interreg subsidy¹⁹. Dutch partner Intro insitu would present sound art during temporary manifestations, whilst Belgian partner Musica would do so in public space. Although the initial idea was not to present these works permanently at the provincial Dommelhof domain, it would be a shame to lose the investments made. When the Interreg subsidies came to an end the idea arose to maintain these installations. They would no longer be supported by Interreg but through



the subsidy Musica receives from the Flemish government and with the support of the council and province. From the very beginning, the artists were asked to make durable works, so it was feasible to present them for a longer period (Heylen, 2012).

During the three Interreg years, works by Belgian artist Pierre Berthet, Dutch artists Paul Panhuysen, Horst Rickels, Peter Bosch & Simone Simons, Hans Van Koolwijk and German artist Erwin Stache were installed in the woods and mobile installations by Belgian artists Moniek Darge, Baudouin Oosterlyncx and Eric Van Osselaer were added to the collection (Musica, 2012). The installation *box 30/70* by Bruce Odland & Sam Auinger did not stand the test of time and was dismantled after several vandalism attacks (PPN, 2010).

In the following years the Klankenbos collection gradually grew with one or two new additions each year. 2012 marks a new era with new artistic director Paul Craenen and the addition of three new international works by Tony Di Napoli, Caroline Locke and Lola landscape architects & Staalplaat. It is also the first time that the Province has committed itself to supporting a new installation²⁰, an evolution that can only be applauded.

The physical supervision of the collection is difficult. Natural factors such as wind and rain put sound works to the test and the Klankenbos also has to deal with vandalism and theft. Combined with the fact that, with 15 sound works spread throughout the Dommelhof domain, most space is taken, the future emphasis will not lie on the expansion of the collection at Dommelhof but on its maintenance and disclosure to the public (Craenen, 2012). It is not unthinkable that existing installations will be replaced in the future by new ones or that the Klankenbos will no longer be limited to the Dommelhof domain and will extend its borders and also include permanent works in public space, outside Dommelhof (Craenen, 2012).

Musica aims to further extend the operation of the Klankenbos with small-scale events around the collection such as performances and

temporary exhibitions, guided tours and residencies for students and artists. Although the activities of Musica have a primarily educational character, the Klankenbos collection is targeted at a broad audience of art lovers, schools and families.

Sound Factory

In October 2011 the Concertgebouw Bruges opened its Sound Factory. Inspired by the Dutch Klankspeeltuin²¹, the Concertgebouw opted for a similar approach. The collection²², accommodated in the Lantern Tower of the Concertgebouw, contains a new interactive work with 150 bell sounds by Aernoudt Jacobs, an interactive installation based on the resistance of human skin by Erwin Stache, a site-specific speaker installation by Esther Venrooy & Olivier Goethals and *Omni*, an interactive interface shaped like a colourful mushroom by Patrice Moullet. This last work is the only work that is also present at the Klankspeeltuin. A collection of 21 carillon bells and a cyber-corner comparable to the one at the Klankspeeltuin complete the Sound Factory. (Sound Factory, s.d.)

In contrast to the Klankspeeltuin, the operation of the Sound Factory is not restricted to workshops. Instead, the Sound Factory is open six days a week and is run by Musea Bruges. It is the intention of the Concertgebouw to reach a broader target group than the Klankspeeltuin, although the workshops are currently only organised for participants up to the age of 18²³ (Vanacker, 2012).

The Concertgebouw also aims to create more coherence between their concert programme and the Sound Factory by integrating sound works into their festivals where possible.

Sound Factory is not the first endeavour by the Concertgebouw in the world of sound art. In 2003 Edgard Varèse's *Poème Electronique* was permanently installed in the highest foyer of the building.

URBAN SOUND TRAILS

Belgium has quite a few sound trails that present sound art in an urban environment. These include both one-off events such as the .WAV project in Bruges in 2002 as well as the yearly sound trails in Kortrijk and Mons.

Sounding City

In 1996, the Kortrijk-based Limelight organised the festival Happy New Ears for the first time. From 1999 onwards Happy New Ears became a separate non-profit organisation. In that same year the festival placed its first steps²⁴ into the world of sound art by inviting sound artists Pierre Bastien, Pierre Berthet and Frédéric Le Junter and musicians DJ Low and Rudy Trouvé to create the brand new production *110 m²*. A small exposition with work by Bastien, Berthet and Le Junter took place on the top floor of the Tacktoeren. From that moment onwards, at least one project around experimental instruments, so called 'nouvelle lutherie', was included each year in the festival programme.

In 2002 Willy Malisse from the non-profit organisation Beeldenstorm asked Joost Fonteyne (Happy New Ears)²⁵ to set up an exhibition that connects sound and image. In order to do so, Beeldenstorm and Kling Klang applied for an Interreg¹⁹ subsidy. In 2002 the first edition of the Audioframes exhibition took place at old factory building Woon & Zorg Heilig Hart in Kortrijk. In 2003 the exhibition was organised in Lille and in 2004 the exhibition was partly organised in Kortrijk and partly in Lille.

From the first edition onwards Happy New Ears has invested in the ideal presentation of the selected works by acoustically isolating the exhibition spaces as much as possible from each other (Fonteyne, 2012).

For the period 2005-2008 Happy New Ears also made an appeal to Interreg subsidies to finance sound works and concerts in Kortrijk and Lille, a sequel to Audioframes. In Kortrijk the sound works were no longer presented in one location. Instead, under the designation Sounding City, they were spread throughout the

city centre of Kortrijk. The exhibition transformed into a sound trail.

The final edition of Happy New Ears in 2009 did not include a sound trail. The reason for this was partly financial and partly because the new festival²⁶ took place 6 months later in spring 2010.

The Flanders Festival Kortrijk currently organises a group exhibition under the heading Sounding City every two years. The organisation strives to work more around one specific theme. In between each group exhibition the festival will still include sound art in their festival programme.

The Flanders Festival Kortrijk is also a partner in Resonance²⁷, a platform for exchanging expertise and supporting new sound art in the form of performances and documentation.

The festival also aims to invest in permanent audiowalks. David Helbich will present his new audio walk in 2013. His audio walk and an updated version of the audio walk created by Christina Kubisch for Happy New Ears 2007 will be permanently available in the near future from Kortrijk's tourist office (Fonteyne, 2012).

City sonic(s)

Happy New Ears was not the first Belgian organisation to move to public space. Transcultures has been organising the yearly sound trail City Sonic(s)²⁸ across Mons since 2003. Although the idea of organising a sound art event in public space had been shimmering in the mind of Philippe Franck (Franck, 2012), it became concrete after a visit to Bruges 2002 (Transcultures, 2002) where .WAV, a sound trail in the city of Bruges²⁹, was on display. The first City Sonic(s) took place in June 2003 (Transcultures, 2002). Since its first edition, City Sonic(s) has focused on sound art in the broadest sense and presented works by both international and Belgian artists. Students have also had the opportunity to present their work. Like Happy New Ears, City Sonic(s) organises concerts and workshops alongside the exhibition and often relatively unfamiliar locations are included in the trail. Through the years several sub-activities have been launched. Since 2009 the programme has



included performances in private gardens (Sonic Garden Party)³⁰ and workshops aimed towards children (Sonic Kids)³¹. Since 2011 workshops for adults (Sonic Formations) have been organised. This year the series Sonic Mix, presenting DJs and young musicians mixing various styles and Sonic Lab, a cross border project Espace(s) Son(s) Hainaut(s) focusing on augmented instruments³², will be launched.

For the 10th edition of City Sonic(s), the epicentre of the festival will move to Brussels with the exhibitions the inner ear at L'Iselp and Sonic Cinema at various galleries. Two sound trails, one in Mons and one in Huy³³, and a series of workshops and performances in Mons, Huy and Brussels complete the programme. New for 2012 is Radio Sonic, an online radio project in cooperation with Radio Campus Brussels presenting interviews, sound creations and festival reports.

ART CENTRES, FESTIVALS, WORKSHOPS AND CONCERT ORGANISATIONS

Most art centres, workshops and festivals focusing on experimental music or media art and concert organisations focusing on experimental music have occasionally presented sound works.

Festivals such as Artefact (Leuven), Ars Musica (Brussels), the former November Music (Ghent), Oorsmeer (Ghent), the former MAIIS (Brussels), Verbindingen/Jonctions (Brussels), Courtisane (Ghent) and Cimatics (Brussels) have presented sound art as part of their programme. Since 2011 the festival La Semaine du Son is organised in Brussels (La Semaine du Son, 2012). In 2003 the Flanders Festival Ghent organised the sound art exhibition Strings³⁴.

Art centres such as the Vooruit in Ghent, Argos in Brussels, STUK in Leuven, Netwerk in Aalst, and Z33 and België in Hasselt sporadically make room for the presentation of sound art in their programme.

Furthermore, workshops such as the former Cargo in Ostend, Timelab in Ghent and Foam, Okno, Lab[au] and Imal in Brussels pay

attention to sound art. Since 2006 workshop QO-2 has focused on experimental contemporary music and sound art. QO-2 regularly offers sound artists residencies and exhibits sound works. (Eckhart, 2012) With support from the European Commission, QO-2 and its partners³⁵ have set up Sounds of Europe, a project around field recordings (Sounds of Europe, s.d.).

Since its creation in 1996, Transcultures has given residencies to sound artists. After the launch of City Sonic(s) this support became more intense. Since 2010 Transcultures is in charge of European Pépinières³⁶ for young artists for the French speaking community in Belgium and also supports other European programmes (Franck, 2012). The Centre Henri Pousseur in Liège offers occasional technical support to sound artists (Berthet, 2012).

Concert organisations such as Les Halles de Schaarbeek³⁷, now extinct Cling Film³⁸, Kraak³ and Les Ateliers Claus regularly present sound works alongside concerts of experimental music. Metaphon, an organisation founded by members of Noise-Maker's Fifes after the death of Geert Feytons, has organised a series of performances by sound artists playing on home-built instruments³⁹ (Metaphon, 2012).

When Brussels, in 2000, and Bruges, in 2002, were the cultural capital of Europe, specific sound art events were organised.

During Brussels 2000, Yves Poliart initiated the Nemo project which brought together artists from Belgium, France and the Netherlands⁴⁰ who played home-made instruments. Baudouin De Jaer created a composition for these unique instruments. The project was repeated in Ghent at the Vooruit in 2001. The audience could play most of the instruments after the performance.

In Bruges the .WAV²⁹ sound trail was organised. Cling Film organised a sound installation at Kaapstad with 30 national and international artists⁴¹. Kraak³ and Cling Film presented performances and sound works on the Stubnitz boat and at De Republiek, in the context of the .WAV festival.

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

Belgian museums and galleries only occasionally venture into the presentation of sound art. Contemporary art museums and galleries presenting sound art are still an exception.⁴² Even fewer museums include sound works in their permanent collection. Some museums have organised an exhibition focusing on sound such as *Images du Son*⁴³ at Espace Nord 251 in Liège, *Beeldende Muziek*⁴⁴ at the Provinciaal Museum Hasselt or *Nature et Sons*⁴⁵ at the Château de Seneffe, but those remain exceptions.

The acquisition of sound art is not a priority for Belgian museums. The fact that sound art actually makes sound does not contribute to conquering a place in the purchasing policy of museums as very few museum buildings are acoustically equipped to present sound art.

Not only does most sound art produce sound, but often technology is involved. In the current staff formation of museums there is usually no technical staff with enough knowledge to maintain the works. Rapid technological obsolescence does not contribute to its acceptance either. However, the main stumbling block to the distribution of this form of art is its ephemeral character and resulting unsaleability.

We do find sound art in museums where we would not expect it. In the musical instrument museum in Brussels the sound installation *Holosound* from Logos Foundation is permanently on display (Raes, 2012).

EDUCATION

Sound artists have very diverse backgrounds. Whereas in painting the majority of the artists have a background in visual arts, this parallel

cannot be drawn with sound art. It is rare for an educational institution to organise the course sound art and to deliver – once graduated – sound artists.⁴⁶ This sparsely available schooling has contributed to the fact that since its origin the background and education of sound artists has been very divergent.

This diversity is not only caused by the lack of available education, but also has a lot to do with the nature of the art form. Sound art is not a trade that can be taught. Its manifestations are extremely diverse, from mechanically moving sculptures to home-made software. Sound art invokes all sorts of disciplines and many trades can be involved.

Although some conservatories⁴⁷ and universities⁴⁸ in Belgium are or were equipped with electronic music studios, the border with other art forms such as visual arts is rarely crossed. In art schools more experiment seems to be present.⁴⁹ Although no Bachelor's or Master's degree in sound art is available in Belgium, the art form does get attention in some courses⁵⁰. However, this is often not structurally embedded in the syllabus and content largely depends on the teacher.

Some schools offering part-time arts education⁵¹ give courses in experimental music. The content of these courses does however depend too strongly on the teacher.

Part-time arts schools in Belgium are currently being overhauled. If sound art, experimental instrument building, intermedia and electronics are introduced to these schools, then the conservatories which traditionally provide art college teachers will have to follow.

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Notes

1 Many sound works make use of field recordings for example, but this does not imply that field recordings in themselves can be labeled sound art.

2 The exposition *Four environments by four new realists* in Sidney Janis Gallery in

1964 did not present, as the title seems to suggest, any environments (Reiss, 1999).

3 In 1996 *Cling Film* records released the tape *Wasserwarts* by Brussels based collective *Noise-Maker's Fifes*. The release contained a recording of the first installation by

Noise-Maker's Fifes, set up inside a dam in Eupen (27th April 1996). The tape was rereleased on cd in 2005 on the band's own label *NMT productions*. Brussels based Sub Rosa released various cds with recordings of sound works. In 2010 the cd *extended loud-*

speakers by Liège based artist Pierre Berthet was released. The cd contained recordings of Berthet's sound installation set up for an exhibition in 2001 at Z33 in Hasselt. (Sub Rosa, 2011, a) (Berthet, 2012) In the same year Sub Rosa also released a book and cd by Belgium artist Baudouin De Jaer based on an exhibition at the Art En Marge museum in Brussels in 2010. (Sub Rosa, 2011, b) (Poliart, 2012) New label Transcultural, founded by Philippe Franck de Transcultures and City Sonic(s) and musician/sound artist Gauthier Keyaerts, will focus on sound art and experimental electronic music (Franck, 2012).

4 The Dutch radio programme Café Sonore, the current version of the former radio programme Audio Art, featured each week on the VPRO, often broadcasts recordings of sound art. (VPRO, s.d.) There is no Belgian equivalent.

5 Although the catalogue of *Spaces* mentions the usage of speakers, a noise generator and an oscillator, these were never deployed in the finished work. (Asher, 1983)

6 As is the case in the author's *Oorwonde* (Maes, 2011), an interactive audio operating table on which the visitor can sense subsonic sounds.

7 A popular set-up is placing small items on subwoofers as employed by Xavier Charles in his *Surfaces vibrantes* (Happy New Ears, 2007).

8 Several artists have shaped the wires that sound is sent through. In *Interspersions* by Takehisa Kosugi the cables and loudspeakers are placed in such a way that they portray plants and flowers (Pagé, 1980). In Robin Minard's *Silent Music* the wires are shaped to resemble plants (Giroudon, 2000).

9 Sono refers to sound and mobiles refers to moving objects or sounds.

10 26-29/01/1976: Mixed-Media VI: tentoonstelling sonomobielen, Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten, Ghent, Belgium

21 02-03/03/1977: Mixed Media VII: sonomobielentoonstelling, Museum voor Hedendaagse Kunst, Ghent, Belgium

05-12/02/1978: Mixed Media VIII: tentoonstelling sonomobielen en alternatieve muziekinstrumenten, Oranjehuis, Antwerp, Belgium

11 The bike of each cyclist is converted into a musical instrument. A loudspeaker extended with a plastic tube is driven by the dynamo of the bike. Each plastic tube will resonate when the cyclist cycles at a specific velocity. Different surfaces provide timbre variations. A minimum of 12 cyclists is required for the happening (White, 2011).

12 *Pneumaphones* are a collection of pneumatically-driven sound sculptures. Each sculpture is attached to an air pillow that when pressed allows flutes, single reeds, lips, tongues, double-reeds, sirens, whistles, membranes, mirlitons, water-organs or cavity

resonators (Raes 1983-1987) to sound. The air is provided by several low pressure air compressors which are equipped with conical control valves. By sitting, rolling, jumping or lying on the inflated tetrahedron shaped air cushions the audience or performers can modulate the wind flow and thus the pitch and intensity of the sound of each sculpture (Raes 1983-1987; Raes 1992).

13 In the *Holosound* installation of Godfried-Willem Raes the reflection of ultrasonic sound beams against the human body generates audible sound (Raes, 1978). The movement of the body determines the sound. If no one is present within the boundaries of the imaginary tetrahedron, no audible sound is present. In the imaginary tetrahedron every movement, no matter how small, changes the pitch of the sound. In a newer version of *Holosound*, midi conversion was integrated so that a variety of sounds could be implemented.

14 07-12/02/1980: Instrument Building Festival – Xth International Mixed Media Festival.

15 Automatenfestivals: 24-28/10/1994, 24-29/10/1995, 22-26/10/1996

16 An ensemble combining musical automata, new interfaces to steer these automata, dancers and performers.

17 Moniek Darge: *Muziekdozen* (2005), Baudouin Oosterlynck: *FluisterOren* (2005) & Eric Van Osselaer: *Musiscopes* (2007) (Musica, 2012)

18 Pierre Berthet: *Houses of Sound* (2005), Paul Panhuysen: *Kanariestudio* (2005), Horst Rickels: *Het geheim van Horst* (2006), Erwin Stache: *Konversation* (2006), Peter Bosch & Simone Simons: *Springtime in a Small Town* (2006), Hans Van Koolwijk: *Oorsprong* (2007), Hekkenbergarchitects (design) & Paul Beuk (realisation): *Tacet* (2008), Amy Franceschini & Stijn Schiffeleers / Koen Deprez: *Radio Forest* (2005/2009), Benjamin Samane: *Willow Hut* (2010), Bernward Frank: *Wind Zylinder* (2009), Robert Lambermont: *Oor van Noach* (2010), various sound artists: *Klankatlas* (2011), Staalplaat Soundsystem & Lola landscape architects: *Composed Nature* (2012), Tony di Napoli: *Chaise Résonnante* (2012), Caroline Locke: *Singing Pools* (2012) (Musica, 2012)

19 Interreg is a subsidy programme that stimulates cooperation between different regions of the various member countries of the European Union.

20 *Decomposed Nature* by Lola landscape architects & Staalplaat (Craenen, 2012)

21 The *Klankspeeluin* located at Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, holds a collection of interactive sound works aimed at primary school children. (Muziekgebouw aan 't IJ, 2011)

22 In September 2012 a new installation by Gijs Gieskes will be added to the collection (Vanacker, 2012).

23 The Concertgebouw is planning to organise workshops for adults from January 2013 onwards (Vanacker, 2012).

24 Previously, in 1997, Happy New Ears had engaged buses to go from Kortrijk to Lille and pay a visit to the Polymachina exhibition, organised by Kling Klang at L'Aeronef. Limelight had invited Pierre Bastien to present his *Mecanium* during the yearly Sinksen festivities (Fonteyne, 2012).

25 Joost Fonteyne contacted Emmanuel Vinchon (Kling Klang) and Yves Poliart to co-curate Audioframes (Fonteyne, 2012).

26 Flanders Festival Kortrijk

27 A partnership with Stichting Intro/In Situ (Maastricht, the Netherlands) and Singuhr Hörgalerie (Berlin Germany) and associated partners: Lydgalleriet (Bergen, Norway), Skanu Mezis (Riga, Latvia), Audio Art festival (Krakow, Poland), Association Bazar (Lille, France). From 2012 onwards Le Bon Acceuil (Rennes, France) will join the primary partners (Fonteyne, 2012).

28 The name of the festival changed from City Sonics to City Sonic in 2011. The main reason for the change of name was the fact that from 2011 onwards the festival was no longer only in the hands of Transcultures but it was co-produced with Le Manège, also situated in Mons. Another reason to drop the 's' was to get closer to the Arsonic project, a new theatre in Mons set up by Jean-Paul Dessy that will focus on new music and sound art and is expected to open its doors in 2014 (Franck, 2012).

29 .WAV (15/06-15/09/2002) was a project by the temporary non-profit organisation Sensor initiated by Joris De Voogt and with members from Cling Film and Kraak³ on the board of directors. Gert Keunen selected five artists: Pierre Bastien, Eavesdropper, Philip Jeck, Scanner and David Toop. Horst Rickels also created a new installation. Next.Wav presented works by students from Le Fresnoy (Tourcoing, France), Justig Liebig Universität-Institut für Angewandte Theaterwissenschaft (Giessen, Germany) and Rits, Erasmushogeschool (Brussels, Belgium) (.Wav, 2002).

30 In 2002 Limelight Kortrijk and Anno 02 organised small performances in or near gardens within the series Secret Gardens (Van Campenhout, 2002). Occasionally sound art has been presented in this setting such as the installation from Pierre Berthet & ErikM.

31 Happy New Ears (Kortrijk) organised Sonokids, a festival day aimed at children from 2003 till 2008.

32 Interreg project with Partners Art Zoyd (Valenciennes, France), Le Manège (Mons), Le Phénix (Valenciennes, France) (Espace(s) Son(s) Hainaut(s), s.d.).

33 A smaller trail, consisting of works presented at previous editions of City Sonic(s) and completed with several new site specific works, will be organised in Huy

in the framework of Dédale, a Biennale of contemporary arts in an urban environment (City Sonic, 2012).

34 The exhibition was curated by Joost Fonteyne and Yves Poliart. The participating artists were Alvin Lucier, Pierre Berthet, Pierre Bastien, Paul Panhuysen and ErikM (Poliart, 2012).

35 Music Technology Group (University Barcelona) / Sons de Barcelona, Institute for Sonic Arts Research (Ljubljana) and Creative Research in Sound Arts Practice (University London) (Sound of Europe, n.d.).

36 A 3 month residency programme at Transcultures in Mons focusing on sound and digital arts (Franck, 2012).

37 Yves Poliart worked as a curator for Les Halles for several years and presented amongst other things installations by Brussels-based collective Noise-Maker's Fifes and QO-2.

38 Cling Film was a record label and concert organisation focusing on experimental music that existed from 1995 till 2003.

39 In the future Metaphon will further expand its activities as a record label and will focus on (re)releasing historic electronic music (Jacobs, 2012).

40 Pierre Bastien, Pierre Berthet, Jacques Brodier, Claudine Denis, Jean Yves Evrard, Patrice Hardy, Slavek Kwi (only in Brussels), Stichting Logos, Laura Maes (only in Ghent), Noise Maker's Fifes, Les Phônes, Laurent Taquin, Totem Contemporain, Max Vandervorst and Michael Weilacher (only in Brussels) (Poliart, 2012; Wabbes, 2012).

41 Four train wagons, each filled with a different set of speakers, were placed in a square-like formation. The following artists participated: AdC~/DaC~, Alejandra and Underwood, Benjamin Dousselaere, Beta-Seed, Casual Coincidence, C-drik, Contagious Orgasm, Crawl Unit, Daniel Menche, Das Synthetische Mischgewebe, Goem, Government Alpha, Guilty Connector, Günter Schroth, Imminent, Jazzkammer, Jonathon Kirk, Kasper T. Toepfritz, Kazumoto Endo, Kevueq, KK Null, Klangkrieg, Laura Maes & Kristof Lauwers, Massimo, MSBR, Roel Meelkop, R.H.Y. Yau, Roeland Luyten, Svstriate, TMRX and Xingu Hill. The installation ran from 09/08 till 01/09/2002 and was funded by the National Agency for the Youth in Action Programme of the European Commission.

42 Gallery CCNOA in Brussels has presented sound art, curated by Guy De Bièvre, within the program *Earwitness* from 2002 till 2007 (CCNoa, s.d.).

43 19/04-12/05/1985 with works by amongst others Paul Panhuysen, Max Eastley, John Rose, Smits, Vannoorden, Julius, Dreyblatt, Niblock, Baudouin Oosterlynck and Logos.

44 08/06-08/07/1984: Festival Beeldende Muziek 27/04-01/06/1986: Festival Beeldende Muziek with works by

Max Eastley, Terry Fox, het Apollohuis, Julius, Vivenza and Peter Vogel 01/05-06/06/1987: Festival Beeldende Muziek with works by Walter Faendrich, Felix Hess, Nina Kramer, Leon Van Noorden, Roberto Ollivero, Nico Parlevliet and Godfried-Willem Raes (Vanhoyland, 2012).

45 27/04-26/10/2008: Baudouin Oosterlynck, Paul Panhuysen, Eric Samach, Christina Kubisch, Bob Verschueren and Pierre Berthet (Berthet, 2012).

46 Nowadays several institutions offer courses in sound art. At the London College of Communication, the Sound Arts and Design department, part of the Faculty of Media, has offered a Bachelor degree in Sound arts & design and a Master in Sound arts since 2008 (Voegelin, 2012) Since October 2011 (Nacenta, 2012) the University of Barcelona has organised the Master en Art Sonor targeted towards professionals already active in the field of sound art as well as degree holders in visual arts, architecture or music (Universitat de Barcelona, s.d.).

Although these Masters programmes in sound art are a relatively new phenomenon, individual courses did exist in the past – such as Leif Brush's *Audible Constructs* at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago in the early seventies (Gilmore, 1970) – that provided education in sound art practices.

47 *Studio* voor Experimentele Muziek at the Conservatory of Antwerp and a studio at the Conservatory of Mons.

48 IPeM, Ghent.

49 In art schools the focus lays on creation, whereas in most subjects at conservatories the emphasis lies on the performance of existing music.

50 The course in radio at RITS (Erasmus Hogeschool) goes beyond radio and also pays attention to more artistic expressions of sound such as sound installations and soundscapes (EHB, s.d.). Sint Lucas Ghent offers Visual Arts students the possibility to participate in the Audiowerkplaats, a sound lab under the guidance of Esther Venrooy (Sint Lucas Beeldende Kunst Gent, 2012).

51 Deeltijds Kunst Onderwijs.

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DANCES WITH ROBOTS AND THE SONG OF ALGORITHMS

Mattias Parent & Maarten Quanten

ON A FEW FLEMISH COMPOSERS BETWEEN MUSIC AND TECHNOLOGY



Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *L'homme machine*, 1748

"The springs of the human machine are such that all the vital, animal, natural, and automatic motions are carried on by their action. In a purely mechanical way the eyelids are lowered at the menace of a blow and the pupil contracts in broad daylight to save the retina, the pores of the skin close in winter so that the cold cannot penetrate to the interior of the blood."

The twentieth century in music is almost unthinkable without electricity. This controlled physical phenomenon contributed to radio, brought about a revolution in sound recording and reproduction, and made electronic sound production possible. The mutual influence of music and technology has of course existed for centuries. Bone flutes had to be carved, all kinds of membranes needed to be made supple and then stretched taut. Max Reger's organ works would have been radically different without pneumatic tracker action, and the *Gesang der Jünglinge* is unimaginable without a tape recorder and pulse generator. In many cases, new forms of musical expression have only been able to emerge thanks to technological developments occurring outside the specific artistic context. Think, for example, of the automated instruments originally intended to reproduce existing music but simultaneously bearing the potential to transcend certain motor characteristics of the human performer. Conlon Nancarrow made use of this in conceiving his hyper-complex *Studies for Player Piano*, whereas composers such as Igor Stravinsky were also interested in the mechanical quality of automated music, which implied freedom from human expression. The machines heralded a new aesthetic that superseded their original reason for being built. A somewhat more recent example can be found in the electronic studios where high-tech electro-acoustic measurement and recording apparatus was used non-idiomatically to generate, modulate and combine synthetic sounds. These procedures were used, for example, to realise the radically multiple serialist ideas of composers such as Karel Goeyvaerts and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Once electronic music had become a fairly established phenomenon – from the early 1960s onwards – engineers and physicists were also brought in to develop specific apparatus intended to generate electronic sound complexes. The Institute for Psycho-acoustics and Electronic Music (IPEM) in Ghent is a perfect example. This was where the engineer Walter

Landrieu built several analogue sequencers for a university 'research and development' project that were intended to automate some of the – highly labour-intensive – studio work. In doing so he collaborated closely with composer Lucien Goethals, who was familiar with the musical context and was making further explorations in that area (Landrieu and Goethals, 1973, p. 71-99).

Humans used the machine to create sounds and larger musical structures that had not existed until that moment, a practice that corresponded perfectly with the post-war artistic attitude that radically focused on innovation. Nonetheless, two tendencies in the artistic approach to new technology can be discerned, be it a little crudely. For example, there were composers such as Louis De Meester who used the equipment in a way that did not greatly differ conceptually from the familiar acoustic instruments. They integrated electronic sounds into their musical idiom (which was already more or less developed), although they did not necessarily try to imitate traditional instruments. For others, the specific principles of sound synthesis and compilation techniques led to a fundamental renewal of their thinking on musical structures and forms. Gottfried Michael Koenig described such artistic methods in several of his texts on early electronic musical practice (Koenig, 1964, p. 288-293). Configuring the instruments was not just an incidental technical job like tuning a piano: the technical experiment was intimately linked to the exploration of the musical material, composition and playing – a symbiosis of science and art. Orderings of electronic sound that refrained from any experimentation easily led to synthetic mimesis of instrumental music and its techniques. Karel Goeyvaerts, however, initially focused on the sine tone generator and tape recorder because he believed technology would offer him a solution to aesthetic problems he did not think he could solve with traditional instruments and musicians. Take his complex serial work structures and their reflection in sound structures, for example, and his search for 'static music'. Goeyvaerts composed his *Nummer 4 voor dode tonen* in December 1952,

Performance of Stefan Prins' *Infiltrationen* by ZWERM and the composer
fltr Johannes Westendorp, Matthias Koole, Stefan Prins, Toon Callier, Bruno Nelissen ▾



in the period when Stockhausen was creating his *Konkrete Etüde* during his internship with Pierre Schaeffer in Paris. *Nummer 4* was the first multiple serial work to use exclusively synthetic sounds, but then the problem of actually *making* it arose. The trouble was that Goeyvaerts could not get permission to experiment at the Belgian radio studios. After all, Belgium had no Herbert Eimert at the time to plead the case at the large institutions for taking such new artistic directions.

And then came Herman Van San, a radical aesthetic thinker who has been ruthlessly forgotten by history, even in his own country (Sabbe, 1998, p. 77-78). In the early 1950s he tried to find a place for himself in multiple serialism, then went on to develop a highly complex form of mathematical and technological musical thought. Van San seemed to be searching for an artistic experimentalism that aimed to reject completely the historically developed ideas on musical form, in a way that was probably even more radical than that of his more famous contemporaries. Research into algorithmic techniques for organising sound material was, for him, inextricably linked to this principle. It was clear that in these circumstances technology could no longer serve as a 'musical instrument' in the traditional sense of the word. Instead, the exact sciences in general and (audio) technology in particular provided a means to study and generate structures that *might* make sense in a musical context. In the late 1950's, Van San went to Cologne to create parts of his *Opus Electronicum Mathematicum* in the WDR studio, mentored by Koenig. He did not succeed, and the piece remained a mere concept. At least until Peter Swinnen went to work on *Csound* in 2000 and the piece was premièred at the TRANSIT festival in Leuven more than forty years after it was composed. Maybe it would be a good idea for musicologists of the future to get to grips with his exceptional ideas, even though his influence on music history was very limited.

Lucien Goethals experimented with synthetic sound production and modulation and contributed, as already said, to the automation of the IPEM studio. In 1966 he wrote and created a

noteworthy serial electronic work, *Contrapuntos*. Its sound complexes are an example of musical structures that arose from the protocols of the studio – *ars technologica*. Short, raw sound particles (sine waves, square waves, noise but also samples of piano clusters) are combined into electronic *Klanggestalte* that are easiest to describe in terms of forms of movement or tendencies in frequency space. In that sense Goethals' music is clearly related to the (electronic) group and field compositions by people such as Stockhausen and Koenig. However the work demonstrates an idiom of Goethals' own, infused with a modern but sensual use of counterpoint. *Contrapuntos* consists of twelve layers of material mixed in a stereo version. This electro-counterpoint technique – the synchronisation of 'monophonic' layers into a 'polyphonic' whole – was also a necessity in the studios and encouraged composers to shape their music on the basis of such production methods and protocols. In itself of course this would not be particularly remarkable, were it not for the fact that Goethals also made a version of the work in which layers of material (or collections of such layers) were played on separate tape recorders. Switching the machines on or off was moreover done with signals from photo-electrical cells that reacted to the movements of concert-goers walking around. Goethals had created an interactive installation that generated an aleatoric, spatial counterpoint.

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Godfried-Willem Raes founded the Logos group in 1968 in Ghent, along with several other students who shared his views. Even back then he was a ferocious opponent of the 'conserving' mentality of Ghent Conservatory and developed into a militant advocate of musical innovation. In Raes' eyes, aesthetics were and are inextricably linked to a wider ethical and political reality. His own experimental artistic orientation developed in parallel with certain anarchist and Marxist political ideas. In that sense the Logos group was related to the British Scratch Orchestra and its members performed music by, for example,

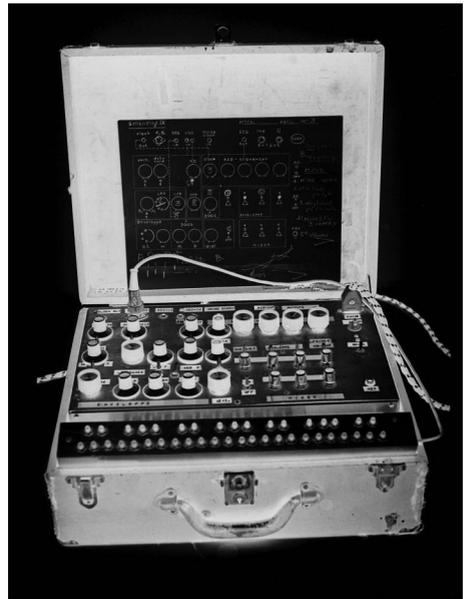
**NEW
TIMES**

CREATE

NEW

CHAL-

LENGES



Cornelius Cardew, Christian Wolff and Mauricio Kagel. Although Raes currently works as a lecturer in composition at Ghent Conservatory, he was thrown out of the institute for refusing to engage with old music. This radicalism was closely intertwined with an intense interest in technology that he used as a means for and object of artistic experimentalism. In the 1970s, this interest was mainly translated into an exploration of electronic sound production. It is striking that Raes – just like Michel Waisvisz in the Netherlands and Hugh Davies in England – soon began designing and building his own instruments, sound sculptures and installations. That practice became an integral part of his artistic activity. The medium of sound sculpture straddles the border between construction, composition and music-making. The direct interaction between the audience and the installations, and the disappearance of the dividing lines between stage and audience also represented an artistic materialisation of Raes' political ideas. Thus he also questions the strict division between musical amateurism and professionalism, for example. What is less obvious is that his stage instruments also have formal characteristics shaped by ideology. An example here would be his *Synthelogs* series (1976), consisting of small analogue synthesizers. They do not have piano keyboards, because he believes that a keyboard would impose the logarithmic division of the octave, as the symbol of old and commercialised music, on the musician.

Godfried-Willem Raes' relationship with means of electronic sound production is a complex one. On the one hand, technology provided an obvious area of experimentation for a composer whose artistic thinking was self-evidently progressive, and who moreover displayed an explicit passion for and knowledge of engineering sciences. On the other hand, we note a disappointment in the medium that we would like to sketch briefly here in three points of concern. Firstly, Raes soon came to consider electronically generated sounds as simplistic 'caricatures' of complex acoustic sounds. After all, they were formally rooted in Fourier schemes (think of the

forms of sound synthesis in early serialism). Raes considered them as a mathematical reduction of the complex nature of sounds into an idealised regularity and schematic two-dimensionality. Secondly, he believed that (live) electronics in a concert setting were susceptible to mystification, inspiring awe. This was not the reaction from the audience that Raes and the Logos group were seeking. Rather than a technological tour de force, they wanted the artistic experience to be central. The third point is somewhat related to this: in the context of (early) live electronic music, the direct relationship between the musician's physical gesture and sound produced was lost. A light touch on a tiny potentiometer, for example, could bring about a serious parametric movement – Superman sending a juggernaut into the stratosphere with a flick of his little finger. The electronics responsible for sound production and parameter modulations were hidden in sealed boxes. Raes' ideal, however, was a naked openness of systems. His artistic and political visions, here, are metaphorically intertwined.

It may be clear that Raes' aesthetic ideals are a far cry from the modernist aspiration towards new sound complexes, as was customary at analogue electronic studios such as the IPEM. His criticism of electronic sounds and equipment was inextricably linked to his compositional and/or instrument-building concepts. For example, he viewed the *Synthelogs* explicitly as 'magic boxes' and the demystification of the equipment and sound sculptures occurred when the audience touched and played with them. Raes continued to use electronics, but only in work involving explicit caricaturization: as a soundtrack to political cartoons (mocking the establishment), for example. However, many of his instruments, installations, sculptures and performances are based on acoustic sound producers (e.g. the *Pneumaphone Project*, see photo) or electronics with highly intuitive or physical characteristics. The *Symphony for Singing Bicycles* (1976), for example, is to be performed by cyclists whose bicycle is fitted with an electronic oscillator driven by a dynamo. This composition/performance/installation is suffused with

Godfried-Willem Raes with his *Taeftkuip*, photo Logos Foundation ▼



Raes' aesthetic. It is performed in public spaces, by professional or non-professional musicians or even non-musicians. Sounds, clusters and gestures arise that do not conform to the (unwritten) laws of what is normally heard in public spaces (i.e. muzak). The electronic sounds are raw, naked, divested of invisible and mystifying modulations or transformations and connected to the physical gesture of cycling, the translation of pedalling speed into a frequency. A number of Raes' instruments are designed as 'electrical' and not 'electronic' for exactly that reason. In this context we mean by that that the musician touches an object leading to the material and/or surrounding air being made to vibrate. The latter is then converted using transducers (pick-ups, air and contact microphones) into an electrical

vibration pattern whose acoustic manifestation is a direct consequence of the physical contact between the musician and the instrument.

The fusion of aesthetic innovation and technology in Raes' work is also reflected in his composition process. He developed algorithms for this early on. After all, one could claim that the creative act of composing, in the eyes of the composer, is far less a matter of merely executing and varying on a (shared) system of rules than intervening in and developing the rules that connect sounds for a composition or group of compositions. This is why the young Raes opposed conservatory practices such as tonal harmonics, classical counterpoint and traditional fugue techniques that hinder free creative think-

ing and result in a mixture of academicism and craftsmanship. This is also where his distaste for modernist composers lurks, who tried to develop new 'big systems' that would apply across the board (e.g. certain approaches in multiple serialism or spectralism). Raes' *Book of Fugues* (1992-1993) is a good example of a formalised collection of artistic ideas that can theoretically generate countless compositions. A computer programme like this one incorporates composition, perhaps it even is the composition; it contains a systematised aesthetic that can be infinitely materialised in the form of numerous variations. The craftsmanship in composing work is contracted out to machines; humans determine the creative rules and musical foundations (such as how the *comes* is related to the *dux*). Technology is a liberating force here, ensuring that humans only need to concern themselves with the typically human aspect of artistic production – creation instead of mere variation. Such a composition moreover contains implicit criticism of several forms of artistic behaviour, due to the fact that it makes certain of their automatisms explicit – or, if you prefer, demystifies them. The fugue (or counterpoint in general) is after all not only one of Raes' favourite points of musical interest, but also an important symbol of conservative musical education.

The principle of automation did not only interest Raes for what it could bring to the composition process, but also for how it could change concert performances. Automated musical instruments have existed for several centuries, of course, and Nancarrow used them extensively to supersede human limitations in performance practice.¹ Raes' first automata were fairly small, digitally controlled acoustic instruments that needed amplification to be heard. Later the machines got bigger and could be used as fully acoustic instruments. Today his robot orchestra includes several organs, a piano, a spinet, percussion, brass, wind, strings and even a rain machine – about fifty machines in total, with more being added each year. Just as with Nancarrow, the technology is intended to outstrip human cerebral and mechanical limi-

tations. This can be done very simply, by giving the automaton a fixed program that converts a musical structure formulated as a collection of parameter values into a succession of mechanical actions (a good example is Raes' *Vibes for Vibi* from 2001): in other words a digital version of the punched piano roll or carillon drum. In this sense Raes' automata clearly do share common ground with the tape recorder in early electronic studios: the machine makes it possible to play unplayable musical structures. With the machines, however, every sound-producing action is visible, taking place in the concert hall: robotic hands, feet and lips play real musical instruments in real time, and there is a direct and intuitive link between movement and sound. The instrument builder works on the same aesthetic assumptions as the composer: philosophy becomes politics becomes technology becomes music.

The task of human musicians in the situation described above is limited to programming the automata. They disappear from the stage; their physical actions and musical movements are no longer relevant. However it was not Raes' intention to make human musicians disappear; on the contrary. The interaction between human and machine has even become one of the central aspects of his artistic work in the last few decades. More specifically, he has developed interfaces that convert movements or sounds into commands for the robots (projects such as *Hex*, *Holosound* and *Namuda*). This artistic practice, too, can be seen as a criticism of the overruling Western music culture that is almost completely focused on the specialist musician and the resulting virtuosity. 'Classical' music-making is in that sense entirely interwoven with a standardised set of performance conventions or reproduction standards. The Romantic focus on (and cult of) the virtuoso – as we still find celebrated today at the high mass of the music competition – can after all only flourish by the grace of that shared collection of norms and values. Hence these values risk gaining an almost absolute nature and generating a (dogmatic) basis for comparison. However, machines outstrip humans here in

terms of motor skills and mechanical flexibility, just as they are faster than biological brains in 'thinking of' a *comes* for a *dux*. A sensor system can liberate the musician from the traditional armoury of instruments that is now wrangled by a computer brain, mechanical fingers and a pneumatic mouth. Body movements are converted into a series of commands that control the machines. The 'dancing musician' can play a whole orchestra at once, his or her actions no longer limited to the single instrument whose characteristics have been intensively internalised over decades. Once again, the dividing line blurs in Raes' musical culture between the professional and the amateur. The 'instrument' moreover incorporates the score (or part of it). After all, the composer creates an algorithm that describes the reactions of the robots to the movements of the performer. The latter improvises, dances a choreography or does both, and the role of performer may even be taken on by the audience if the machines are set up as an installation.

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In the 1950s, electronic technology promised to open up a whole new creative world of sound. As time progressed, composers gained ever-increasing control over the pixels of music, the atoms of sound. The musical avant-garde developed an unprecedented interest in technology, an artistic rocket that would carry them up out of the traditional Western aesthetics. Many of us have already connected serial aesthetics, the general rationalism and progress-based thinking of the 1950s and a form of 'post-Auschwitz' ethics. The development of unheard musical structures, work forms and sound forms belonged in that context. When Herman Van San said that he wanted to rid music of emotion and infuse it with mathematical rationality, he was invoking a far wider, shared current of thinking. Such aesthetic ideas bear witness on the one hand to a rejection (to a certain extent) of old norms (or at least the reproduction of these norms), and on the other hand they express hope for a future in which the formal beauty of structures that were

traditionally 'non-musical' could become musical – electrons and algorithms, quantum mechanics. Musical expression, here, demands from its audience a far-reaching empathy with otherness as a condition for communication. In this context aesthetics are anything but detached from life, even if they perhaps take on an unprecedented form of sensual stubbornness. Or to put it in the words of Gottfried Michael Koenig:

“An audience that only calls music ‘human’ when it understands it, but only perceives in music that which a machine could register, does not have a human relationship with music. This cannot be restored until the perception of art emphasises specifically human capacities, such as the ability to understand new things. Recognising familiar things is not understanding. In this sense electronic music that appeals to a specifically human capacity should be more human than instrumental music decorated with glamorous titles but afraid to tell the audience more than it already knows.”

Koenig, 1962/1963, p. 77

Godfried-Willem Raes' artistic production is explicitly infused with ideology at many levels. His multifaceted work is political, and hence so is the constantly present technology, although he does not always entirely affirm this. Technology, the machine, frees humans from their limits, through its interfaces becomes an extension of their limbs, vocal cords and maybe other organs as well. These interfaces and algorithms ensure in turn that the performer has access to a whole array of instruments, and that the classical virtuoso

no longer takes central stage. Technology changes and/or renews musical culture, and is formally grafted onto Raes' social and artistic ideals.

There is a certain area of common ground between Raes and Stefan Prins (°1979), the young Fleming who came home from the Internationale Ferienkurse in Darmstadt in the summer of 2011 with the coveted Kranichsteiner Preis for composition under his arm. The composer's first degree was in electronic engineering with a specialisation in photonics. Nowadays he usually works with Max/MSP and almost all his work includes a technological component. His electronic sound material is often produced with granular synthesis techniques. In that sense he is affiliated to a tradition of 'modernist' electronic sound experimentation that characterised the second half of the twentieth century in music. Incidentally, this also applies to Prins' use of algorithmic composition techniques. He also experiments, among other things, with improvisation, sampling interfaces and sound synthesis using analogue (no-input-mixing) and digital feedback.

It is striking in Prins' early work that communication, interaction and symbiosis between human and technological systems is not only a means or an instrument for creating musical structures, but also a basic conceptual principle. Initially the composer noted the very close intertwining of humanity and the machine in today's world and has subsequently made it a theme of his work. The computer is all but omnipresent, digital communication a recent but undeniable norm. Influence is mutual: humans build and operate machines at work and in their free time; the presence and functions of machines affect human thought and actions. The stronger the control that humans exercise over machines, the more intensive symbiosis often is as well, the branching of electronic tentacles in brains and flesh that – just like with certain parasitic organisms – influence the thoughts and actions of their host. Although this is not a case of a fundamental, or even partial evaluation of 'good' and

'evil', criticism (from the arts world) is self-evident here. This is because the individual's autonomy seems to be affected, especially if we view the human subject through a romantic/modernist (including Marxist) lens. There is certainly a dose of criticism present in Prins' work, but the last thing he does is to express this by avoiding technology or aiming for ultimate control of the alien system by 'naturalising' it further towards humanity, removing the friction. Rather he creates an artificial mirror of that field of tension by transforming the relationships and mechanisms inside it into musically fertile structures and processes. In *Not I* for electric guitar (2007) for example, the composer plays with the alienating effect that live electronics can have on the auditory result of the performer's physical gestures, the non-analogue relationship between touching strings and the sound result that the listener (and performer) associate with that action. The soloist, performing a monologue, loses subjective autonomy – just like the female protagonist of Samuel Beckett's *Not I* (1973) – as another voice, another perspective, breaks in and takes over. He and she are forced into alterity, the 'I' into the 'not I'. In conceptualising the piece for ensemble *Fremdkörper I* (2008), written for a concert programme on the theme of *Entartete Musik*, Prins explicitly links the technological 'foreign body' with the cultural and social 'other'. Each instrument is amplified using a guitar amplifier that is also connected to a computer with pre-recorded, electronically processed material from the same instrument. When the performer is playing, the alien (or alienated?) digital sound producer (or reproducer) is silent; when the performer stops, the technological body immediately forces its way through the amplifier via an electrical signal. The two worlds, that of the flesh, with sounds linked to physical and visible action, and that of sublimated, reproduced and transformed sounds, interpenetrate each other. They move between heterogeneity and fusion in a sound world in which alterity is anything but exclusively linked to one of the systems and whose borders can moreover blur. In *Infiltrationen (Memory space #4)* (2009) for four electric guitars and

live electronics, the phenomenon of technological infiltration is linked to the idiosyncrasies of the human brain, more specifically memory. The score is generated during the performance by a computer algorithm and contains musical tasks for the musicians to perform. The guitarists can give signals to the algorithmic network, react to what is happening and thus direct the musical 'game' for themselves and the others – humans appear to be the masters of technology and intervene creatively in the art work. But the symbiosis is more complex than that. The computer commands the musicians to remember certain actions and then recall them later. Here technology determines human activity and at the slightest hesitation – as in *Fremdkörper* – it takes over from the musicians: it controls, evaluates and intervenes. The computer appears here as the superior entity in terms of processing speed and memory, and humans have to adjust to technological nature. The basic conceptual principles – though not their development – are related here to Raes' claims for the role of the machine in a creative context. The mere search for new sounds is something Prins has long since left behind. New times create new challenges.

There is one thing that Goeyvaerts, Van San, Goethals, Raes and Prins have in common: they are not satisfied with the state of things as they are. From their observation of the world and

music they extend, add, change, contemplate, question and communicate. In their music, they reflect the newest world in all its complexity, its possibilities, paradoxes and uncertainties – both using and commenting on technology.



Note

1 Incidentally, it was Raes who brought Nancarrow's music to Europe in the early 1970s (to the Logos concert hall).

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SOUND FLOWS AND

Philippe Franck

ELECTRONIC NOMADISM



n the beginning: the computer and music software made to transform sound, rhythms, and patterns. In the beginning: turntables, mixer, and vinyl discs touched, glued, scratched. In the beginning: sound matter, fragment, sample, beat, 'click', accident... then the loop, sequence, pattern, mix... From these multiple electro-organic elements emerge mobile and fluid sound architectures. Frozen on pause at a moment of assumed instability, they are continuous potential future creations, remixed by their creators or by others who own them, transforming the smallest molecule or simply adding, subtracting or modifying their components.

This art of re/mix is not limited to the DJ, whose practice it is. It has become a method pertaining to the very creation of the living sound organism. Hence, what is recorded, then offered to the public domain often is a choice among tens of different versions, and other choices are bound to be issued on various media, remixed by the same or by others. This second level of sound processing can be denominated differently. Depending on the degree and type of processing, it can be called 'remix' (creation of remix albums, the essential maxi following the single, or even as a bonus, generally offered at the end of the original album), 'reconstruction' (such as the producer-musician Bill Laswell at the mixing table, gathering 25 years later some of Miles

Davis' most famous compositions from 1969 to 1974, and offering with the album titled *Panthalassa*, an 'emotional chaining' by selecting and highlighting certain elements instead of others, creating a sort of respectful introduction to Miles' psychedelic period), or in 'revisitation' as in *Maximin* (Young God Records, 2002) where Jean-Marie Mathoul and David Coulter borrowed, with his permission, long excerpts of Charlemagne Palestine's original compositions and added subtle elements that melt into the maxi/minimalist master's universe, left intact, while respecting his spirit and original sources.

Some, including Bill Laswell, dare using the word 'translation', that of a musical source into any esthetic creation (ambient, dub, etc.). In any case, we switch from the notion of original creation to the concept of transformation and reinterpretation using a variable process, placed in the foreground by electronic creation.¹

This art of linking, switching, recycling, circulating, and commuting is now integrated into daily practice and is subject to market expectations and pressure (in search of 'novelty' or 'new versions'). A 'viral art' revealing a viral society, which contaminates genres, cultures, and media in an endemic, endless continuum; one remix after the other, the source is diluted, mutated, and mixed with other organisms for further reproduction.

This art of flow, 'deterritorialized', gives birth to a nomad body made of multiple, variable, parasitic, residual matters... resulting in 'arrangements' described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Mille Plateaux*², a "reflection of flow and fold" continuously reread and remixed and an inspiration for numerous electronic projects and musicians. In the same spirit are 'organized' *Folds et rhizomes*³, released by Sub Rosa immediately after his death and including young 'electronic musicians' selected by the wild herb philosopher (Scanner, David Shea, Mouse on Mars, Oval, Main, Tobias Hazan), and the double CD titled *In memoriam Gilles Deleuze*, the founding piece of the *Mille Plateaux* label managed by the Frankfurt philosopher Achim

Szepanski (including, among others, the aforementioned, along with DJ Spooky, Jim O'Rourke, Atom Heart, and numerous figures who since then have become major actors in these lush rhizomatic fields). Without Deleuze's 'tune', Sub Rosa, Mille Plateaux and many other independent record labels, valued sound labs for today's researchers would likely not have developed into their current state.

'Electronic wanderers' travel in the global city, pirating its cellular communication (Scanner), playing (Oval), or provoking (Disc) digital accidents to reveal invisible mappings and to scramble the radars of control societies. These wanderers are certainly not idle; they move swiftly and emerge in all corners of the world for a surgical stroke in a festival, concert, performance, exhibit, session, or workshop. With their computers and samplers, electronic pirates fight the spectacular disinformation society with copy-pasted, diverted, recreated data, and hacking and exchanges on the sound network of networks.

SUBVERSION OF THE INFRA-THIN

An overproduction of 'cultural products', usually designed in haste, that formats – even in the area of electronic music where reproduction is facilitated by digital reproduction techniques – increasingly ephemeral trends that clone, emerge and die more and more rapidly. Precious are silences stolen from sound pollution (a switch from the creation of musical fullness to listened emptiness) and gaps in which one can find meaning. Could these breathing spaces be the last sustainable areas in a saturated climate for a new form of subversion?

In his notes, Marcel Duchamp describes the infra-thin as a "possibility with a future", "switching from one to the other precisely being the place of infra-thin."⁴ Infra-thin is used by the 'bearers of shadow', an anonymous society represented by these sources of light. Some electronic music genres utilize these infra-thins which

can be heard in negative format, between two clicks, between two layers, between two grooves, between needle and vinyl, between mouse and screen, between bass and drum. Scelsi, Cage, Feldman also 'materialized' the infra-thin in their music of silence. Ryoji Ikeda clearly isolates it between two abyssal pulsations and infra-bass, while Terre Thaemiz uses it in a concept album (*Interstices*, Mille Plateaux, 2001) that delivers slices of insidious 'muzak', an essentially catchall, tasteless genre in disturbing segments, a manifestation of claimed radical queer approach that sees identity as 'an information strategy rather than an end point for essential truth'. David Toop tracks it between two signs of nocturnal life (*37th Floor of Sunset-Music for Mondophrenetic*, Sub Rosa, 2000) turned into a vast installation in which the British anthropologist-technologist acts as a sound unveiler while Scanner blurs the limits between private and public life by integrating in his digital net cellular interceptions of the place where he stands. A city monitored, scanned 24/7 to which these audio-voyeurs attempt to return its elusive soul using sound instants, fragments of 'found poetry'.

RECOMPOSING GEOSONIC ITINERARIES AND TRANSCULTURAL ACTIVISM

The sound flows redesign forgotten natural links, highlight others unknown until today by investing, for the time of an action-creation, other geographies and other cultures. This is how Charlemagne Palestine, a New-York Jew of Russian origin, subtly mixes, in *Jamaican Heinekens* in Brooklyn (Baroni, 1998) the anthropologic recording of a ceremony including Jamaicans, Cubans and Dominicans in Brooklyn with a quasi idle synthetic drone (but the art of the quivering resides in this 'quasi') to take us in a slow trance to the limits of the sacred, the pagan, and the schizo. Likewise, *Walking in Jerusalem* (Mille Plateaux, 2002) by Random Inc, part poetic documentary, part ballad, and part film noir based on recordings made in Jerusalem, or *Lume Lume* (Staubgold,

2000), a soundtrack for the Danube composed by the Romanian violinist Alexander Balanescu (in collaboration with artists from the German, Austrian, and Italian electronic scene) broadcasted in the Linz Klangpark during the Ars Electronica Festival. Other itinerant creations have proved more committed. In *Plunderphonics 96* (Seeland, 1996), John Oswald, a member of the activist collective Negativland, deconstructs, using wild audio-collages, 30 years of rock history and creates a zapped Frankenstein. With *Second nature* (Mille Plateaux, 1999), Ultra Red created an 'electroacoustic pastoral' in Los Angeles' Griffith Park occupied by homosexuals previously expelled by the police; an ode to a threatened libertarian 'playground'.

(E)motional multiculturalism, militant multiculturalism stimulated by NICTs and their use in musical creation, without hymn or flag except that of minority voices and of the right to universal singularity.

IDENTITY NOMADISM

Most electronic nomads who ignore the genre borders own more than one passport. We see an inflation of identities, pseudonyms and hide-and-seek games. Well-ranked in the hit parade of electro-(multi)schizos, Atom Heart, previously known as Lassigue Bendthaus (the name used for his technoid productions) became Senor Coconut for a latino version of a Kraftwerk standard, before morphing into Geez'n'gosh for a 'gospel'n cut' album (*Nobody knows*, Mille Plateaux, 2001). The proliferation of disposable names results in corrupting the disc market by flooding it with productions (to this day, Atom produced over 40 albums under various labels) and creates a form of freedom, preventing excessive determinism relative to the evolution of a unique personality by allowing him/her to potentially reach several different audiences. Such differences make each temporary identity a multiple of itself, present where his audience and critics expect him (a name, a style, a label) while his fraternal twin is already elsewhere.

Often, some electronic nomads, continuously invited to multiple festivals and electronic art and music events spend most of their time in airplanes and trains; there, they compose, communicate, and feed on the journey for a creation that, like its creator, is permanently moving. Simultaneously, this lifestyle of creation and performance makes any notion of territory abstract; geographies and differences disappear in the accelerated pace of airports, stages, and hotels. A high-speed musical journey into planetary no man's land.

ESTHETICS OF CONFRONTATION

Urban nomads without any community other than virtual, without any god or nostalgia, unattached 'isolationists', free electrons who meet in networks and enjoy friendly, creative confrontation: Scanner versus Kim Cascone, Kim Cascone versus Keith Rowe, Ryoji Ikeda versus Carsten Nicolai/Alva Noto (aka Cyclo). Carsten Nicolai versus Ryuichi Sakamoto, Janek Schaefer versus Robert Hampson/Main (aka Comae), Main versus Jim O'Rourke, O'Rourke versus Fennesz and Rherberg (compression of these three personalities into a three-headed Hydra called Fenno'berg), Rheberg versus Bauer, etc. the associative chain is long.

The art of confrontation, of the 'versus', opposing/linking two entities, two or more universes collating, temporarily mixing while never losing their individuality that is fortified in these jousts, the ephemeral encounter of two organisms that refuse to merge and generate a third, parallel channel. Co-presentation, in/communicating cohabitations or rubbing, clicking, sparkles... connections most often devoid of fusion, episodic linking.

The magic of these improvisation moments that generated new dynamism to live creation, occasionally evoking free-jazz (clicking of samurai knives with Ottomo Yoshohide, Philip Jeck and Martin Tétreault) where video games combine experimental and playful dimensions in a sound happening, confrontations seen and

heard by a passive audience, that result in a long drift by some accomplished 'electronicautistics'. Ultimately, those are only confronted with themselves. Rather than choosing any piece from *Folds & rhizomes*, Oval choses, for his remix of his de-leuzian successor, *Double articulation* (Sub Rosa, 1996) to download all other participants in the album to recreate a perfectly homogenous continuum. Whether he grabs other sources or uses his own, it always results in an auto-remix (whether a 1976 electro-acoustic essay by Henri Pousseur or an electro-jazzy piece by Squarepusher blended through his 'Oval Process', it mutates again and only into an 'ovalian' flow.

AN ADVENTUROUS CONFRONTATION BETWEEN SOUND GENRES AND WORLDS

To inaugurate the 'electro-contempo' series, the classical, non-conventional composer Jean-Paul Dessy (Musiques Nouvelles) selects sequences and sounds suggested by Scanner who in London samples cello parts played for the occasion. The next step is the writing by Jean-Paul Dessy in Brussels and exchanging emails, comments back and forth over the Channel. A few weeks later, they meet onstage at the Botanique in Brussels during the 'electro-contempo' weekend with a Musiques Nouvelles string quartet. The following year, a CD called *Play Along* (Sub Rosa) completed with other pieces borrowed here and there or personally arranged continued this collaboration. A successful ping pong game compared to many failed transgender attempts, between two sensitivities, different backgrounds who, while totally remaining true to themselves and each with their knowledge, languages, and instruments, invented a new mode of crossed creation and composition while avoiding overlapping.

We know that the electronic music generation that emerged in the nineties enthusiastically rediscovered the pioneers of concrete music (Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry, as well as Luc Ferrari, Eliane Radigue, etc.) and the great masters who amazed us so much. (Stockhausen remixed despite of himself, Xenakis with, among

A  VIRAL

ART 

REVEALING

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SOCIETY 

others, his timeless *PH Concret* revisited and extended 45 years later in Brussels by Kim Cascone) as well as minimalists (John Cage, Steve Reich remixed by DJ Spooky, Andrea Parker, Coldcut and a few other intrepid musicians, Morton Feldman, Pauhne Oliveros, Giacinto Scelsi, etc., finally recognized by an increasingly large audience) whose essential approach and esthetics greatly impacted generations of musicians from various back-

grounds. In the years 2000, several intergenerational confrontations occurred with variable success, but always with communicative pleasure: DJ Olive at the turntable and Luc Ferrari behind his modulating machines shortly before the master of 'Almost nothing' flew to new spheres, Kim Cascone and his laptop meeting Tony Conrad and his 'long string' during a memorable Transhistorics evening in an auditorium still in construction at the Grand-Duc Jean

Modern Art Museum in Luxembourg, Pan Sonic tamed by Charlemagne Palestine for a recording of *Mort aux vaches* at VPRO, the Dutch radio, the pioneer-poet of electro-acoustic music Léo Kupper at Théâtre Mercelis (Ixelles/Brussels) playing like a naughty little boy at throwing his MIDI sounds in the middle of the Brussels turntablist duo Géo-graphique, and Janek Schaefer with his two-arm 'twin turntable'. Also, the composer Henri Pousseur, fellow traveller of Berio and Butor, whose visionary electronic work is joyfully re-discovered and who accepted that Robert Hampson (Main), Philip Jeck and Oval play their personal versions of his *8 Etudes paraboliques*⁵, initially recorded at WDR (Cologne) live at the Botanique (Brussels) in 1972. By the way, it should be noted that this was not a remix in today's sense but rather another mix, since the sound journey is constructed from the principle of mixing and modulating initial sources.

The confrontation also happens between musicians and artists from other disciplines (multiple encounters that should be analyzed in a separate article) with electronic media as common point: multimedia artist (Scanner and Tonne, with both dimensions potentially coexisting within the same person), choreographer, writer-performer (the duet between electro-guitar player Richard Pinhas, and Maurice Dantec, author of *Babylone Babies*, both influenced by delezian teachings), or visual (performances by Thomas Koner with his compatriot Jurgen Reble, film alchemist, or with the French experimental filmmaker Yann Beauvais). Despite its potential, the confrontation between live sound and image, increasingly present and almost mandatory today (among other reasons, to deal with the unspectacular austerity of the experimental electronic scene) remains problematic and, in many cases, frustrating. The appeal of images, even when poor, tends to obliterate the musical dimension. Today, the really successful interactions and collaborations requiring not only time but also understanding of media specificities and protagonists' universes are much more rare than hasty juxtapositions and editing between wall-paper effect, graphics and MTV-style melting pot. Other

audio-iconic attempts (although a minority, but one can hope since this issue of the image-sound interaction and that of new representation modes currently are the object of numerous debates) fortunately emerge from these much too recurrent schemes. Among others, Sounds and Visions of Imaginary Cities, a truly nomad project that revitalizes the (now too) conventional DJ-VJ formula, starting from an original urban sound database recorded on vinyl by DJ Olive and an image database on imaginary cities simultaneously mixed for a given time, by electronic musicians (Charlemagne Palestine, who was the DJ for this project, only relied on turntable speed, and Boris Polanski who lacerated and tore vinyl discs to modify their sounds), and video artists. Other, more ambitious projects, integrate music and multimedia dimension to create 'electronic' or 'virtual' operas (a never-ending return to the fantasy of Wagner's total art). Here also, we see that the musical dimension is often relegated to a form of emphasis of often-impressive iconic devices that obliterate, with heavy use of technology, the stage and, too often, the meaning.

The vocabulary used by today's music critics and sound investigators has many common terms with that of visual artists: matter, texture, layer, volume, etc. This lexicon is the foundation of a practice that works sound as a visual material using software or, directly on the medium by physically altering vinyl to distort, scratch or destroy it as does Christian Marclay, the herald of so-called 'actionist turntable artist', as well as on the CD as does the California collective DISC who, starting from the principle that there are too many CDs in the world, tries to remedy this situation by torturing them with anything they find before 'composing' a piece made of scratches, jumps and repeated tracks, and accelerated buzzing.⁶ Numerous artists, today known as musicians used to be (and remain, directly or indirectly, true to their approach) visual artists (Philip Jeck, DJ Olive, Christian Marclay, Christina Kubish, etc.), architects (Janek Schaefer) or even landscape designers (Carsten Nicolai). Since the space dimension prevails

over time considerations in electronic music, they immediately felt comfortable in this discipline. With Sound Art (a hybrid genre including various practices involving space and sound arts, that produced many musicians, visual artists as well as designers, poets, performers, etc.), sound enters other spaces, not directly dedicated to music, museums and exhibits, increasingly attracted to these invisible volumes, urban spaces, transportation, public broadcasting systems “misused” for the time of the event. Sound trajectories and masses are ‘projected’ in space by the creator/engineer/space specialist: an intended ‘poetisation’ of noise, using sound calligraphy: visual sound, and sound vision, sound staging, film for the ears, and invisible soundtracks.

CUT’N CLICK

Today, ‘cut up’, the art of word-image moving, permuting, artifact of the Dadaists, politico-playful shortcut of the controlling society, semi-random work of the ‘third spirit’ evoked by William Burroughs and Brion Gysin, continues to open doors of perception. Fifty years after *The Third Mind* by the interzone tandem, and thirty years after the Electronic revolution (predicted by “the invisible man” who left a nasal message on the voicemail of our unconscious), click’n cut, the anonymous pair, emerges from the womb of digital machines opened by the e-bloc surgeons (Carsten Nicolai/Alva Noto, Dat Politics/Tone Rec, Matmos, etc.). The ‘click’ is the machine’s symptom, the sh-sound of its joints, the cry of its accidents. With the ‘cut’, the blade of the electronic sushi, the fragmentation, the slicing of the unit, the definition of the sample, it is isolated as punctuation, pulsation, counterpoint. Between click and cut, the interval is defined in digital space. Sometimes, one hears in the digital/sidereal silence (since Cage, we know it doesn’t exist) a breath by the machine, by the matrix; an unidentified organism emerges from the unsuspected shallows of programmed trajectories.

REINVENTING THE LISTENING EAR

While hi-fi technologies strive for the most precise and encompassing finish, the most popular daily listening conditions are mediocre. As music broadcasting devices are made available to greater audiences, are more varied (CD player, Walkman, MP3 player, built-in hi-fi in cars, etc.) and allow for private, a la carte listening, we are no longer immersed in a sound universe with all the attention and availability it requires. Most times, we only hear music in an undifferentiated manner, mixed with other sound stimulations/pollutions, but we are not really listening. In this paradox, concerts or a new mode of music rendition could guarantee the survival of musical immersion. Today, there are several types of broadcasting spaces, calling for different listening modes:

- Musical environments: outdoor or indoor urban spaces, dispatching music or sound, in which the visitor comes and, eventually, stops for a generally limited time;
- Relaxation spaces: ‘chill out’ or ‘lounge’ spaces in which visitors are invited to relax, sit or lie comfortably, listening to the sound of a DJ mixing down tempo music;
- Places of architecture contemplation that speak to soul and spirit, with an encompassing, qualitative and precise approach of sound, which triggers full attention and availability of the listener;
- Performance venues: concert halls, most often still in a traditional frontal position. They are less and less suitable for experimental electronic creations, for their broadcasting tools, and for the non-spectacular character of their representation devices (‘admiring’ the artist’s forehead lit by his laptop screen, or his hand moving the mouse and, in a supreme releasing movement, his head nodding over a ‘live’ activated track);
- The nomad listening and listening types in polymorphous architectures such as a large festival dedicated to electronic music; the listener wanders easily, at his pace, from a ‘chill out’ space to an open-space or closed stage or to a more intimate space.

In the immediate future, we still need to (re) invent listening lounges, 'sauna sonora', 'sonic gardens', new temples dedicated to the gods of music (but they already exist.), and other spaces designed for active listening and inner sound experience.

WATER MUSIC

Sound object, sound sculpture, sound architecture... Electronic sounds are raw materials for visual and organic constructions. Following the visionary architect-theorist Markus Novac, inventor of liquid architecture, a 'transarchitecture', combining reality and virtuality, hardness and flexibility, masculine and feminine to create a third specie⁷, we could pretend that electronic music, freed from the weight of academic or

commercial dictates, would liquefy or fluidify even more with metadata exchanged in multiple networks with high speed variability. Digital music invades data sphere (or, is it the other way around?). Sound flows create mobile immaterial forms that populate various spaces and communication means, whether physical or virtual.

Sound architectures built on 'floating foundations' that resist earthquakes⁸ and adapt to fluctuations and chaos.

Sound and music of impermanence in constant mutation... *Water music flowing forever...*

This text originates from *Sons en mutation*, a coordinated publication in French co-edited for Musiques Nouvelles with La Lettre Volée in 2003. Franck, P. & Dessy J.-P., *Sons en mutation*, Editions La Lettre Volée, 2003.

Notes

1 In his quest on relationships between 'models of creativity broadcasted by digital technology' and the trauma, the architect Mark Goulthorpe speaks of "apparent break in the strategy of performance", a change he describes as the "switch from a notion of original to the notion of transformation, of which the most obvious effect is to use time as a creation element. (...) Transformation moves the original creation and disperses its historical legitimacy (locked in a vertical temporal segment) among a now unlimited electronic horizon..."

Goulthorpe, M., *Trend from the autoplasic to the alloplastic: notes on a technological latency in Cahiers de la Recherche architecturale et urbaine, Virtuel/réel, quelle place pour les nouvelles technologies*, Paris, 2001, p. 58.

2 Deleuze and Guattari mention Husserl who "discovered an area of material, vague essences, vagabond, anexact, and still rigorous, as opposed to fixed, metric, formal essences. Such essences generate texture (materiality) with two characteristics: "first, it is inseparable from a passage to the limit as change of status of distortion and transformation happening in a space-time which itself is inexact, acting as events (removal, adjunction, projection, etc.); second, it is inseparable from expressive or intensive

qualities, capable of more or less, produced as variable affects (resistance, hardness, weight, color, etc.). Consequently, there is an ambulant events-affects coupling constituting the vague body essence and distinct from the "fixed essence-resulting properties in the object", "formal essence-formed object".

Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari, *Mille Plateaux – Traité de nomadologie. La machine de guerre*, Paris, 1980, p. 507

3 "The two of us wrote *L'Anti-Oedipe* together; since each of us was several persons, it made up a crowd. From this first sentence of *Mille Plateaux*, we imagined Sub Rosa. From the onset, we wanted to be something else than a label, maybe a machine made of rhizomes, peaks and grooves, rest and excitement, illumination (why not), and maybe exasperation and doubt. That is how things are, the miracle of epiphany. Under the rose, the intimate word of friendship, something beautiful that grows, changes, travels else-where and comes back different. A pack who scatters, then regroups in a dark forest, a dry desert. (Excerpt from insert notes of the *Folds & rhizomes* CD, written in 1995 by Guy-Marc Hinant, co-founder of Sub Rosa).

4 Duchamp, M., *Notes*, Paris, 1999, p. 21

5 The original sources are also available today for all for a personal 'home parabolé mix' (Pousseur, H., *Etudes paraboliques*, 4 CDs, Sub Rosa, 2001) (Note : Sub Rosa projects a special LP issue the 8 pieces, in 2013/14)

6 These artists and sound works, object of an increasing number of productions and publications, on a double CD titled *Bitstreams, Sound Works from the Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art*, Whitney/Lowlands 2001.

7 Zeilner, P., *Hybrid Space. New Forms in Digital Architecture*, London, 1999, p. 128

8 Inspired by this concept of Frank Lloyd Wright and the principle of flexibility, the Sub Rosa label released three composite albums including abstract sound pieces with high visual dimension by, among others, Christophe Charles, David Toop, Mark Clifford, Stephen Vitiello, Janek Schaefer, CM Von Hausswolf (*Floating Foundation*, volume 1, 2, 3, Sub Rosa).

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Klaas Coulembier (b. 1984) works as a research assistant at the Musicology department of the University of Leuven. Since October 2009, he has been working on a PhD thesis on multi-temporality in the music of Elliott Carter and Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, supported by the Research Foundation Flanders (FWO). He wrote an elaborate essay on Flemish Ensemble Music since 1950 (published by MATRIX New Music Centre) and he regularly writes program notes

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Paul Craenen is a composer, music teacher and curator. He has been involved in several educational new music projects, including a three-year experimental music course at the music academy of Oud-Heverlee and a master course Intermedia at the conservatory of Amsterdam. Paul Craenen received a doctoral degree from Leiden University in 2011 for a research on corporeality in contemporary composed music. Since 2012, he is artistic director of Musica, an impulse centre for music and sound art, based in Neerpelt (Belgium).

Peter-Paul De Temmerman (b. 1966) studied visual arts, but music turned out to be his true passion. Since 1998 he works as a freelance journalist specialised in contemporary art music. From 1998 until 2005 he wrote mainly for the business newspaper De Tijd. Besides, he regularly writes on political and social topics for the humanist magazine Het Vrije Woord.

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Michel Fourgon (b. 1968) studied composition with Claude Ledoux and Patrick Lenfant (electroacoustics) in Liège and graduated in the Arts and Science of Music at the University of that same city, where he worked as a researcher for Henri Pousseur. Since 2001, he has frequently collaborated with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Liège. Michel Fourgon is teaching composition and music history at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Liège.

Philippe Franck is art historian, cryptic and cultural designer, and the head of Transcultures, an interdisciplinary center for digital and sound cultures based in Mons. He is also artistic director for the international sound art festival City

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According to certain sources **Jelle Meander** is a poet and a musicologist. He wonders what Khlebnikov meant with “*scrape language and you will see space and its skin*”.

Mattias Parent graduated as a musicologist at the University of Leuven in 2005 with a master's thesis on the work and aesthetics of 'music maker' Godfried-Willem Raes. Since then, he works as a music teacher and regularly participates in educational, art and music projects. In his spare time, Mattias likes to develop musical DIY-experiments.

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Maarten Quanten (b. 1982) studied Musicology in Leuven and Berlin. In 2009 he received his PhD with a dissertation on temporal structures in the music of Karlheinz Stockhausen and Gottfried Michael Koenig. Currently he is working at the Brussels Museum of Musical Instruments and teaches at the School of Arts of University College Ghent.

Prof. dr. em. **Herman Sabbe** was a professor at the Musicology department of the University of Ghent and the Université Libre in Brussels. His major book publications include *Het Muzikale Serialisme als Techniek en Denkmethode* (1977), monographs on Stockhausen (*Karlheinz Stockhausen...wie die Zeit verging...*, 1981) and Ligeti, and *Stille! Muziek! Een antropologie van de Westerse muziekcultuur* (2003). Recently, he published a collection of scientific essays on music as an evolutionary adaptation under the title *Homo Musicus* (2010).

Serge Verstockt is a thoroughgoing exponent of modernism. He strongly endorses the new technologies, which he believes will lead to new ways of expression. He has systematically explored the possibilities of the computer. In recent years he has been active with computer graphics and video. His compositions are connected with various branches of the art world and he rejects being categorized solely in terms of the narrow music world. His works can better be understood as general 'works of art'.

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