

COMPOSING (IN) CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA

THEORETICAL AND MUSICAL RESPONSES TO COMPLEXITY

Volume I

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Pectora roborant cultus tecti

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STELLENBOSCH

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explicates a perception of music as complex phenomenon and, accordingly, the comprehension, creation and performance of music as complex tasks. While its immediate field of investigation is the composition of music, it proposes an understanding of musical composition that exceeds the conventionally confined acts of conceiving and notating music, by effectively including the acts of performing and perceiving music as inherent to the process of creating music and, in fact, as crucial to complete this creative process. This inclusion does not suggest an attenuation of the specialized skill of musical composition but, to the contrary, advocates the necessity of a heightened awareness for the complexity of this task, which will follow from an understanding of music as systemically interrelated and principally inseparable set of (inter)actions encompassing its conception, performance and reception.

In support of this approach an extensive introduction to complexity thinking is presented. For reasons of the intrinsic complexity of this topic and taking into account that complexity thinking has not yet formally been related to music studies, this section exceeds the scope of a preliminary preamble. Instead it constitutes one of four equally weighted sections of the dissertation. It offers to the musically trained reader not familiar with the topic an overview of historical developments leading to the theory of general complexity (Chapter 1) and a subsequent characterization of general complexity traits (Chapter 2). From here a link to musical considerations is established by means of a thorough reassessment of four terms – difference, identity, contexts and novelty – all of which are central to discourses in complexity, as well as in music studies (Chapter 3). From this basis an initial set of musical consequences arising from a complexity perspective is proposed (Chapter 4).

One of the hallmarks of complex phenomena is the permeability of their boundaries. Following this insight the second section is dedicated to reflections on specific environments and circumstances acting as musical contexts, as well as a reading of musical responses with regard to the emergence of external contexts as internal subtexts. The first chapter in this section focuses on HIP (historically informed performances) as a complex methodology of transforming intangible historical evidence into tangibly different musical interpretations (Chapter 5). The second and third chapters are assessments of the effects of local circumstances on compositional activity in South Africa; one is based on empirical data obtained from a survey (Chapter 6), the other is of a very personal nature and reflects my own recent experiences from working as musician in this country (Chapter 7). The final chapter in this section expounds the core tenets of my personal compositional approach, framed as musical response to a subjective reading of South African circumstances perceived as equally challenging and enabling musical contexts (Chapter 8).

Complementing the purely 'theoretical considerations' of these eight chapters, sections 3 and 4 contain 'practical responses', thereby fulfilling a requirement of the format of an integrated practical Ph.D. The practical research outputs are contained in a portfolio of four compositions (submitted both as scores and CD recordings in a separate volume), which represent my recent work of deliberate musical engagement with specific contexts framed from a South African perspective (Section 4). Preceding the portfolio, Section 3 contains a discussion of each of the respective works, linking the compositions to the theoretical reflections of Part One, thereby integrating practical and theoretical work and demonstrating the reciprocal influence and interaction between both sets of interventions.

The discussion of *The Songs of Madosini* revolves mainly around the question of musical differences that emanate from intercultural collaborations (Chapter 9). The reflections on the *Proteus Variations* hinge on the issue of diversity, perceived not quantitatively, but as quality principally elevating the notion of variation to replace that of single dominance (Chapter 10). *EisTau* affords the opportunity to reflect on a musical response to the global crisis of climate change, as well as an engagement with the complex of music's communicative, narrative and even semantic propensities (Chapter 11). Finally, the question of relational identity (determined by biographical, geographical and musical relations and thereby implying reflections on place, presence, absence and the 'other'), are central to the elaborations on the *Concerto for an African Cellist* (Chapter 12).

Interspersed between the twelve chapters are fourteen 'Parentheses'. These are relatively short sections (distinguished from the ordinary text by grey background shadings) providing additional and somewhat independent reflections on topics that pertain to the main text. The preface to the thesis offers a brief introduction to PBR (practice-based research), which informs the integrated structure of this work.

OPSOMMING

In hierdie tesis word musiek as komplekse verskynsel beskryf, waarmee bedoel word dat die begrip, skep en uitvoering van musiek as komplekse aktiwiteite beskou word. Die werk ondersoek in die eerste plek die komposisie van musiek (in Suid Afrika), maar met 'komposisie' word meer verstaan as slegs die aspekte van musikale konsepsie en notasie. Hierdie wyer begrip behoort nie as 'n afwatering van 'n gespesialiseerde kompositoriese vaardigheid misverstaan te word nie; dit is, in teendeel, daarop gemik om 'n skerper bewussyn te skep vir die kompleksiteit van komposisie wanneer musiek as stel van onderling verbonde sistemiese interaksies verstaan word wat die onlosmaaklik samehangende aspekte van skepping, uitvoering en resepsie behels.

Ter ondersteuning van hierdie benadering begin die tesis met 'n breedvoerige uiteensetting van kompleksiteitsdenke. Omdat hierdie onderwerp kompleks is en omdat dit nog nie vantevore op musiek toegepas is nie, bestaan hierdie gedeelte van die tesis uit 'n omvangryke omskrywing van kompleksiteit in vier hoofstukke. Dit bied aan die musiekgeletterde leser 'n oorsig oor die geskiedkundige ontwikkeling van kompleksiteitsdenke (hoofstuk 1) asook 'n karakterisering van kompleksiteitskenmerke (hoofstuk 2). Vervolgens word daar 'n brug na musikale oorwegings geslaan d.m.v. verwysings na vier onderwerpe wat in beide musiek- en kompleksiteitsdiskoerse 'n sentrale rol speel: verskil, identiteit, konteks, nuutheid ('novelty') (hoofstuk 3). Hiermee is 'n basis geskep waarvan daar 'n eerste stel musikale gevolgtrekkings vanuit 'n kompleksiteitsperspektief getrek kan word (hoofstuk 4).

Een van die fundamentele kenmerke van komplekse stelsels is die deurlaatbaarheid van hulle grense of skeidslyne. Indien musiek as 'n sodanige stelsel aanvaar word, volg dit dat spesifieke omgewings of omstandighede 'n invloed as musikale kontekste kan uitoefen. Omgekeerd beteken dit ook dat musikale reaksies op eksterne kontekste as interne subteks gelees kan word. Hierdie wisselwerking is die onderwerp van die tweede hoofseksie, waarvan die eerste hoofstuk op historiese uitvoeringspraktyk fokus. Dié benadering word hier verstaan as komplekse metode om historiese gegewens in nuwe vertolkings van vröe musiek in te span (hoofstuk 5). Die tweede en derde hoofstukke fokus op ondersoek van spesifiek Suid-Afrikaanse omstandighede en die wyses waarop dit die skepping van musiek in die land beïnvloed. Die eerste van hierdie hoofstukke is gebaseer op 'n meningsopname onder Suid-Afrikaanse komponiste (hoofstuk 6), terwyl die ander hoofstuk baie persoonlike ondervindings tydens my werksaamhede in hierdie land reflekteer (hoofstuk 7). In die laaste hoofstuk van hierdie deel verduidelik ek my benadering tot komposisie n.a.v. my subjektiewe persepsie van Suid-Afrikaanse kontekste wat ek terselfdertyd as bemagtigend en problematies ondervind (hoofstuk 8).

Aanvullend tot die eerste deel se 'teoretiese oorwegings', bevat die tweede deel artistieke uitsette wat as 'praktiese intervensies' beskryf kan word. Met hierdie jukstaposisie word 'n strukturele vereiste ten opsigte van die formaat van 'n 'geïntegreerde Ph.D' vervul. Die uitsette bestaan uit vier komposisies wat in die vorm van partiture en CD opnames in 'n aparte volume ingedien word. Dit weerspieël my onlangse werk met sy doelbewuste musikale refleksies op spesifiek Suid-Afrikaanse kontekste (seksie 4). 'n Breedvoerige bespreking van elke werk (seksie 3) lei die portfolio in, verskaf 'n skakel tussen die teoretiese en praktiese werk, bewerkstellig die integrasie van die dele en demonstreer sodoende die wedersydse wisselwerking tussen die twee verskillende vorms van intervensie.

Die hoofstuk oor *The Songs of Madosini* handel hoofsaaklik oor die vraag van musikale verskille wat tydens interkulturele samewerkings (soos deur hierdie werk vereis) na vore tree (hoofstuk 9). Die onderwerp van die refleksies oor die *Proteus Variasies* is diversiteit, nie ten opsigte van die kwantitatiewe aspek van hierdie verskynsel nie, maar ten opsigte van veelvoud as 'n 'kwaliteit' op sigself, wat aan die beginsel van variasie voorkeur verleen bó die van 'n enkele oorheersende tema (hoofstuk 10). *EisTau* verskaf 'n geleentheid om oor die moontlikhede van musikale response op gobale gebeure te besin, soos in hierdie geval op die persepsie van die uitwerkings van klimaatsverandering. Boonop word die geskiktheid van musiek om te kommunikeer, uitdrukking aan narratiewe te verleen of om selfs semantiese betekenis oor te dra in hierdie ondersoek belig (hoofstuk 11). Die kwessie van musikale identiteit is sentraal tot die bespreking van *Concerto for an African Cellist*

(hoofstuk 12). Identiteit word hier verstaan as kwaliteit wat – behalwe uit inherente eienskappe – tot 'n groot mate uit bepaalde verhoudings voorspruit. Op hierdie wyse word biografiese, geografiese en musikale verhoudings met mekaar in verband gebring, asook kwessies van plek, aanwesigheid, afwesigheid en die vreemdheid van die 'ander'.

Altesame veertien so-genoemde 'parenteses' is tussen die twaalf hoofstukke geplaas. Hierdie kort seksies word deur middel van 'n grys agtergrond uitgelig en bied bykomstige (semi-onafhanklike) refleksies oor onderwerpe van spesifieke belang op 'n gegewe moment in die bespreking. Die voorwoord (Preface) bied 'n bondige opsomming van praktyk-gebaseerde navoring (PBR: practice-based research), wat die akademiese format van hierdie proefskrif bepaal.

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COMPOSING (IN) CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICA THEORETICAL AND MUSICAL RESPONSES TO COMPLEXITY

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PREFACE

The format of this dissertation is guided by the description of a so-called ‘integrated’ practical Ph.D. recently introduced at the University of Stellenbosch. The university’s yearbook refers to a dissertation in this category as ‘the result of an integrated study of ... creative processes and theoretical work’ and further only offers the following additional explanation of what this should entail:

The unique nature of the integrated option is derived from the coherence and interdependency of the study of the creative processes and theoretical dimensions of the research leading to an original contribution to knowledge of and insight into the art.¹

Endorsing a remarkably open approach with few procedural restrictions, the references to notions of *coherence* and *interdependency* implicitly open the doors to inter- or trans-disciplinary investigations, ideas with which this approach seemingly seeks to address the prevailing schism between theoretical and practical musical subjects. Its ratification in a music department that principally upholds the separation and even isolation of theoretical and practical studies rather rigidly seems all the more exceptional. Not surprisingly, however, the first attempts to align research proposals for prospective studies to this approach have caused considerable contention in departmental circles, revealing widely different interpretations of the framework.

Stellenbosch University should be commended for the courage of implementing this degree, permitting the scrutiny of hitherto non-negotiable academic conventions and potentially facilitating alliances with methodologies developed in other disciplines. Even at this early stage the approach has set off a productive – if slightly disruptive – process of reassessing prevailing methods. Already it functions as an enabling catalyst, even though a more specific circumscription of what can and should be achieved under its auspices will only emerge once a body of work produced within the new parameters is available for assessment. Until then the concept is bound to develop and change in the same degree as actual work, encouraged by its vision to probe beyond the traditional confines of discrete disciplinary integrity, will substantiate its usefulness. In any event, validating the approach itself by pioneering the exploration of its prospective potential becomes an additional challenge if not an integral task under the circumstances.

For the purposes of the work presented here the ‘integrated’ format is eminently suitable. In fact, the mere ‘availability’ of this option functioned as a decisive catalyst for me to embark on this project. The explicit link between ‘creative processes and theoretical dimensions’ evokes immediate associations with the concept of practice-based research (PBR), a format that has received considerably attention in academic institutions in certain regions.² Countries that have spearheaded developments include the UK, Sweden, Canada, Australia, Portugal and Brazil.³ Amongst individual institutions placing a special emphasis on the approach the Queensland Conservatorium at Griffiths University (Australia), the Orpheus Institute in Ghent (Belgium) and Huddersfield University (UK) stand out.⁴ In South Africa PBR has received some attention in drama studies.⁵

¹ See www0.sun.ac.za/pgstudies/postgraduate-programmes/faculty-of-arts-and-social-sciences-1/departments-of-music/phd-in-music.html [accessed on 5.4.12], my emphases.

² The *Dutch Journal for Music Theory* dedicated a special edition to PBR in 2007 (DJMT, vol. 12, issue 1). Apart from articles and book reviews on the topic, this publication contains numerous references for further reading.

³ Daniela Büchler, Michael Biggs *et al.*, ‘Academic Research in Areas of Design Practice’, International Conference on Design Research Brazil, Rio de Janeiro, 2007.

⁴ Mareli Stolp, ‘Contemporary Performance Practice of Art Music in South Africa’, 17.

⁵ Fleishman claims that Performance as Research (PaR) has become ‘a well-established approach to using creative performance as a method of inquiry in universities in the UK, Australia, Canada, Scandinavia, South Africa and elsewhere’. Mark Fleishman, ‘Difference of Performance as Research’, in: *Theatre Research International* vol. 37 no. 1 (2012), 28.

This Preface undertakes to outline the somewhat complex epistemological premises of PBR, as well as the challenges that its 'implementation' poses. Finally it briefly explains briefly how I interpret and envisage making use of the leeway afforded by the structure of this degree.⁶

Assessing the international PBR⁷ debate, it is evident that 'no real consensus exists on the presentation, format and character of research outcomes in PBR projects.'⁸ By and large its advocates seem awed by having stumbled upon something important, yet for lack of a better grip on the core issues, seem to grapple mainly with technical and methodological questions of how 'artistry' (artistic activities) can be related to 'science' (empirical, scientific research) in order to better accommodate the arts in the academe. It is important to note that the current European debate is largely driven by two decisive external causes⁹ – first, the replacement of art diplomas with academic qualifications following structural changes decreed by the EU's *Bologna Declaration*¹⁰ and second, the increasingly standardized convention of linking academic funding to quantifiable research outputs and the subsequent pressure on academic institutions to deliver such outputs by hook or by crook.¹¹

Motivated mainly by the purpose of decreeing comparable criteria for professional qualifications granted throughout the European Union, the *Bologna Declaration's* implementation as centralistic, bureaucratic intervention has thoroughly reshaped (if not disrupted) traditional educational structures throughout Europe, including the forcible replacement (elimination) of a variety of locally unique forms of music education. At tertiary level these were, until very recently, broadly characterized by the institutional separation of practically and academically orientated studies into conservatories (colleges, *Hochschulen*) and universities respectively. In the wake of the *Bologna Declaration* previously practically orientated studies are now forced to culminate in academic degrees instead of practical diplomas. Hence disciplinary reconsiderations and realignments have become necessary.

In many ways the emerging debates at first showed all the signs of a headlong flight. Typically they would contain somewhat vague sketches of novel potentialities, new kinds of knowledge, previously inconceivable research scopes, as well as slightly nervous conjectures on how all these unknown dimensions might best comply to the hallowed hallmarks scientific research. As a consequence many reflections on PBR still bear the traits of slightly exaggerated visions only scantily masking the core issue: that of desperate attempts to reinstall some sort of functionality, to activate remedial interventions, which would once again provide and allow for operational space under bureaucratically decreed rather than disciplinarily designed conditions. The apologetic nature of PBR definitions is revealed time and again, as seams and stitches on artificial links between practice and research become visible. Ironically such forcible or speculative links betray the continued subscription to a perception of ontological separateness of what is proclaimed unified or integrated.

As Sir Christopher Frayling (writing in his capacity as Rector of the Royal College of Art) summarises somewhat cynically, decade-long debates at 'countless conferences... have ended up with both feet firmly planted in the air'¹² the core issues persistently remaining shrouded by confusion.

There's the confusion between research (as process) and research degrees (as qualifications). There's the confusion between advanced research and practice. There's the confusion about whether or not, or in what sense, research should result in communicable knowledge. There's the confusion about how the

⁶ For a related discussion of the topic by a colleague who completed practical Ph.D in the same format at the same university, see Mareli Stolp, 'Contemporary Performance Practice of Art Music in South Africa: A Practice-Based Research Enquiry' (Stellenbosch, 2012) Chapter 3, pg. 50-69.

⁷ Also referred to as 'Practice-Led Research' (Kershaw) and 'Practice as Research' (Fleishman).

⁸ Stolp, *Contemporary Performance Practice*, pg. 34.

⁹ Henk Borgdorff, 'The Debate on Research in the Arts', *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* vol. 12, no. 1, (2007), 3.

¹⁰ *Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education convened in Bologna on the 19th of June 1999* <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/bologna/bologna.pdf> [accessed on 27.4.2012].

¹¹ The issue of research funding constantly lurks in the background of PBR considerations. See for example Büchler *et al.*, 'Academic Research in Areas of Design Practice', 2007.

¹² Christopher Frayling in the foreword to Macleod & Holdridge, *Thinking through Art*, (Routledge, London 2009), xiii.

traditional procedures of research ... might apply in the fine arts. And there's the deep-seated confusion, about whether it is appropriate to grant university degrees for studio practices.¹³

Frayling touches on the second cause when he unmasks a fair degree of PBR hype as naked 'pragmatism dressed up as principle.'¹⁴ If research funding agencies link their resources to research outputs, the academic exercise to define all sorts of procedural outcomes as 'research outputs' becomes a viable if somewhat contorted strategy to qualify for such funding. My own experience unfortunately confirms Frayling's assessment. Therefore a fair degree of scrutiny seems called for to distinguish between opportunistic and scrupulous applications of the concept.

That said, I posit that even political or economic reasons to include PBR into the mainstream of funded research¹⁵ may provide serendipitous occasions to make necessity a virtue. Yet, there are far better academic and artistic reasons for the approach than political or economic ones. I wish to argue that the PBR debate should focus on its core business (of enriching and diversifying means of generating knowledge), rather than on its administrative usefulness (in standardizing professional qualifications).

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH (PBR)

A good starting point for a principal investigation of the notion of 'praxis' in a scientific environment is Bourdieu's reflection on the 'logic of practice'.¹⁶ Although the monograph with this title was written to document his ethnographic fieldwork in Algeria, it also fully develops the theoretical positions sketched earlier on in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.¹⁷ Reflecting on the ethnographic project in his preface Bourdieu concludes that in fact the latter, what he calls 'the objectification of the generic relationship of the observer to the observed is the most significant product' of the undertaking.¹⁸

His astute focus on the problematic nature (and complexity) of the relationship of observer and observed arises from a discomfort of asserting the observer (in this case the ethnographer) a default epistemological privilege.¹⁹ At the same time he resists the lures of 'intuitionism, which fictitiously denies the distance between the observer and the observed.'²⁰ Instead he chooses 'to objectify the objectifying distance and the social conditions that make it possible, such as the externality of the observer [and] the objectifying techniques that he uses.'²¹

Bourdieu's far-reaching insight is not only recognizing that the distance between the anthropologist and his informant 'is insurmountable, irremovable, except through self-deception',²² but further to comprehend that the gap does not indicate a so-called 'social distance' (for example resulting from different 'cultures' or 'mentalities'), 'but is in fact the effect off a gap between social conditions.'²³ These principally different conditions of both sides can be described in terms of 'difference in distance of necessity'²⁴ – i.e. the difference of being inside a game (and bound by its rules) or outside (and unaffected by the rules). Ultimately it is the difference of being involved merely theoretically (able to withdraw at any moment) or caught up practically

¹³ Frayling in Macleod & Holdridge, xiii.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ In South Africa the topic has come on the agenda of arts departments due to government pressure on universities to produce more Ph.D degrees.

¹⁶ *Le sens pratique* (1980); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*.

¹⁷ *Esquisse d'une théorie de la pratique* (1972).

¹⁸ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* trans. Richard Nice (Stanford University Press, Stanford 1992), 15.

¹⁹ Ibid. 14.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. 14-15.

²⁴ Ibid. 14.

(unable to withdraw at all). With the introduction of these two categories, Bourdieu's observation gains relevance far beyond the anthropological realm in which it was noted initially.

In effect it describes the condition to which scientific investigation and research is principally subjected. At the core of every scientific endeavour an insuperable distance between observer (scientist, researcher, analyst) and observed (object or topic of study) must be acknowledged. With regard to the present study I wish to argue that the acknowledgement of this Bourdieuan conditionality is the ultimate basis for any and all PBR considerations.

Put bluntly, theoretical science is hampered – if not haunted – by the impossibility of uniting knowing and doing. This follows from the very definition of 'theory':

Because theory – the word itself says so – is a spectacle, which can only be understood from a viewpoint away from the stage on which action is played out, the distance lies not so much where it is usually looked for, in the gap between cultural traditions, as in the gulf between two relations to the world, one theoretical, the other practical.²⁵

The state of affairs described here is unproblematic, as long as theory is privileged (as in conventional academe) or if theorists are content only to be theorists (without having a stake or an involvement in the practice 'on' which they work).²⁶ However, these very positions do become problematic from the perspective of the practitioner, especially if theory's traditional privilege plays out in form of institutional power and if theoretical frameworks fail to do justice or appropriately represent practical experience.

Discarding theory, as some practitioner's might be tempted to do, will obviously not 'solve' this problem, but would just turn the imbalance around. But ignoring the problem is also no longer tenable – except, perhaps, for the remaining few, who still enjoy the full benefits and protection of academe's proverbial 'ivory tower'. If, however, what is at stake is to think about *and* engage with the world concurrently, Bourdieu's gap needs to be negotiated.

By pointing out that a different 'sense of time' applies in theoretical and practical work respectively, Bourdieu raises another important point:

Science has a time which is not that of practice. For the analyst, time disappears: not only because ... arriving after the battle, the analyst cannot have any uncertainty as to what can happen, but also because he has the time to totalize, that is, to overcome the effect of time. Scientific practice is so detemporalized that it tends to exclude even the idea of what it excludes.²⁷

The metaphor of a player caught up in a game is helpful in illustrating this point. Such an actor (player, practitioner) has to act 'on the spot', 'in the heat of the moment' and with the urgency of actively and presently determining (or at least fighting for) a decisive future outcome of either winning or losing.²⁸ This reality of the practitioner is differs completely from that of the theorist. It is determined by conditions, which precisely exclude those under which science is practiced, namely 'distance, perspective, detachment and reflection.'²⁹ The set of contradictory conditions determining both domains lead Bourdieu to the categorical verdict that there is effectively 'no chance of giving a scientific account of practice.'³⁰

From this position PBR gains considerable significance, far exceeding the administrative concerns of research funding or degree compatibility. By advocating the integration of practical and theoretical work it signifies nothing less than a deliberate attempt at reducing the 'distance to necessity'. The suggestion is that PBR could

²⁵ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 14.

²⁶ Note the preposition: Theorists rarely work 'with' or 'in' a practice.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 82.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

bring a 'feeling' or 'sense'³¹ of being inside the game into the otherwise removed academic domain and thereby imbue theoretical work with a sense of urgency, relevance and contextual relatedness. Following Bourdieu's argument this integration in fact becomes a crucial component of revalidating the 'scientific project' *per se*, which otherwise fails to live up to its own (rigorous, scientific) criteria.

Moving from underlying philosophical considerations to PBR as formalized strategy to address the described challenges, a delimitation (in the absence of a final definition) of the approach should be given. Michael Biggs³² offers a useful description of PBR as research that 'prioritizes some property of experience arising *through practice*, over cognitive content arising *from reflection on practice*.'³³ The notion of 'experience' with regard to its role in research is qualified by emphasizing that what is of concern here is not 'experiential feeling' but rather 'experiential content',³⁴ in other words 'the meaning of an experience ... and how that might be related to the content of [a] shared context.'³⁵ Obviously feelings cannot be eliminated from experiences, but Biggs argues that 'experiential feelings are *representations* of experiential content,³⁶ the former belonging to the sensory, the latter to the cognitive element of experience. Whereas the mere expression of feelings would be trivial, the role of feelings in perceiving 'significant aspects of human experience'³⁷ validate them as valuable perceptive and deictic means. And while representations always are translations of sorts they can just as well be substituted by other forms representation.³⁸ Hence 'experiential knowledge [can be framed] as a *representational problem*'³⁹ – the quest of fittingly to translate (transmute, convert, paraphrase) experiential feeling into intelligible and testable expressions.

From the vantage point of this description PBR can be described as methodological framework in which individual experiences (in addition to cognitive insights) can be harnessed for the purpose of rigorous research. This is facilitated by permitting a variety of modes of representation and communication (extending beyond, but not excluding verbal articulation), which broaden the scope of efficient expression yet hold trivial, private and irrelevant aspects of experiential feelings sufficiently at bay.

The aforementioned distinction between experience and cognition as distinct ways of gaining and communicating knowledge implies the recognition (and corroborates the existence) of *different types of knowledge*. On a basic level 'practical and explicit knowledge' can be described and distinguished by 'knowing-how and knowing-that.'⁴⁰ In the know-how category knowledge and skill complement each other, as in knowing how to ride a bike or play a musical instrument.

On another level Biggs distinguishes between three principal types of knowledge: 'explicit, tacit and ineffable',⁴¹ thus distinguishing them by the form in which they can best be communicated. 'Explicit content' is obviously expressed linguistically, whereas 'ineffable content' explicitly defies this means. 'Tacit content' is located somewhere in between and 'has an experiential component that cannot be *efficiently* expressed linguistically.'⁴²

Tom Eide Osa differentiates even more types of knowledge by listing the categories of 'familiar knowledge, intimate knowledge, implicit knowledge, intuitive knowledge, personal and tacit knowledge, first-hand

³¹ Bourdieu employs the French *sens*, which encompasses an even wider range of meanings, e.g. 'reason', 'direction', 'judgement'.

³² Emeritus Professor of Aesthetics at the University of Hertfordshire (UK) and prominent consultant in the field of art research.

³³ Michael Biggs, 'Learning from Experience: Approaches to the Experiential Component of Practice-Based Research', *Forskning, Reflektion, Utveckling* (2004), 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* 12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10, original emphasis.

⁴⁰ Ryle, quoted in Biggs, 'Learning from Experience', 12.

⁴¹ Biggs, 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*

knowledge, experience knowledge [and] acquaintance knowledge.’⁴³ In all cases PBR allows to draw the consequences from the argument that ‘different ways of knowing’ accordingly require ‘different ways of saying’ appropriately to express the different levels or types of knowledge. Methodically PBR therefore accommodates different formats (art works, performances, installations, etc.) as the requisite ‘different ways of saying’ in order to best convey a specific content.

The notion of *ineffable knowledge* – i.e. the somewhat controversial assumption that ‘it is possible to know something without being able to say it’⁴⁴ – deserves special mention. This claim implies that what is ‘knowable’ may exceed ‘what can be said’ verbally, semantically, deductively or logically. It concedes that we cannot make meaningful claims about domains outside those of logical language such as, for example, aesthetics or ethics, which belong to the realm of propositions.⁴⁵ In such cases other media are not merely optional or preferred means, but in fact become necessary to express content or knowledge that cannot otherwise be accessed. This has led to a radical form of PBR, which demands that the practice of art or a performance *per se*, without any verbal elucidation, should already be acknowledged as ‘research’, i.e. as knowledge-generating medium or method.

To illustrate the point of ‘ineffable knowledge’ – implicit knowledge that defies its verbal expression – Osa uses the example of ‘knowing’ the sound of a clarinet or the taste of wine:

If someone had never heard the sound of a clarinet it would be impossible to explain in words exactly how it sounds. Though the explainer has precise knowledge of the sound of a clarinet, his verbal explanation will never be able to portray the sound accurately. And knowing the sound of a clarinet is only the first rough gateway or first step to the clarinet world. An experienced professional clarinet player is able to produce and recognise a vast amount of clarinet sounds, in the same way that a wine connoisseur is able to recognize a vast amount of wines. And in both cases it is impossible to articulate or achieve this knowledge through words alone.⁴⁶

The notion of different types of knowledge, some of which might exist beyond semantic means of expression has elicited a variety of responses, in turn informing a variety of PBR approaches. Marcel Cobussen makes the bold statement that ‘PBR (re)opens the discussion of what knowledge is [or] when it can adorn itself with the predicate “scientific”.’⁴⁷ The issue of recognizing – accrediting as it were – alternative ‘ways of knowing’ is also taken up by Mark Fleishman when he problematizes the ‘hegemony of the text in the academy.’⁴⁸ He considers this dominance of (what de Certeau calls) *scriptocentrism* ‘as a major part of Western imperialism’.⁴⁹ For him, then, ‘performance constitutes “an alterity” that resists the [hierarchic] hegemony.’⁵⁰

Reflecting on the relationship between research (including ‘contemplation, reflection and logical investigation’)⁵¹ and practice (with a special emphasis on the performance of music) as alternative means of gaining knowledge, Mareli Stolp claims that the ‘combination of practice and research (action and theoretical reason) in PBR studies presents an alternative approach to this binary opposition.’⁵² With respect to musical performances she highlights an important change of focus brought about by the deliberate integration of practice and research: Whereas every performance relies on implicit knowledge, PBR makes this (underrated

⁴³ Tom Eide Osa, ‘Knowledge in Musical Performance: Seeing Something as Something’, *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* vol. 12, no. 1, (2007), 52.

⁴⁴ Wittgenstein quoted in Osa, 52.

⁴⁵ Osa, *ibid.*

⁴⁶ Osa, 52.

⁴⁷ Marcel Cobussen, ‘The Trojan Horse: Epistemological Explorations Concerning Practice-Based Research’, *Dutch Journal of Music Theory* vol. 12, no. 1, (2007), 20

⁴⁸ Mark Fleishman, ‘Difference of Performance as Research’, *Theatre Research International* vol. 37, no. 1, (2012), 30.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Stolp, *Contemporary Performance Practice*, 53.

⁵² *Ibid.*

and underrepresented) knowledge explicit.⁵³ PBR thus implies a shift of focus, away from the finished end product (e.g. a polished performance), towards the requirements and the process itself (of working towards a finished performance).

The performance theorist Baz Kershaw describes ‘the performance way of knowing [as] close, active, immediate, on the move, embodied, sensual, fluid, interactional and affectively engaged.’⁵⁴ By placing ‘creativity at the heart of research’ he claims that PBR implies a paradigm shift, ‘through which established ontologies and epistemologies of research in arts-related disciplines could potentially radically be undone.’⁵⁵ In the same vein Frayling can once again be quoted with his call for ‘a radical academy’, which would be home to a ‘distinctive research culture... which examines and understands its own assumptions, which produces new knowledge [and] is distinct from advanced practice in the professional worlds of art’.⁵⁶

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH (PBR)

If the theory behind PBR appears to be in place, its practical implementation certainly lags behind. In an ironic but not unsurprising twist the old privilege of theory reappears at the heart of this very attempt at tempering it. The situation clearly demonstrates the complexity of the challenge of moving beyond *thinking about* a renewed practice towards actually *practicing it*. What makes matters even more intricate is the difficulty of distinguishing between *conventional practice* (i.e. the existing domain of ‘practical staff’ in academic arts or music departments) and *practice as research* (a presumable different or novel kind of practice) which, however, is mainly conceived as such by an avant-garde of theorists. Arguably the majority of ‘theoretical staff’ still subscribe to yet another form of *conventional practice* – that of subjugating all ‘practical practice’ to current academic (i.e. theory-dominated) standards.

Even though some theoretical consensus on how PBR should look and work is beginning to emerge, this has had very little impact on the rigidly embedded conventional structures of existing academic institutions to date. Arguably this *status quo* will hardly change significantly, unless the debate is taken much further – to a level where its reflections not only concern particular and isolated benefits, but where a strong argument can be made for PBR as a constitutive element of the academic endeavour, instead of a merely nice-to-have addition. Once again nothing less than Bourdieu’s negotiation of ‘distance to necessity’ is at stake, this time in the opposite direction: from practice to theory.

I stated earlier that PBR manifests as a remarkable, serendipitous opportunity. Cobussen rightly points out that ‘[w]hat the scientific world and the universities concede with this kind of research, and especially with the possible result – an art work – is *the very fundamental and quite revolutionary statement that knowledge can articulate itself outside of discursive practices, outside spoken and written language, and that this kind of knowledge cannot be generated otherwise than in or through the production of art.*’⁵⁷ Recognizing that universities have taken a truly bold step, artists, practitioners and performers should do the same and fully accept the challenge to step into this void and make use of a hugely important opportunity.

The concession accorded by academe will be of little worth if beyond some cosmetically different approaches the self-same practices continue. Further, it should be recognized that – apart from reasons of external pressures (such as the Bologna reforms in Europe or revised subsidy guidelines in South Africa) – the introduction of PBR is not only a ‘concession’ granted to practicing artists, but just as much an invitation, a substantial artistic challenge, if not in fact a desperate call for help to assist academic institutions in their urgent and long overdue need of reform and transformation *from within*. It is interesting to note a widespread intuitive

⁵³ Stolp, verbal communication during a PBR colloquium at the Conservatory of the University of Stellenbosch, 6.12.2011.

⁵⁴ Baz Kershaw, ‘Practice as Research through Performance’, p. 105, quoted in Fleishman, 30.

⁵⁵ Kershaw quoted in Fleishman, 29.

⁵⁶ Macleod & Holdridge, *Thinking through Art*, xiv.

⁵⁷ Cobussen, *The Trojan Horse*, 19, my emphasis.

consensus among theorists, research administrators and practitioners that PBR could play a crucially important role in this regard.

Exceptions granted,⁵⁸ as things stand currently, established academic institutions introduce PBR only in a rather half-hearted manner. All too often the widely endorsed visionary approach is nevertheless stopped in its tracks when it comes to questioning conventional academic methods, as these continue to maintain and enforce the hegemony of conventional scientific strategies, such as those of analyses, objectification and reduction.

On the other hand, not only the institutions but just as much affiliated practitioners can be blamed for not rising to the challenge. Speaking for the practice of musical arts in the South African academic environment it must be noted that projects in this realm hardly move beyond safe conventions, rarely take genuine risks, nor question their subjugation under dominating theories. In this regard one is infelicitously reminded of ‘academic’ as pejorative qualification for ‘rulebound, safe, technically proficient, competent rather than inspired’ music making.⁵⁹ Practitioners working on this restricted level effectively deny their academic environment the invigorating impulses that might justifiably be expected from them and that arguably would be a fair return for the concession of a (highly subsidized) space granted for the development of an inquisitive artistic practice.

Currently it seems that the responsibility to occupy and use to the full a space that has *de facto* been allocated rests foremost with the practicing and performing artist. While there certainly remain administrative obstacles and organizational challenges the PBR domain has formally been staked out and allocated as a space yet to be populated with and defined by novel content – a task that is certainly not that of theorists, nor that of administrators. As long as inquisitive practitioners don’t accept the challenge and the space remains unclaimed, the potentialities of PBR cannot be estimated.

A final point of considerable importance will conclude these reflections. Many authors argue that since PBR represents a very specific methodology it deserves a special place and somewhat special treatment within the academe. I consider this to be misguided and instead hold with scholars like Biggs and O’Riley, who claim that this is not only unnecessary but in fact inappropriate.

Tim O’Riley⁶⁰ develops a cogent argument for an ‘enmeshed relationship’⁶¹ of practice and research and, by implication, for a fruitful and ‘necessary intermingling of these activities.’⁶² He reasons that science (with its focus on research) and art (with its focus on practice) share much at root level. First, ‘practice’ is an integral part of research in many fields outside the arts (for example in medicine, archaeology and experimental physics). Second, ‘creativity, uncertainty, and doubt – values and states that one habitually associates with art’⁶³ – equally exist in other disciplines as well. Third, intuition is not unique to art. For although scientific approaches will rely predominantly on processes of ‘consecutive reasoning,’ such processes could hardly be conducted without a fair degree of imagination or intuition to initiate or guide them.⁶⁴ Hence it is hardly tenable to call for a privileged state of artistic research on the grounds that it holds sway over the domains of practice, creativity or intuition. O’Riley invokes further communalities (overlapping from both sides as it were) by pointing out that ‘practice is imbued with the rigor, criticality, knowledge of context, and questioning associated with research; and research is in a sense determined by the drive afforded by practical thinking, experience, enactment, and embodiment.’⁶⁵

⁵⁸ For a list of institutions running especially creative programmes see pg. xiii.

⁵⁹ Frayling quoted in Macleod & Holdridge, *Thinking Through Art*, xiv.

⁶⁰ As practitioner O’Riley is painter and printmaker, as researcher at the London Royal College of Art he has explored ‘the relations between art and research, science, digital media, and the role of speculation, narrative and serendipity in art practice.’ [<http://www.rca.ac.uk/more/staff/tim-oriley/>]

⁶¹ Tim O’Riley, ‘A Discrete Continuity: On the Relation Between Research and Art Practice’, *Journal for Research Practice* vol. 7, no. 1 (2011), 5/8.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1/8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4/8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5/8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 6/8.

However, given these commonalities, it must nevertheless be noted that art and science pursue completely different aims and hence require discreet activities. An obvious distinction is that ‘art does not necessarily aim for evidence that can be agreed on but instead offers ways to see, and possibilities for thought or emotional engagement.’⁶⁶ Another would be to say that art and science represent opposite ways of engaging with the world – art by making (in order to find out), science by finding out (in order to make). Accordingly they also communicate their ‘findings’ in contrary ways – art can only be convincing (compelling and meaningful) by being inviting, science can only be inviting (compelling and meaningful) by being convincing.

From these differentiations important consequences arise for the implementation of PBR: While there are no reasons to view research in the arts and the sciences as principally different, art should also not ‘try to ape the methods of science to give it legitimacy in the eyes of academia. It will on the whole fail to be science and it is likely to fail as art.’⁶⁷ And, of course, it would fail to contribute to the crucially important inner transformation of the academe,⁶⁸ unless remaining true to its nature.

Central to what art can offer other disciplines, O’Riley argues, is its ‘provisionality’, i.e. making ‘a virtue of incompleteness.’⁶⁹ In the arts – other than in the sciences – it is readily accepted that a result (i.e. an artwork) ‘is fundamentally incomplete [as it] requires a spectator’s input in order to exist or function.’⁷⁰ This follows from the tripartite constellation that an artworks is intended to be perceived (1), yet its beholder’s perception and interpretation cannot be prescribed (2) and therefore a crucial component of any artistic project by definition eludes the artist’s control (3). Put differently ‘an artwork’s resonance draws on the fact of its incompleteness;’⁷¹ its ‘unfinishedness’ is the very feature that grants what O’Riley terms ‘spectatorial involvement’.⁷² In this manner art demonstrates that incompleteness is no deficiency – even with regard to a research result. Instead conditionality, provisionality, temporality *additionally inform* any finding, often in crucially important ways.

This links to a final point that is underlined by Biggs’s claim that experientially led research questions are context dependent.⁷³ In the sense that a ‘result’ (whether artistic or scientific) will hold different value or importance to different audiences in different contexts, it is inevitably contingent and never final. Uncomfortable as it may be, there is no way to get around the condition that its meaning and meaningfulness *depends* on this contingency. It is important to note that ‘dependence’ concurrently carries an element of risk (in the sense of ‘hinging’) as well as one of serendipity (in the sense of ‘relying on, coming to the rescue’). To claim that there exists ‘a dynamic relationship between context, question, method and answer and audience’⁷⁴ and that the appropriateness of questions, frames and methods is to be judged in terms of how they satisfy the audience for whom these issues have value,⁷⁵ arguably defies the positivist ideal of ‘absolute’ or ‘incontestable’ findings, however, it certainly presents no insufficiency. (At which point we are already deep in complexity thinking...)

After these explorations of practice-based research, it remains briefly to explain how this thesis employs this format:

In a broad sense the study qualifies as PBR since its point of departure is my compositional practice. However, as mentioned initially, I prefer to frame it as ‘integrated’ study as it takes its immediate cue from the degree outline’s instruction to integrate practical and theoretical work. It does so by demonstrating that both domains inform and influence each other to the extent that neither would be possible without the other, but

⁶⁶ O’Riley, 5/8.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ See this preface, pg. xix.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ O’Riley, 2/8.

⁷¹ Ibid., 5/8.

⁷² Ibid., 1/8.

⁷³ Biggs, *Learning from Experience*, 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1.

refrains from making a claim that composition should explicitly be perceived as research *per se*.⁷⁶ Accordingly the thesis consists of two separate, yet mutually constitutive ‘texts’ or parts. Both may stand on their own, yet – as they permeate and inform each other significantly – ‘reading’ them in an integrated manner in each other’s ‘contexts’ will make for a richer experience.⁷⁷

Part One contains a verbal (linguistic, semantic) reflection on the notions of complexity (Section 1). It refers to an existing complex methodology, offers a reading of general and personal circumstances that emanate as specifically South African musical contexts and finally proposes a compositional approach that acknowledges and deliberately integrates the complex interactions within these contexts (Section 2).

Juxtaposed to this body of *verbally* expounded reflections, Part Two contains a portfolio of compositions (presented as scores and recordings), which complement and extend the theoretical reflections of the first part (Section 4). Establishing direct links between the verbal reflections and the musical expositions, four chapters (Section 3) are dedicated to a discussion of the four compositions respectively.

As is indicated in *Figure 1*, the reciprocal, mutually constitutive relation between both components may be further expounded by suggesting that the theoretical part of the dissertation be perceived as *context* for the presentation of the compositions. Thereby it functions as platform, format, occasion (intervention) for the compositions to emanate, offering a specific methodology and strategy of presenting and, in a way, even ‘realizing’ the compositions. *Vice versa* the compositions – as practical component of the thesis – become the subject of its investigation. Note that I consider them subjects and not objects of the investigation.

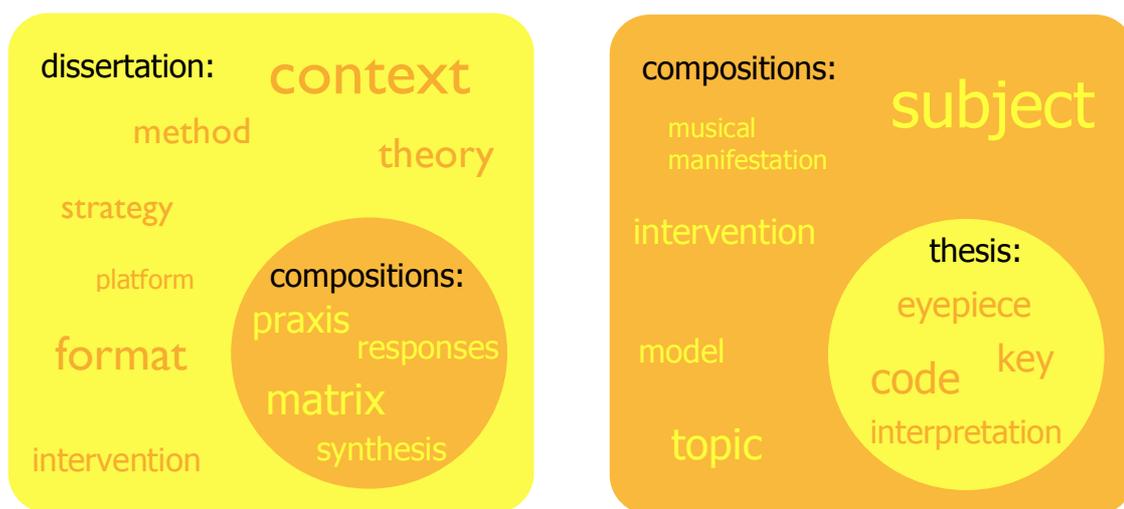


Fig. 1: Illustration of the mutually constitutive relation between theoretical and practical parts of this dissertation.

I posit that this elevated status is substantiated through the compositions’ actual, physical presence as scores and reproducible recordings. In this way they may step into a dialogue with the theoretical considerations, becoming more than mere passive objects of study. Moreover, being the primary texts (both temporarily and by emanating from my primary field of expertise), it is the compositions that inform the theoretical part, rather than the other way around. Without the existence of these compositions, the on-going practice from which they have originated and the experience gained from their performances there would have been no reason, nor substance for any of the ensuing theorization.)

From the perspective of the composer the theoretical part of the dissertation is but an eyepiece for specifically framed and focussed investigations, interpretations or explanations of (certain aspects of) the

⁷⁶ As I have argued earlier this unnecessary given the existing communalities of research and practice.

⁷⁷ It proves difficult to elucidate the exact differences here using conventional terms. The English language displays a leniency towards being inclusive, rather than explicit, when circumscribing the meaning of text, script, passage, note, which may all refer to verbal as well as musical features.

compositions. Obviously, an intrinsic epistemology is part and parcel of the act of viewing or investigating, and this assumes the function of ‘code’ or ‘access key’ to a certain way of reading (interpreting) the works.

From the theoretical vantage point the compositions are seen as praxis, potentially even as matrix, or as specific materialisations and syntheses of the theories propounded. Moreover, as they are always tangible responses to perceived musical contexts,⁷⁸ they concretely link musical theories to perceived world-views. In this sense music becomes a ‘reading of the external world’, a cognitive intervention, a manifestation of perceived reality and thereby a tangible medium through which theoretical work can flow into a practice and become ‘real.’⁷⁹

I believe that this kind of constitutive mutualism between practical and theoretical work should be considered as ultimate legitimization of the PBR approach. The point is not merely to juxtapose two different sets of findings; it is rather to acknowledge that different findings do not relate linearly, that they cannot simply be added up, but that they interact, inform, change (constrain and enrich) each other, whence an emergent knowledge not to be gained in any other way arises.

I vividly remember Paul Cilliers’s encouragement ‘to dance with the form of the dissertation’,⁸⁰ i.e. to work creatively with (and around) the academically defined format. Considering that ‘it takes two to tango’, I hereby wish to extend this invitation to the reader to join me in an interdisciplinary exploration or boundary-crossing capriole, which derives its strength from ever-changing positions and multiple perspectives and in which the biggest mistake would be to stand still. Realizing that there is no optimal, single, solely reliable vantage point for the investigation to be undertaken, an epistemological dance of theory and practice is in fact the only viable method.

⁷⁸ See the reflections on the notions of ‘structural coupling’ and the ‘survival unit’ in Chapter 3, pg. 70 ff.

⁷⁹ For my understanding of ‘reality’ see Parenthesis III on ‘Critical Realism’, pg. 42 ff.

⁸⁰ Personal communication early on in the supervision process.

PART ONE

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

AVANT SCÈNE

... to begin writing about complexity, without this being a random point of entry. Complexity thinking contravenes the concept of a clear-cut beginning. The idea of determined linear cause and effect is dissolved and substituted by the perception of complex and mutually recursive relationships, in which any cause is itself already an effect of some previous interaction, with even earlier causes in unending loops of feedback. Trying to say anything about complexity therefore requires a leap of faith into the topic, which – wherever one might land – will require the acceptance of having left out something important, which should have been said before. There is no way to rectify this inadequacy, for example by jumping in just a little earlier. Therefore the *acknowledgment of insufficiency and uncertainty* must centrally be incorporated in an apposite description of complexity.

From a conventional scientific perspective (i.e. operating with knowledge based on empirically proven and objectively verified facts) a shortcoming of this kind would be intolerable. The scientific method per definition invests special efforts precisely to close any such epistemological fissures in order to arrive at coherent, comprehensive and universal findings. By acknowledging complexity the irritation of uncertainty must be accepted – not as an annoying frustration but as an inefaceable pivotal feature. For it is only from this apparent *limitation* of knowledge that a *transformation* into a broadening of knowledge can occur; only such a ‘crack’¹ might offer an ‘opening’ into a deeper understanding, an entrance which a closed epistemology would effectively obstruct. From this perspective the acknowledged insufficiency may lead to a heightened awareness, a kind of thinking ‘at the same time richer while less certain.’²

By the same token a text on complexity will never be complete. By default it cannot fully state and even less conclude what it endeavours to disclose. But by conceding this, it may in fact express significantly more than it could ever achieve by presuming to treat its topic exhaustively. The claim that knowledge of complexity will be incomplete is no principal deficiency, nor is it meant as a commonplace truism vaguely referring to an inaccessible or expressible metaphysical realm. It is a qualitative statement, revealing something of the systemic relationship of wholes and parts. A complete whole is not constituted through every possibility contained in the sum of its parts. Rather, it emerges in spite of the restrictions it imposes on all its parts, which therefore – by virtue of being only part of a whole – are not whole (neither faultless nor complete) themselves. Consolation can thus be found in the fact that an ‘un-begun’ and ‘unfinished’ text, a limited utterance, may nevertheless contribute to the whole, which is never an unbroken unit, but only exists through its constituent ‘partial’ and imperfect components.

Framing the issue differently, it could be said that by its very nature *complexity is always more complex* than can be assessed and ever be ascertained. Again, the truism is by no means trivial, as it does not close on itself but instead opens recursively. Firstly it states that complexity defies a complete grasp or full comprehension in the conventional sense, where ‘full comprehension’ implies the entire disentanglement of complexities into ordered categories. Secondly it questions the very concept of comprehension as abstract propensity outside of, unrelated to, or fully different from the subject of its understanding. If *complexity* is always (open-endedly, recursively) ‘more complex’ then, by implication, the very notion of understanding will always be wanting, insufficient, inadequate, yet – all along – it remains the only gateway for complexity to ‘show’. By the same

¹ Edgar Morin, *On Complexity* (Hampton Press, Cresskill 2008), 8.

² *Ibid.*, 26.

token this 'inherent inaptitude' is no fault or insufficiency, but fully appropriate with respect to complexity. For if truly 'complete understanding' were possible, complexity could be unravelled (reduced, simplified, dissolved) and would hence cease to exist. Assuming, on the other hand, that 'true complexity' exists, implies that all understanding must principally be limited, incomplete, or at least provisional. What is remarkable about the relationship between the *phenomenon* of complexity and its *perception* is that the ostensible mutual incongruence in fact amounts to a reciprocating conditionality. The constructivist conclusion that complexity does *not* exist, because we cannot grasp it, must be turned on its head: Complexity *does* exist, precisely because we cannot grasp it. Hence our incomprehension does not separate us from a complex world but intrinsically ties us into such a world.

Considering its extensions, inclusions, recursions and feedback loops – in short, its inherent reaches beyond the immediately perceptible – it becomes inapposite to consider complexity as a mere *topic* that can be investigated or discussed objectively. Much rather, it must be viewed and approached as a *condition* for any such investigation, arguably even as *universal condition* for *any* investigation, including the inevitable subjectivity of any such endeavour. While complexity not necessarily always plays out (is not always 'realized'), it is always present and can be 'activated' instantaneously by virtue of a chosen systemic frame. The quality of 'framing' – understood here as 'setting the scope, angle and method of investigative approach' – thus attains significant importance. As *act of cognition*, complexity is wholly subjective, leading to an *experience of perception* that hence emerges as *systemic phenomenon*, equally dependent on propensities of the *observer* as well as those of the *observed*.

In this manner the topical (object of study) and the conditional (manner of study) become an inextricably intertwined systemic complex. Neither can be fully separated from the other, nor fully reduced to the other. This means that neither can be understood fully *without*, nor *with* (or through) the other. In that sense complex systemic relationships prove to be irresolvable, irreducible and it is precisely this tension and openness that complexity thinking must attempt to uphold. It implies acknowledging that nothing exists on its own, not only due to its direct history, lineage or heritage, but just as much because of contingent and forever changing 'contextualities'.³

From the vantage point of solidly grounded empiricism this dynamic, variably referable relationality is, at first, a most irritable quality. It appears as dangerously shifting and swaying ground (as in an earthquake), leading to continuously changing qualities, identities, functionalities, sets of relevance, suddenly arising possibilities and just as sudden constraints, and will most probably leave the orthodox observer utterly confused. As its contingent nature effectively prohibits the triumphs of clear-cut concepts, neat solutions and completed tasks, engaging with complexity seems a most frustrating prospect. However, once adjusted to the flow of events and relations, the flexibility of the approach may prove to be appealing, especially if supposedly clear-cut concepts and strategies more often than not fail to yield the promised, reliable results.

Replacing the earthquake metaphor with maritime connotations, the notion of a complexity epistemology may be compared to a boat, which spontaneously and continuously adapts to the water surface's morphology, gaining its *sustained stability* from its *ever-adapting buoyancy*. Just as stepping onto solid ground after a lengthy boat trip feels awkwardly rigid and dull, so does the return to conventional epistemologies based on deterministic and reductionist principles after an excursion into complexity thinking. The only downside to be admitted is that it is only possible in hindsight to determine the point of departure, from which circumstances will have allowed to begin writing...

³ I.e. specific qualities attained by virtue of given contexts.

SECTION I

Thinking Complexity: Towards an Epistemology of Complexity

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING COMPLEXITY

Since everything then is cause and effect, dependent and supporting, mediate and immediate, and all is held together by a natural though imperceptible chain, which binds together things most distant and most different, I hold it equally impossible to know the parts without knowing the whole, and to know the whole without knowing the parts in detail.

*Blaise Pascal*⁴

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this first section is fourfold. Firstly it offers an introduction to complexity thinking, assuming that the reader of this thesis will not necessarily be familiar with the philosophical dimensions of this concept. The introduction traces a line of pertinent scientific and philosophical insights that first arose from observations in thermodynamics and cybernetics, leading to the formulation of a ‘general systems theory’, ‘restricted complexity’ and finally to ‘general complexity’. As will be shown, this last concept describes complexity in a manner highly congruent with tenets put forward from a ‘critical realism’⁵ perspective.

The notion of ‘complexity’ has emerged as an important concept in a wide array of different disciplines. This observation has led pioneers in the field, such as Ludwig von Bertalanffy, to regard *complexity* as a universal phenomenon and *complexity thinking* principally ‘applicable’ to all disciplines and epistemologies.⁶ More recently, this universalistic claim has been critiqued as one of the conceits or flaws of complexity thinking.⁷ To this criticism can be added the fact that such a claim principally contradicts the notions of particularity, provisionality and historicity of complex systems. However, von Bertalanffy’s view cannot be discarded: From a more nuanced reading of his claim the argument can be made that particularity, provisionality and historicity apply universally. This then denotes not a hegemonic, overriding or ‘imperialistic’ position, but rather a subtly ‘final’ argument against any such position – complexity proclaiming a ‘universal non-universality’.

This is not the only paradox characterizing complexity. Complexity thinking indeed invites and integrates the paradoxical.⁸ Related to the ‘universal/non-universality’ paradox, is the issue of trans-disciplinarity that appears as consequence of the emergence of complexity in various fields and strongly informs the approach of this study. While the universality of complexity may be contested, there is increasing evidence for the transferability regarding an epistemology of complexity studies between various disciplines.⁹

Since complexity first became visible in the natural sciences, tracing the roots of its emergence requires an excursion into the scientific realm, thereby already demonstrating how the study of complexity *compels* a trans-disciplinary engagement. As a musician I present this section with some trepidation, relying heavily on accredited accounts and multiple cross-references from specialist literature. I wish to state clearly that this

⁴ Blaise Pascal, *Pascal’s Pensees* (E. P. Dutton, New York 1958), 20.

⁵ Following Bhaskar’s and Minger’s circumscription of this approach. Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar *et al.*, *Critical Realism: Essential Readings (Critical Realism: Interventions)* (Routledge, London 1998), John Mingers, ‘Realizing Information Systems: Critical Realism as an Underpinning Philosophy for Information Systems’, *Information and Organization* vol. 14, (2004).

⁶ Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, ‘An Outline of General Systems’, *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* vol. 1, no. 2, (1950)

⁷ See for example Will Derkse, *On simplicity and elegance: An essay in intellectual history* (Eburon, Delft 1992), Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Routledge, New York 1977), Richard Swinburne, *Simplicity as Evidence for Truth* (Marquette University Press, Milwaukee 1997).

⁸ A classical example is Morin’s definition of constitutive forces being ‘simultaneously complementary and antagonistic’. Edgar Morin, *Method. Towards a Study of Humankind* trans. Roland B elanger (Peter Lang, New York 1992), 102. Also see Chapter 2, footnote 14.

⁹ E.g. von Bertalanffy (1950), Roth & Schwegler (1981), Cilliers and Preiser (2010).

section merely summarizes what has already been proposed elsewhere and that I claim no scholarly authority as a natural scientist. However, with my interpretations, summaries and especially the application of these findings into musical thinking, I wish to invite commentary and critique and stimulate meaningful trans-disciplinary investigative collaborations.

The translation and application of complexity thinking into intra-disciplinary knowledge systems requires the concerted efforts of open-minded specialists from various fields. This will become an increasingly important academic task in future, as existing knowledge systems will no longer be able to afford *not* to gauge their intra-disciplinary integrity against trans-disciplinary ‘reality checks’. From a complexity perspective, disciplinary integrity does not imply segregation, nor should specialization imply isolation. Instead, the original notion of ‘university’¹⁰ applies as an urgent imperative, requiring the active and organized integration of ‘diversity’. Once the opening to this idea has been risked, complexity not only *compels* but also *provides* the epistemology for meaningful trans-disciplinary links.

The second chapter offers an index of complexity tenets in an attempt to principally – albeit provisionally – describe key characteristics of complex systems in order to establish a theoretical base for the ensuing investigations. Here, findings that emerged from scientific observations are philosophically abstracted or distilled into broad principles. These not only reveal general links to specific phenomena traditionally only investigated in discreet disciplines, but, in often mutually recursive interactions, many discreet phenomena have since informed a broader systems thinking, resulting in a productive interaction and verification of specific against general observations or, systemically speaking, of parts and wholes. It is my hope that this summary of characteristics may provide a bridge between the natural sciences and the humanities in this thesis. More specifically, for the purpose of this study, it serves as point of departure for applying complexity thinking to musical considerations and assumptions.

Thirdly, concretizing the abstract reflections on complexity, I wish to unpack four ‘key concepts’ in some detail. The concepts are those of DIFFERENCE, IDENTITY, CONTEXT and NOVELTY, all of which, apart from their general importance, I hold to be of special musical significance. The choice of these specific topics is further motivated by their contestation in current musicological discourses, resulting from problematic engagements of modern, postmodern and postcolonial perspectives with each of them. However, in my view the familiar reiterations of the same arguments in musicological debates have led to an unproductive deadlock.¹¹ I hope to demonstrate that much can be gained by approaching and understanding these concepts from a complexity perspective. In doing so, I hope to rehabilitate each of them as productive ‘moorings’ – points of departure in a quest for meaningful links between complexity and music or, ultimately, for a complex understanding of musical relations.

Lastly, since the advent of modernity complexity thinking has not rigorously been ‘applied’ to musical thinking, perception and practice. Adding to the *specific* considerations pertaining to difference, identity, context and novelty, the first section therefore closes with a reflection on *general* consequences, which a complex understanding of music may hold in store for current musical practices and conventions. These premises will in turn function as point of departure, when I expound on my personal compositional considerations and convictions in the last chapter of Part Two.

¹⁰ Derived from the Latin noun ‘universus’ ([all] turned into one] the medieval notion of ‘universitas [magistorum et scholarium]’ foremost refers to the ‘totality [of teachers and scholars]’ Charlton Lewis, & Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1975). The initial concept of university thus emphasizes the notion of the scholarly *community*, rather than disciplinary *segregation*.

¹¹ My own observations in this regard are corroborated by a whole section of musicological literature concerned with this problem. A few examples stand for many more: Kevin Korsyn (2003, 7) speaks of an ‘impasse’ and a ‘double crisis’ which faces musical discourse in that ‘the potential for communication, and thus the social bond itself, is menaced by fragmentation on the one hand and a false consensus on the other.’ Peter Jefferey (quoted in Korsyn, 6) laments the ‘deep chasms that divide our specialities’, highlighting the phenomenon that the production of specialist knowledge erects communication barriers. Kay Kaufman Shelemay (quoted in Korsyn, 6) critiques the institutionalization of disciplinary barriers ‘forming distinct subcultures each with its own professional organization to ensure the perpetuation of its own distinctive social structure.’

'NEW COMPLEXITY' AND GENERAL COMPLEXITY – A NECESSARY DISAMBIGUATION

In musical circles the term 'complexity' is likely to call up an association with the compositional school for which the Australian musicologist Richard Toop coined the label 'New Complexity'.¹² This descriptor stems from an 1988 article on music by Michael Finnissy, Chris Dench, James Dillon and Richard Barret and was an attempt at grouping and characterizing a compositional approach producing highly abstract music requiring extremely intricate notation for the realization of correspondingly dense musical textures. Even though the article advocated the aesthetics of the group, the composers thus referenced early on resisted the grouping as well as the label.¹³ Regardless of their objections the term has stuck and is widely used ever since.

In his definition of 'New Complexity' the musicologist Christopher Fox emphasizes three main features characterizing music falling into this category: first, 'multi-layered interplay of evolutionary processes occurring simultaneously within every dimension of the musical material,' secondly the pushing of 'the prescriptive capacity of traditional staff notation to its limits' and thirdly the fact that the extreme technical and intellectual difficulties following from extremely detailed notation would be 'regarded as a significant aesthetic feature' of the style.¹⁴

To these qualities James Boros adds those of 'superbly anarchic plurality'¹⁵ and the desire to work with and in marginalized musical areas 'beyond those which received (Western European) knowledge accept as musically viable' following an 'exploratory urge in favour of engaging in an open-ended search for a form that [to speak with Becket] "accommodates the mess," but that springs from and therefore mirrors in a genuine way the very chaos of our existence.'¹⁶

A set of partly overlapping definitions is offered by Cordula Paetzold, who claims that

two aspects seem particularly important for a definition of (musical) "New Complexity": the expressive impulse underlying the composition, and the sheer technical skill in the generation and use of the musical material. Further aspects, such as an overflow of information, and special challenges in the practical instrumental-vocal performance, among others, are supplementary. What the various definitions have in common is the idea of multidimensionality, and the concomitant struggle for perspective through the use of multiple, simultaneous, layers.¹⁷

Paetzold also presents a response by Brian Ferneyhough to the question of 'what he understands "complexity" to entail in music.'¹⁸ Distilled from a longer discussion another set of principally defining features emerges: 'discrepancy, incommensurability, and the consequent reliance upon ambiguity as mobile mediator between perceptual categories.'¹⁹

Considering that Ferneyhough's compositions represent something like 'the *ne plus ultra* of musical complexity, in the sense of notational overload, performing difficulty and ... philosophical questioning'²⁰ he is

¹² Richard Toop, 'Four Facets of the "New Complexity"' *Contact* (1988).

¹³ Roderick Hawkins, (Mis)understanding complexity from Transit to Toop: 'New Complexity' in the British Context. PhD thesis, Dept. Music, University of Leeds (Leeds 2010).

¹⁴ Christopher Fox, Entry: "New Complexity" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹⁵ James Boros, *Why Complexity? Perspectives of New Music* Vol. 32 No. 1 (Seattle 1994) pp. 94.

¹⁶ Boros, 92.

¹⁷ Cordula Paetzold, 'Ferneyhough – Cox – Thomalla An Analysis, Two Outlooks, and the Question of a "New Complexity" School', *Search. Journal for New Music and Culture*, Issue 10 (University of Victoria 2013), 3. http://www.searchnewmusic.org/paetzold_2.pdf [accessed on 20.12.14].

¹⁸ Paetzold, 5.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Tom Service, A guide to Brian Ferneyhough's music. www.theguardian.com/music/tomserviceblog/2012/sep/10/contemporary-music-guide-brian-ferneyhough 10.9.12 [accessed, 20.12.14].

often regarded as the figurehead of the 'New Complexity' approach. Yet even he rejects the term.²¹ Nevertheless it has consistently 'been applied as a general descriptor' of his music for the last 25 years.²²

In a speech delivered at a music festival dedicated to 'Complexity'²³ two years after his initial paper, Toop already spells out a much broader definition of complexity. While the 1988 paper – at least as far as far as the coinage of the term 'New Complexity' is concerned – has clearly had a wide impact, the slightly later enunciations seem to have gone rather unnoticed and therefore merit all the more to be mentioned here.

In 1990 Toop suggests to think of complexity much broader, as the kind of quality 'we constantly seek in a work of art (whether from the standpoint of composer, performer or listener)' but for which 'when we find it – when it moves or astounds us – we tend to find other words'.²⁴ Instead of marvelling about the complexity of music, we tend to ravish about it as 'beautiful', 'impressive' or 'astonishing' in what Toop calls an 'aesthetic transferral' of complexity into some other, more familiar mode of description.²⁵ This understanding is shared by Ulman, who suggests that 'in a broad sense "complexity" is [...] an attribute of *any* interesting music.'²⁶ And even if the term should more strictly be reserved for 'a music that privileges ambiguity and subtlety, nourishing many paths of perception and interpretation,'²⁷ such a category would certainly accommodate many more composers than those immediately linked to the complexity school.

While these new definitions potentially open the notion of complexity principally to include an array of widely differing music, Toop does reserve a special position for the work of composers, who – like Ferneyhough – uphold 'a certain martyrological streak within Dionysian modernism.'²⁸ However, he now qualifies the 'New Complexity' label primarily as 'an open refutation of New Simplicity.'²⁹ Beyond this aesthetic demarcation Toop reads Ferneyhough's work as an expression of 'late High Modernism',³⁰ more specifically as a continuation of the 'hyperexpressive tradition' based on Boulez's works of the late 1940s and thereby representative of one of the very few approaches within 'contemporary art music to remain faithful to the idea of *art as the endless search for the transcendental*, and of music as potential revelation.'³¹

This interpretation in fact offers one of the best explanations for the enormous technical difficulties, of Ferneyhough's music. For, as Toop justly observes 'difficulty of execution *can be an inbuilt aesthetic component*, most evidently in nineteenth-century music. But once again, though it may be one (drastic) means of projecting and enhancing the innate complexity of a work (as in Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata and Grosse Fuge) *it does not of itself endow a work with "complexity"*'.³² Unless the overwhelming technical challenges to the performers are seen as a rhetoric means 'in pursuit of "das Unerhörte," ... axiomatically inclined to take instrumental writing to the verge of impossibility'³³ their 'physically and psychically exhausting gestural disjunction'³⁴ would hardly be justifiable or tolerable musically. Only a transcendental reward could entice anybody to deliberately undergo such suffering in executing and listening to music. (The question whether there is in fact any such transcendental reward to be garnered must remain open, as it belongs in the realm of personal taste or even quasi-religious belief.)

Returning to the notion of complexity and my delineation in this regard, it almost suffices to heed Toop's own disclaimer, already formulated 25 years ago: 'Let's admit that the term "New Complexity" is partly a

²¹ Service, *A guide to Brian Ferneyhough's music*.

²² Ferneyhough, quoted in Paetzold, 5.

²³ 'Complexity? Festival', Rotterdam, 8-10 March 1990.

²⁴ Richard Toop, 'On Complexity', *Perspectives of New Music* Vol. 32 No. 1 (Seattle 1994), 43.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Ulman, . 'Some thoughts on the New Complexity', *Perspectives of New Music* Vol. 32 No. 1 (Seattle 1994), 203, my emphasis.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Toop, 54.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, 54, my emphasis.

³² *Ibid.*, 46, my emphasis.

³³ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

journalistic convenience'³⁵ and further that the word complexity is one, which ... asks to be taken on trust, as a matter of conviction rather than theoretical definition. We can agree, I imagine, that the music of composers such as Brian Ferneyhough or James Dillon is, in purely material terms, complicated.'³⁶ 'With the notion of "complexity", however, real disagreements, real incompatibilities of judgements can arise.'

The reason for this, Toop consents, is that complexity is 'essentially a subjective, perceptual phenomenon – not an objective, material-based one.'³⁷ Clearly, here he moves away from a definition of a limited kind of complexity (such as the label 'new' might indicate) and towards a general understanding of complexity. His ensuing elaborations show a remarkable analogy to definitions offered independently and in fully different contexts by complexity philosophers such as Morin or Cilliers to which I will turn in due course:

"Complexity" is, in my view, essentially a subjective, perceptual phenomenon-not an objective, material-based one. For me, the word 'complexity' evokes a situation in which there are not necessarily "many things" (there could be many, but there might be only a few), yet in which I sense many levels of relationships between the few or many things. Whatever the definable cause of these relationships (organic, mechanistic, or even fortuitous), their outcome is something I unreflectingly sense ... as "richness."³⁸

'Richness' is at once a rich and vague term and points in a direction in which complexity 'is not just work-specific, [but] can also be historical, intertextual, and much else besides.'³⁹ I hold this insight to be of great importance and it will therefore resurface frequently throughout my thesis. Limiting complexity to a mere aesthetic or technical feature of only a single compositional school is therefore not only presumptuous but impoverishing – in the sense of overlooking measures of richness beyond this very narrow focus. Toop even goes so far as to suggest that the avant-garde claim of its hegemony – by virtue of producing especially complex music – should be seen as a 'certain naive pride on the part of the composer[s] in making the compositional process itself more visible, for public and professional admiration', a pride relying on a 'rather simplistic view of progress ... as well as an acceptance of positivist ... values.'⁴⁰

I trust that these cursory reflections will suffice to clarify why I wish to distance my understanding of complexity from the one historically propounded in connection with the 'New Complexity' school. My concern is not the limited field⁴¹ of a certain 'compositional school' (which is, moreover, considered controversial or even rejected outright by most of the composers purportedly belonging to it). Instead, I am concerned with complexity as universal condition, not only of music, but, as it were, of life itself – and in that sense of music as well. Formulated more specifically, my scholarly concern – one leg of this integrated thesis – is perhaps to reintroduce 'Old Complexity' (i.e. universal, ubiquitous, comprehensive complexity) into modernist musical thinking. Furthermore, my artistic approach – the other leg of the thesis – most certainly does not overlap with the artistic interests or intentions of any of the 'New Complexity' composers, nor do I share their transcendental aesthetic premises. Therefore, in spite of the shared name and seemingly shared topic this thesis will not touch on 'New Complexity'. In fact, by showing that complexity cannot be reserved for a limited school or approach, I suggest that the label is a misnomer to be discarded altogether.

Complexity, as it is understood here in the tradition of Morin and Cilliers, results from unpredictable, non-linear and dynamic relationships that prevent a complete understanding of all facets. Its manifestation is hence perceived as an emergence that cannot be prompted by accumulative material densification, but results from a qualitative 'leap'. In fact, what emerges may in itself not appear complex at all, as the *appearance* of a leaf, the

³⁵ Toop, 53.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid. 48.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Toop, 49. I hold this insight to be of great importance and it will therefore resurface frequently throughout my thesis.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ For an explication of this term borrowed from Bourdieu see Chapter 6, pg. 107 ff.

striking *beauty* of a piece of music, the refined *taste* of a well-cooked dish or the *depth* of a meaningful conversation illustrate. Arguably complexity emanates ubiquitously in *qualities* that abound on this living planet but, even though belonging to everyday experiences, remain somewhat intangible (unsusceptible) to deterministic, rational description.

'Complex systems are usually associated with living things.'⁴² Moreover, ecological, social and economic systems, languages, cultures and, I will argue, music, must be considered complex. As nature is imbued with complexity, in return there always resides a 'natural' quality in complexity. I posit that on this level humans (perhaps especially in pre-modern civilizations and more or less unconsciously) have always had an intuitive understanding and appreciation of 'complexity' as an experiential quality. In this sense, music will have been practised and appreciated similarly intuitively as a complex activity, if only due to its *inevitably concurrent involvement* of a *diversity* of facets (such as personal, communal, societal, cultural, aesthetic, artistic and technical questions), all influencing and nourishing each other in always different ways. With respect to a principally complex condition of 'musical practice' as contingent on cultural, historical, sociological and technological circumstances, the approach suggested here is not new, but much rather amounts to a rediscovery (or 'uncovering') of first principles.

It is acknowledged that the thesis strongly emphasizes the emancipatory if not utopian dimensions of complexity thinking. This should not be read as a denial of problematic or even alienating aspects, which certainly exist and include significant restrictions (such as the impossibility of making finite statements, the constant necessity of admitting provisional, context-determined and subjective positions as well as acknowledging a rather complex set of conditional frameworks as set out in Chapter 2). However, the exploration of the enabling prospects of complex thinking were an important motivating force in undertaking this study and overcoming the inherent restrictions and are therefore deliberately foregrounded.

FROM SYSTEMS TO COMPLEXITY – AN EMERGING HISTORY

1. SYSTEMS

The perception of natural and abstract systems dates back to antiquity, as the Greek origin of the word indicates.⁴³ 'System' is indeed a common term widely used in all walks of life with a seemingly intuitive understanding to the effect of 'set of connected parts forming a complex whole'. It is in fact a quasi-universal concept 'because, in a certain sense, all known reality, from molecule to the cell to an organism to a society, can be conceived as systems.'⁴⁴ Strangely, however, the phenomenon of systemically recurrent organizational principles as such remained largely unnoticed *in spite* of their omnipresence, or perhaps *because* of their ubiquitous, quasi-invisible natural occurrence. A formal theory of systems only emerges as late as 1950 and usually the Austrian biologist Ludwig van Bertalanffy is credited for being the first to have described the generic principles of systems scientifically.⁴⁵ From here on systems thinking develops in almost all disciplines and into widely different directions.⁴⁶

2. THERMODYNAMICS

Edgar Morin's formulation of the gradual 'invasion of disorders'⁴⁷ into what was previously believed and perceived to be a principally ordered world and universe, offers a suitable starting point for understanding the historical lineage of complexity thinking. Thereby Morin not only indicates the advent of certain historical

⁴² Paul Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems* (Routledge, London 1998), 3.

⁴³ A combination of *sun* 'with' and *histanai* 'to set up'.

⁴⁴ Morin, *On Complexity*, 9.

⁴⁵ Von Bertalanffy, *An Outline of General Systems*.

⁴⁶ Morin, *On Complexity*, 9.

⁴⁷ Morin, *Method*, 29.

developments but, more importantly, highlights the roots of a potential change of paradigm. Such an interpretation highlights the overarching paradigm of ‘cosmic order’, always implying notions of determinism, lawfulness and necessity⁴⁸ that determined the occidental belief- and knowledge systems up to the nineteenth century. Under the auspices of Platonism, Christianity, classical science from Galileo to Newton and further the absolute and immutable Laws of Nature, Species, History, Progress or social Hierarchy, disorder was relegated to the ‘quasi-phantasmic foam of reality’⁴⁹ and viewed as mere chance perturbation on the surface of orderly processes. From the nineteenth century onwards, ‘pockets of disorder’ were increasingly observed ‘at the very heart of physical order’⁵⁰ and gradually compelled the acknowledgment of such occurrences far more than negligible instances of disruption.⁵¹ Corroborated by the revolutionary scientific insights of the twentieth century (e.g. the understanding of solid matter giving way to a subatomic particle soup, discontinuous quantum energy, the notion of a dispersing universe following a primordial catastrophe), disorder appeared as rule rather than exception. Hence the erstwhile question, why there should be disorder in an orderly reigned universe, had to be more appositely turned around: How could order and organization emerge in a universe shaped by chaotic processes?

This reversal of underlying questions indicates the depth of the breach running through a world claimed by religious beliefs to be ordered, a claim that European Enlightenment had reaffirmed and rationally proven by discovering and celebrating order in all classical disciplines.

Remarkably, the first irrevocable glimpses of disorder arose from ‘highly ordered’ observations. Stated differently, it was precisely because disorder was discovered by scientific (systematically ordered) observations and thus empirically corroborated, that its manifestation was so shattering. If only on a cognitive level, this already indicates a mutual constituency between order and disorder, the one not being discernible without the other. As will become evident subsequently, that link runs much deeper. However, in an ironic twist, to this day empiricism remains one of the last bastions claiming to hold disorder at bay and away from its own methodology.

One of the first empirically recognized instances of ‘disorder’ was captured in what is now known as the second law of thermodynamics arising from Nicolas Sadi Carnot’s studies on the efficiency of steam engines.⁵² While still fully subscribing to the caloric theory of heat,⁵³ Carnot observed that the efficiency of the conversion of heat into mechanical work is dependant on the temperature gradient between an engine and its environment. He subsequently postulated that in principle the transformation of heat into work is reversible, i.e. that energy is never lost but transformed. Examining the relation between heat transfer and work somewhat closer, Rudolf Clausius⁵⁴ refined these findings by delimiting that heat will not spontaneously flow from cold regions to hot regions without external energy being applied to a system. Stated differently, all transformation of energy gives off heat and therefore cannot be reconverted entirely. Thus the idea of energy *degradation*⁵⁵ into heat was introduced for the first time. Clausius subsequently coined the term ‘entropy’ for the universal dissipation of

⁴⁸ Morin, *Method*, 9, 407.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ With reference to the parallel societal upheaval of the French revolution, Morin notes that the term ‘revolution’ before 1789 and as applied to celestial bodies signifies ‘faultless repetition’, underlining the ‘idea of Universe [as] the most perfect of clocks.’ After this date the same term (intrinsically simply denoting the notion of ‘rotation’) is predominantly associated with revulsion, rebellion, ‘break up and change.’ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵² ‘Réflexions sur la puissance motrice du feu et sur les machines propres à développer cette puissance’, 1824.

⁵³ Caloric theory: Widely accepted theory in the 18th century on the phenomena of heat and combustion in terms of the flow of a hypothetical weightless fluid known as caloric; www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/90137/caloric-theory [accessed on 12.9.13].

⁵⁴ In his most famous paper, titled: ‘Über die bewegende Kraft der Wärme und die Gesetze welche sich daraus für die Wärmelehre selbst ableiten lassen’, *Annalen der Physik und Chemie*, (Volume 19, pg 368 ff) Leipzig, 1850. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k15164w/f384.table> [accessed 5.9.13].

⁵⁵ Morin, 31.

potential, which he defined as ‘the irreversible diminution of aptitude to transform itself and to do work, proper to heat.’⁵⁶

Ludwig Boltzmann refuted the caloric theory and, assuming the existence of atoms and molecules at a time when their existence had not yet been conclusively proven,⁵⁷ applied statistical mechanics in his studies of gasses and thermodynamic systems.⁵⁸ Considering gas as consisting of randomly colliding particles, he suggested that increasing entropy might be understood as the gradual decline of kinetic energy leading to increasingly disordered movement and distribution of parts. Arguing from this vantage point, a disorderly arrangement of particles is by far more probable than an orderly one and entropy is ‘explained’ as a logical consequence of mechanistic probability.

Whereas up to this point the entropic phenomenon could only be circumscribed empirically, Boltzmann’s structural interpretation explained it as a function of the distribution of micro-states in a system. Hence the ‘degradation of energy’ could be equated to a ‘degradation of order’.⁵⁹ Today the ‘second law’ is popularly summarized and expressed as stating that ‘if a system is left alone it drifts steadily into disorder.’⁶⁰

Almost a century later another thermodynamic observation became decisive to the understanding of complex systems. In the 1970s Ilya Prigogine described dissipative structures (such as the often mentioned Bénard cells)⁶¹ as ‘a typical phenomenon of structuration corresponding to a high level of cooperativity on a molecular level.’⁶² Prigogine’s findings are generally understood as a formal and scientifically rigorous concept of self-organization, an unexpected and astounding phenomenon considering that it seemingly contradicts and physically counteracts the universal drift towards entropy or disorder. Morin attaches great significance to this discovery, seeing in it evidence ‘that deviance, perturbation, and dissipation can provoke “structure”, that is to say, both organisation and order.’⁶³ Prigogine’s insight that a system’s ‘stable dynamic state’ depends on it being kept ‘far from equilibrium’ has become a hallmark formulation in the characterization of complex systems.

Thus the thermodynamic legacy with regard to the development of understanding complex systems rests largely in the notions of ‘thermal equilibrium’ (as a physical state analogous to death) and ‘disequilibrium’ (signifying an energetic, dynamic state). These terms recur in countless descriptions of systems, such as the following:

Orderly linear systems are found at or near equilibrium... Complexity, by contrast, is exhibited by systems that are far from equilibrium. In this instance, the system has to exchange (dissipate) energy, or matter, with other systems in order to acquire and maintain self-organised stable patterns. That is the only option open to it to avoid falling into the destructive clutches of the second law of thermodynamics. The most dramatic illustration of that process is planet Earth. Without the nourishing rays of energy from the Sun, Earth would perish into complete equilibrium, and therefore nothingness. Continuous supply of energy from the Sun keeps the planet in a highly active state far from equilibrium. The energy is absorbed, dissipated and used to drive numerous local interactions that in total produce the stable pattern that we perceive as life on Earth.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Morin, 31.

⁵⁷ The existence of atoms was only conclusively proved in 1906 subsequent to Einstein’s re-interpretation of Brownian motion. http://www.vias.org/physics/bk4_02_04_04.html [accessed 12.9.13].

⁵⁸ ‘Über die Beziehung zwischen dem zweiten Hauptsatz der mechanischen Wärmetheorie und der Wahrscheinlichkeitsrechnung respektive den Sätzen über das Wärmegleichgewicht’, Vienna, 1877.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁶⁰ Robert Geyer, ‘Europeanisation, Complexity, and the British Welfare State’, *UACES/ESRC Study Group on The Europeanisation of British Politics and Policy-Making* (Sheffield 2003) 6.

⁶¹ So-called ‘Bénard cells’ result from natural convection, as can be observed in a plane layer of fluid heated from below. Remarkably, heating causes the fluid to assume regular flow patterns, which often appear as hexagonally shaped cells, named after the French physicist Henri Bénard, who first described the phenomenon in 1900.

⁶² Morin, *Method*, 38.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 38.

⁶⁴ Geyer, *Europeanisation, Complexity, and the British Welfare State*, 7.

3. CYBERNETICS

Cybernetics is a trans-disciplinary branch of research emerging from the ‘techno-scientific projects’⁶⁵ on which government in the USA felt compelled to embark with the view of decisively intervening in the Second World War. ‘Positivistically’ described, cybernetics (the science or art of ‘steering, governing’)⁶⁶ was originally concerned with the study of (the mechanisms of) control systems, more specifically self-controlling devices such as corrective feedback cycles, self-regulating (teleological) mechanisms or circular causality. Heylighen succinctly sums it up as ‘the science of communication and control in the animal and the machine (to which we now might add: in society and in individual human beings).’⁶⁷ Morin’s rather more ‘hermeneutic’ summary of cybernetics interprets it as the designation of ‘a new type of artificial machine’ and the attempt ‘to formulate a theory which corresponds to organization, communicational by nature, proper to those machines.’⁶⁸

As principles observed in the material, mechanical ‘machine’ world could be extrapolated to the immaterial realm (subsequently leading to a new understanding of corresponding phenomena such as autonomy, identity, social behaviour and purpose),⁶⁹ cybernetics revealed a remarkable universality of core principles, applicable in disciplines ranging from mathematics, engineering and computer science to biology, meteorology and social studies. Norbert Wiener (who coined the term by borrowing it from Ampère), John von Neumann, Alan Turing, Claude Shannon, Warren Weaver, William Ashby, Heinz von Foerster, Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson are considered pioneers in the field.⁷⁰ The so-called ‘Macy Conferences’ held between 1946 and 1953 are considered as the most important forum for the development of the foundational ideas of the discipline.⁷¹ A convention exists of referring to first-, second-, and third-order cybernetics as representing specific developmental stages in the field. Hayles, in her excellent overview of developments in cybernetics,⁷² ascribes the key concepts of *homeostasis*, *reflexivity* and *emergence* to respectively characterize their main concerns.

a) FIRST-ORDER CYBERNETICS

During its first stage ‘cybernetics was forged as an interdisciplinary framework that would allow humans, animals and machines to be constituted through the common denominators of feedback loops, signal transmission and goal-seeking behaviour.’⁷³ For the first time ‘feedback’ was recognized as an ‘informative’ phenomenon functioning as a pivotal organizational principle. It was perceived to reconcile ‘teleonomy (or finality) and causality’ by means of ‘non-linear, circular mechanisms, where the cause equals the effect... The simplest application of negative feedback for self-maintenance is homeostasis.’⁷⁴

Interestingly, at this stage homeostasis was considered to be the prime goal of any system and, following Ashby,⁷⁵ even to be the ‘universally desirable state’ in both the ‘inanimate and the animate’ world. As such it was

⁶⁵ Lafontaine’s somewhat euphemistic description as quoted in Minka Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics: Critical Complexity, Deconstruction, and Implications for Understanding the Ethics of Business* (Springer, New York 2012), 94.

⁶⁶ Greek: *kybernetes* – steersman, from *kubernan* – to steer.

⁶⁷ <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/CYBERN.html> [accessed 14.9.13].

⁶⁸ Morin, *Method*, 235.

⁶⁹ Stuart Umpleby, ‘Cybernetics: Definitions and Description’ in *A Larry Richards Reader* (unpublished, Richmond 2007), 2. An overview of similar content (‘Defining Cybernetics’) may be found on a webpage of the American Society for Cybernetics (ASC) at <http://www.asc-cybernetics.org/foundations/definitions.htm> [accessed 25.12.14].

⁷⁰ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 94.

⁷¹ ‘The Macy Conferences were a series of meetings of scholars drawn from numerous disciplines held after the second world war in New York on the initiative of Warren McCulloch and the Macy Foundation between 1946 and 1953. The primary goal of this series of conferences was to set the foundations for a general science of the workings of the human mind. The Macy Conferences were largely responsible for coalescing an immanent set of ideas into the new field of cybernetics.’ <http://ensemble.va.com.au/Treister/GEMATRIA/MacyConference/GMC.html> [accessed on 23.8.13].

⁷² N. Katherine Hayles, ‘Boundary Disputes: Homeostasis, Reflexivity, and the Foundations of Cybernetics’, *Configurations* vol. 2, no. 3, (1994), 446.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 441.

⁷⁴ Heylighen, *Principia Cybernetica Web*, <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/CYBERN.html> [accessed 14.9.13].

⁷⁵ quoted in Hayles, *Boundary Disputes*, 456.

automatically and immediately equated to stability and safety.⁷⁶ In true cybernetic spirit Ashby constructed an electrical device to demonstrate the notion of homeostasis. Inputs changing his homeostat's state would trigger a 'configuration of variables that would return it to its initial condition.'⁷⁷ The device was meant 'to model an organism that must keep essential variables within pre-set limits in order to survive.' Mathematically speaking, the problem of homeostasis was equated to finding an inverse function in an organism (machine) for a function of the environment 'such that the product of the two will result in an equilibrium state.'⁷⁸

In hindsight it seems remarkable that Ashby would perceive a mechanical device sufficiently suitable to illustrate (and solve) the problem at hand. This attitude should be understood from the cybernetic premise, which would equate both humans and machines as being 'information-processing systems.'⁷⁹ In fact, first-order cybernetics may be summarized as the 'triumph of information over materiality'.⁸⁰ The realization that in the man-machine relationship, information is more 'potent' than energy, motivated the quest for a theory of information, its 'flow' in neural structures and about mechanisms translating information into observable operations.⁸¹

Initial investigations into the nature of information, mainly driven by Ralph Hartley and Claude Shannon,⁸² revealed it as a communicational as well as a statistical entity. Information is therefore not only concerned with the 'transmission of messages', but is also a function of 'the probability or rather the improbability of the appearance of this or that elementary unit carrying information...'⁸³ In fact, Shannon stressed that 'it should be defined solely as a mathematical function' which, on this level, would have nothing to do with 'the semantic question of what to send and to whom to send it.'⁸⁴ He further proposed considering information as a negative form of entropy, also called negentropy,⁸⁵ arguing that if '[s]tatistical entropy is a probabilistic measure of uncertainty or ignorance, information is a measure of a reduction in that uncertainty.'⁸⁶

An intriguing extrapolation of information thus emerged: As it had been established that DNA could be conceived as 'chemical quasi-signs of which the whole could constitute a hereditary quasi-message, [now] reproduction could be conceived of as a copy of a message.'⁸⁷ Stretching the informational vocabulary even further, genetic mutation could be 'likened to "noise" disrupting the reproduction of a message'.⁸⁸

In its cybernetic interpretation, information was established as a concept that irrefutably links the *immaterial* (a spiritual notion of communication) to *biologically and physically tangible organization* (in thermodynamics and genetics). Remarkably, even though it became 'an indispensable concept', it remains 'fundamentally unknown' from a physical point of view.

Shannon's theory was only concerned with the transmission of information (reduced to physical bits and hence a 'binary distinction between signal and noise')⁸⁹ through effective communication channels. He was well aware that his theory could not account for information's meaning, nor elucidate the mechanisms of understanding such meaning. Hence Morin regards the cybernetic understanding of information as a 'problem concept, not a solution concept ... not capable of understanding either birth or the growth of information.'⁹⁰

⁷⁶ Hayles (446) explains this by pointing out that – possibly subconsciously – 'homeostasis reflected the desire for a "return to normalcy" after the maelstrom of World War II.'

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Hayles, 446.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 441.

⁸⁰ Hayles quoted in Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 94.

⁸¹ Ibid., 94-95.

⁸² Both were working at the Bell Laboratories for a time and are generally acknowledged as co-founders of information theory.

⁸³ Morin, *On Complexity*, 13.

⁸⁴ Hayles, *Boundary Disputes*, 448.

⁸⁵ Morin, *On Complexity*, 15.

⁸⁶ Heylighen, *Principia Cybernetica Web*, <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/ENTRINFO.html> [accessed on 13.9.13].

⁸⁷ Morin, *On Complexity*, 13.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Hayles, *Boundary Disputes*, 451.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 14.

Nevertheless it is an important step towards a more comprehensive elucidation of the notion of information, which Morin subsequently develops under the auspices of a general systems theory.

In spite of its revolutionary approach of studying ‘interactions between objects’ (rather than objects on their own) and for that purpose considering all objects equal, ‘regardless of their nature (physical, biological, artificial or human)’,⁹¹ first-order cybernetics still fully subscribed to the idea of scientific objectivity.⁹² However, this fundamentally changed in the second stage, as several Macy contributors⁹³ began to emphasize the element of self-reflexivity in systems. This reflexivity, amounting to *control as observation*, would account and allow for *change* and hence evolvment and goal pursuit in systems, as opposed to the previous (thermodynamically conceived) model, in which *control as regulation* would mainly serve to maintain *stasis*.

b) SECOND-ORDER CYBERNETICS

The term ‘second-order cybernetics’ was coined by von Foerster⁹⁴ by way of suggesting that the ‘cybernetic principles [be extended] to the cyberneticians who had devised the principles’, in other words that ‘the observer of systems can himself be constituted as a system to be observed.’⁹⁵ It culminated in Maturana and Varela’s proposal to perceive ‘the world as a set of formally closed systems’,⁹⁶ a theory that can be read as the consequent development of ‘von Foerster’s self-reflexive emphasis into a radical epistemology.’⁹⁷

These two positions respectively demonstrate the core principles of *self-reflexivity* and *circularity* coming to the fore in this phase. A description by Francis Heylighen summarizes how they relate to each other:

In second-order cybernetics [the] emphasis is on how observers construct models of the systems with which they interact... Such circularity or self-reference makes it possible to make precise, scientific models of purposeful activity, that is, behaviour that is oriented towards a goal or preferred condition. In that sense, cybernetics proposes a revolution with respect to the linear, mechanistic models of traditional Newtonian science. In classical science, every process is determined solely by its cause, that is, a factor residing in the past. However, the behaviour of living organisms is typically teleonomic, that is, oriented towards a future state, which does not exist as yet.⁹⁸

The notion of ‘organizational closure’ entered the debate from an unsuspected source. Studying how visual stimuli are processed in the frog’s cortex, the two Chilean biologists Maturana and Varela learnt that ‘response patterns [are] adaptive for frogs’. Frogs apparently don’t see large, slow-moving objects, but instead have an aptitude to respond especially strongly to small, quick movements, which – typically revealing flying insects – potentially indicate a source of food.⁹⁹ As Hayles points out, in these experiments the frog became ‘a techno-bio apparatus instantiating the cybernetic framework that constitute[s] animals and machines as information-processing systems’.¹⁰⁰ The experiments lead to the insight – novel in the late 1950s – that ‘perception is species-specific’ in the sense that ‘every perception is always already encoded by the perceptual apparatus of the observer.’¹⁰¹ Since then similar findings have been reported regarding the species-specific vision of insects, birds, dogs, etc., confirming that ‘[reality] comes into existence for us, and all living creatures, *only through the interactive processes determined solely by the organism’s own organization*.’¹⁰² The startling revelation that ‘there is

⁹¹ Lafontaine quoted in Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 95.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 95.

⁹³ Von Foerster, MacKay, Kubie.

⁹⁴ Heinz Von Foerster, *Observing Systems* (Intersystems Publications, Salinas 1984).

⁹⁵ Hayles, *Boundary Disputes*, 442.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Heylighen, *Principia Cybernetica Web*.

⁹⁹ Hayles, *Boundary Disputes*, 460, referring to the seminal Macy paper ‘What the Frog’s Eye Tells the Frog’s Brain’.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 461.

¹⁰² Hayles quoted in Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 97.

no possibility of a transcendent position from which to see reality as it “really” is’ was, however, first gained – in Hayles’s formulation with due amphibian credit – from a ‘frog-sized hole [blown into] objectivist epistemology.’¹⁰³

The recognition of *the role of the observer in any observation*, and hence the uncomfortable but undeniable acknowledgement of inescapable subjectivity, even in the realm of science, stands out as the single most significant advance made during this phase of cybernetic enquiry.

From their studies of ‘cognition’ and its understanding as an internal, biological phenomenon (rather than the objective registration of an outside world), Maturana and Varela arrived at the premise that all living systems are ‘autonomous, self-referential and organisationally closed.’¹⁰⁴

Their argument can be summarized as follows: As the study of any organic functionality will reveal, the outside world can at best be accorded to play ‘a triggering role’ with regard to ‘internally-determined activity’¹⁰⁵ of an organism or system. For reasons of their integrity and identity, living systems cannot but ‘operate within the boundaries of an organization that closes in on itself and leaves the world on the outside.’¹⁰⁶ This does not mean that systems are fully isolated from their environment, but instead implies a ‘reflexive relation’¹⁰⁷ between system and environment, ‘mediated by the self-referential loops that constitute the system itself.’¹⁰⁸ Not only is self-reference thus key to understanding the organizational confines of systems; it is an equally crucial mechanism of a ‘system’s capacity for self-production through feedback loops’¹⁰⁹ – famously termed ‘autopoiesis’¹¹⁰ by Maturana.

‘Autopoiesis’ stresses organizational autonomy as a central feature of any living being, as opposed to the allopoietic nature of things ‘made by others’ from the outside and which ‘have as their goal something exterior to themselves. Allopoietic systems are defined functionally and teleologically rather than reflexively, [whereas] autopoietic systems have as their goal the maintenance of their own organization.’¹¹¹ Hence *reflexivity* and *self-reference* loom large in the conception of ‘autopoiesis’: ‘It is the circularity of its organization that makes a living system a unit of interactions, and it is the circularity that it must maintain in order to remain a living system and to retain its identity through different interactions.’¹¹² Rather than considering a system in its *dependence* on its environment, this view privileges its *autonomy* (and with that its self-referentiality and organizational closure). Whatever is needed from the environment (energy, information, matter) ‘is drawn into the system, in order to facilitate its own production and maintenance’,¹¹³ which is all the system can ‘know’ and can do.

Maturana and Varela’s work, perceived widely as providing a compellingly coherent theory for the understanding of complex systems, has been highly influential in numerous fields. Perhaps most notably, it was taken up and applied to sociology by Niklas Luhmann.¹¹⁴ Extending the notion of *organizational closure* to that of *informational closure*, he postulated that communication (understood as self-referential social operation) can only take place ‘within a system’, i.e. within pockets of society understood as bounded entities of culture, language, convention, purpose or organizational activity as ‘functional systems’, which would in turn arise from meaningful

¹⁰³ Hayles quoted in Woerman, 97.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., with reference to Humberto Maturana, & Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition. The Realization of the Living* (D. Reidel, Dordrecht 1972).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 136.

¹⁰⁷ Maturana has circumscribed the intricacies of this relation with the notion of ‘structural coupling’, a concept that is elaborated in some detail in the reflections on *systemic openness* on pg. 48 ff.

¹⁰⁸ Poli quoted in Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 97.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 98.

¹¹⁰ Literally meaning ‘autonomous creation’.

¹¹¹ Hayles, *Boundary Disputes*, 462.

¹¹² Maturana, & Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, 9.

¹¹³ Morgan quoted in Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 97.

¹¹⁴ Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford University Press, Stanford 1996).

communication. By implication ‘communication is the society’.¹¹⁵ Only where there is communication, can society exist; a boundary arises when, where and because no communication is possible anymore. Hence the boundary results from the systemic organization and can in that sense never be crossed or overcome from within, as this would effectively change the organization’s identity.

The far-reaching influence of Luhmann’s work in turn has led to a popular understanding that ‘systems are closed’. (As will be shown duly, a closer systemic investigation actually leads to a somewhat more nuanced characterization.) In a similar manner, Varela and Maturana’s work has often been understood as principally constructivist, following from the premise that we can only perceive what our sensory organisms *permit* us to perceive. (As I will show in Parenthesis III, this premise must not conclusively lead to a constructivist argument). However, as they stand, both points reveal the somewhat problematic aspects of solipsism and relativism,¹¹⁶ from which second-order cybernetics never quite escaped.

c) THIRD-ORDER CYBERNETICS

One way of describing the various stages in cybernetics is to note the change of emphasis placed on ‘self-organization’. While this remained a central concept throughout, its thrust or purpose was interpreted quite differently in various contexts. The different approaches reveal about as much about the historical context of (and the actors in) cybernetic research, as they reveal about the science itself.

In the first, tentative and conservative phase (usually delimited to the years 1945-1960)¹¹⁷ self-organization was first recognized in conjunction with its propensity to regulate a system and guarantee its return to homeostasis. As Hayles notes, ‘[i]n broader social terms, homeostasis reflected the desire for a “return to normalcy” after the maelstrom of World War II.’¹¹⁸ The second stage (broadly situated in the 1960s and 70s), with its emphasis on the autonomy of self-organization systems, seemed to propound a reawakened self-consciousness, coinciding with the recovery of war-torn economies.

Finally, in the third stage – after political stability and self-esteem had been re-established – self-organization was recognized as a means rather than an end in itself and subsequently viewed ‘as the engine driving systems toward emergence.’ Interest focused on how systems evolve ‘in unpredictable and often highly complex ways through emergent processes.’¹¹⁹ From its very onset this future-orientated phase was far less clearly defined than the previous ones. Moreover, it sounds the bell for the discipline’s decline. From the 1980s onwards, cybernetics as distinct discipline would gradually be subsumed into the rapidly developing and industrially driven field of information technology (IT), for which it had of course in many ways prepared the field. Its last headlines were made in connection with research into virtual reality, artificial intelligence and artificial life.¹²⁰

However, in a sense the discipline only disappeared by virtue of having become ubiquitous and having turned almost every single global citizen into a ‘cybertician’: With the advent of mass-produced personal computing devices ‘the idea of a virtual world of information that coexists with and interpenetrates the material world of objects is no longer an abstraction’.¹²¹ In Hayles’s words: Cybernetics ‘has come home to roost, so to speak, in the human sensorium itself.’¹²²

If cognition is considered a biological function rather than a ‘passive act’¹²³ of observation, then the aptitudes for perceiving, discerning, noticing, apprehending etc. are in fact to be understood as *creative activities*, as ways of

¹¹⁵ Luhmann speaking on a youtube clip: ‘Gesellschaft ist nur Kommunikation. Wenn sich Kommunikation fortsetzt, setzt sich Gesellschaft fort.’ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FpB7ypFn7zw> [accessed on 18.9.13].

¹¹⁶ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 100.

¹¹⁷ Hayles, *Boundary Disputes*, 442.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 446.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 463.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Hayles, 443.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ If there can be such a contradiction of terms...

'bringing forth' the world.¹²⁴ While in second-order cybernetics this formulation had a somewhat problematic, subjective and constructivist ring to it, in third-order cybernetics it attained a new meaning and quality: that of emergence.

John von Neuman and Stanislaw Ulam's development of self-reproducing cellular automaton¹²⁵ afforded one of the earliest opportunities to study scientifically the phenomenon of emergence. Von Neumann was struck by the ability of such 'finite scientifically state machines' to produce structures more complex than themselves, simply by continuously updating their states by means of the mechanical iteration of basic, linear rules.¹²⁶ To explain this he postulated a 'complexity barrier', defined as 'the point past which systems experience not only quantitative, but also qualitative changes.'¹²⁷

As will be elaborated duly, the notion of a 'qualitative change' – a state suddenly arising and not predictable from previous behaviour, patterns, or component properties – has become a core definition of emergence. Back in the 1960s the concept was not as clear and von Neumann felt compelled to provide a somewhat lengthy description to summarize his observations:¹²⁸

There is thus this completely decisive property of complexity, that there exists a critical size below which the process of synthesis is degenerative, but above which the phenomenon of synthesis, if properly arranged, can become explosive, in other words, where synthesis of automata can proceed in such a manner that each automaton will produce other automata which are more complex and of higher potentialities than itself.

Later experiments with cellular automata showed that 'a system's computational capacity ... peaks in a narrow regime between highly periodic and chaotic behaviour.' The observation 'that emergent behaviour exists [only] in the boundary area between order and chaos'¹²⁹ lead to the popular and somewhat sensationalist description of complexity as residing at 'the edge of chaos'.¹³⁰ For a while research into complexity would be preoccupied with its 'technicalities', focussing on the conditions for or the locations of its existence. Such investigations would often digress into the realm of chaos, which exerted a great fascination in the 1970s and 80s. The field of study covered by these approaches has since been labelled 'restricted complexity'.¹³¹

4. RESTRICTED COMPLEXITY

The remarkable feature of non-linear (unpredictable) 'self-organization', discovered at the base and heart of chaos and complexity, lead to concerted efforts to unravel the laws underlying such behaviour. From a scientific point of view, self-organization is in fact highly remarkable: its potentially teleological dimension and its apparent contradiction of entropy and the second law of thermodynamics cannot be accounted for deterministically. Self-organization is usually equated to living organization and had not been observed in inanimate nature before von Neumann's discovery.¹³² To some, his self-reproducing automata do in fact substantiate the notion of 'artificial life'.¹³³

¹²⁴ A phrase frequently used in conjunction with Maturana's work; see Chapter 2, section 12, pg. 52.

¹²⁵ Algorithm for the two-dimensional self-replication of orthogonal cells by means of rule-based mathematical iterations that can be visualized readily by computer pixels. (The mathematical device is a by-product of both mathematician's investigations into the possibility of calculating the motion of liquids by considering them as made up of discrete units, of which each is determined by – and in turn influences – its neighbours' behaviour.)

¹²⁶ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 101.

¹²⁷ Rasch quoted in Woermann, 102.

¹²⁸ Von Neumann quoted in Woermann, *ibid.*

¹²⁹ Horgan quoted in Woermann, *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Langton quoted in Woermann, *ibid.*

¹³¹ Edgar Morin, 'Restricted Complexity, General Complexity' in C. Gershenson, D. Aerts, & B. Edmonds (eds.) (World Scientific, Singapore 2007). 10.

¹³² Morin, *On Complexity*, 16.

¹³³ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 101.

Initial studies of complexity would nevertheless be conducted from within a fully deterministic scientific regime, somewhat paradoxically trying to illuminate complex conditions without employing a ‘logic of complexity’¹³⁴ in the investigations themselves. Inevitably such attempts would fall short of their aim and subsequently gave rise to the category of ‘restricted complexity’, defined as follows: ‘A restricted approach to complexity is ... a purely descriptive approach ... [striving] to grasp and explain the interplay of the elements of a system *in terms of rules*’.¹³⁵

Initially chaos and complexity seemed to denote similar states of systems, displaying an apparent lack of order, but inherently obeying specific laws. This was considered to relate to Poincaré’s notion of ‘dynamical instability’ with which he characterized the ‘inherent lack of predictability in some physical systems’.¹³⁶ (Poincaré’s discovery pertains to a phenomenon since popularized as the *butterfly effect*, following a metaphor suggested by meteorologist and chaos theory pioneer Edward Lorenz.)¹³⁷

Chaos theory has brought intriguing concepts (such as non-linear dynamics, bifurcation, a sensitivity to initial conditions and strange attractors) to wide attention, but in spite of generating substantial initial excitement, ‘chaos turned out to refer to a restricted set of phenomena that evolve in *predictably unpredictable ways*’ and ‘has had a declining output of interesting discoveries.’¹³⁸

One of the oldest and arguably most active institutions dedicated to the (trans-disciplinary) study of complexity, more specifically ‘to discover, comprehend, and communicate the common fundamental principles in complex physical, computational, biological, and social systems’,¹³⁹ is the Santa Fe Institute, set up in 1984. The inscribed quest to uncover ‘fundamental principles’ exposes a universal approach that is problematic with regard to its very goal. Complexity theorists have mused that a unified theory of complexity (TOC), also dubbed a ‘theory of everything’ (TOE) would be necessary ‘to make the science of complexity more coherent, general and precise.’¹⁴⁰ According to conventional, (empirical, deterministic, Newtonian) scientific standards, such a theory should grant a satisfactory description, allow for prediction as well as manipulation of complexity, and thus contain *predictive, explanatory* and *control* components.¹⁴¹ However, as by its very nature complexity flouts precisely these criteria, it resists conventional scientific investigation along such generic lines. Complexity ultimately defies the very possibility of a TOE, an awareness that very tentatively and occasionally shimmers through in statements from Santa Fe (such as the one admitting that ‘it’s very hard to do science on complex systems’).¹⁴² Yet the nature of this syllogistic trap is not yet fully understood by science.¹⁴³

5. GENERAL SYSTEMS THEORY

While the notion of ‘system’ or ‘systemic interaction’ has manifold and ancient roots, it can be argued that its scientific recognition and thereby its *rediscovery* in the twentieth century mainly arose from two distinct sources. One was the field of cybernetics, where Walter Cannon’s studies of homeostasis and self-regulation revealed the phenomenon of ‘feedback’, soon to be observed in countless different situations as ‘patterns of circular causality’¹⁴⁴ or retroaction and hence conceived as a general systemic property. (This, incidentally,

¹³⁴ Morin, *On Complexity*, 18.

¹³⁵ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 105, my italics.

¹³⁶ Margaret Rouse, *Definition: Chaos Theory*, <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/chaos-theory> [accessed on 21.9. 2013].

¹³⁷ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 103.

¹³⁸ Horgan quoted in Woermann, *Ibid.*, my italics.

¹³⁹ See www.santafe.edu/about/mission-and-vision/. The institute’s mission is moreover framed by a political motivation expressed in the claim that ‘complex ... systems ... underlie many of the most profound problems facing science and society today... At the Santa Fe Institute, we are asking big questions that matter to science and society.’

¹⁴⁰ Chu *et al.* quoted in Woermann, 103.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁴² Cowan (one of the Santa Fe Institute’s founders) quoted in *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁴³ Morin, *Restricted Complexity*, 10.

¹⁴⁴ Debora Hammond, ‘Philosophical and Ethical Foundations of Systems Thinking’, *Triple C (Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society)* vol. 3, no. 2, (2005), 22.

provided a 'primary impetus for the development of cybernetics as a trans-disciplinary field of research').¹⁴⁵ The other was the work of the Austrian biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who's 'contribution to the evolution of systems thinking grew out of his work in theoretical biology, articulating an organismic approach to the study of living systems that would explore the nature and source of complex patterns of organization.'¹⁴⁶ Independent from cybernetic research, von Bertalanffy also noted the trans-disciplinary application of systems thinking, compelling him to propose it as universal epistemology in the formulation of his General Systems Theory (GST).¹⁴⁷

Both cybernetics and GST thus shared an agenda of searching 'for new approaches, for new and more comprehensive concepts, and for methods capable of dealing with the large wholes of organisms and personalities'.¹⁴⁸ But apart from this they represent two fully opposite trajectories of thought: Cybernetics starts off from technological research and arrives at *models of living systems based on principles observed in machine systems*. General systems theory (GST) originates from the study of the organization of living systems and – noting the existence of 'models, principles and laws that apply to generalized systems ... irrespective of their particular kind'¹⁴⁹ – subsequently proposes that these are universally applicable, in other words that *mechanical or social systems may be modeled on biological principles*. Assuming a 'logical homology',¹⁵⁰ it follows that the term 'organism' may be replaced with that of 'organized entity' and that a transition from 'organismic biology' (von Bertalanffy's term for '*system theory of the organism*') to a 'general systems theory' may be induced.¹⁵¹

Von Bertalanffy considered his work as embedded in an ancient tradition of systemic thinking. He calls on the Aristotelian holistic and teleological world view, Dionysius's hierarchic order, Nicholas of Cusa's *coincidentia oppositorum* ('the fight among the parts within a whole which, nevertheless, forms a unity of higher order'), Leibniz's hierarchy of monads, Hegel and Marx's emphasis on the dialectic process of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and finally Gustav Fechners notion of supraindividual organizations.¹⁵² Deliberately taking the ideas of earlier system thinkers into consideration in his *General Systems Theory* in 1947, he observes a consistency in the kind of questions that systems have at all times tried to address. He notes 'that the problems with which we are nowadays concerned under the term "system" were not "born yesterday" out of current questions of mathematics, science, and technology. Rather, they are a contemporary expression of perennial problems which have been recognized for centuries and discussed in the language available at the time.'¹⁵³

The historical context of von Bertalanffy's approach may be summarized as follows: Firstly, as a biologist, he was drawn into the 'fight on the concept of organism in the first decades of the twentieth century'.¹⁵⁴ At that stage the existence of 'order or organization'¹⁵⁵ and, by implication, goal-directed functionality in nature was explained either through comparisons with 'man-made machines',¹⁵⁶ or as a 'product of chance'.¹⁵⁷ The problem with the first approach was (and remains) that the origin of any 'machine' could only be explained by an 'external creator', for whom science principally cannot account. The problem with the second was (and remains) that – even given the highly improbable event of 'chance organization' and ignoring the inherent

¹⁴⁵ Hammond, 'Philosophical and Ethical Foundations of Systems Thinking', 22.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Von Bertalanffy, *An Outline of General Systems*.

¹⁴⁸ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 105.

¹⁴⁹ Ludwig von Bertalanffy, 'The Historical Status of General Systems Theory', *The Academy of Management Journal* vol. 15, no. 4, (1972), 411.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 410.

¹⁵² He mentions Aristotle's statement that the whole is more than the sum of the parts, Dionysius 'hierarchic order', Nicholas of Cusa's '*coincidentia oppositorum*' (opposing 'components of a system that nevertheless form a unified whole'), Leibniz's 'hierarchy of monads' and finally Hegel and Marx's dialectics.

¹⁵³ von Bertalanffy, 'The Historical Status of General Systems Theory', 408.

¹⁵⁴ Woodger quoted in von Bertalanffy, 410.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 409.

¹⁵⁶ Descartes's '*bete machine*', Lamettrie's '*homme machine*' or even later models of 'organism as a caloric, chemodynamic, cellular, and cybernetic machine'; *ibid.*, 409.

¹⁵⁷ As 'expressed in the Darwinian idea of natural selection'; *ibid.*

contradiction of this combination – it cannot account for the biological phenomenon of ‘life’ as ‘unnatural’ case of entropy-defying ‘self-maintenance’.¹⁵⁸ In view of the limits of ‘the “paradigm” of classical science, i.e. the explanation of *complex phenomena* in terms of *isolable elements*’,¹⁵⁹ some scientists¹⁶⁰ resorted to ‘neovitalistic’ ideas, which of course could never escape from metaphysical or supernatural crutches.

Clearly realizing the dilemma of a discourse locked between two equally untenable positions, von Bertalanffy – already in the late 1920s – suggested an alternative approach, in which he strongly emphasized the notion of organization:

Since the fundamental character of the living thing is its organization, the customary investigation of the single parts and processes cannot provide a complete explanation of the vital phenomena. This investigation gives us no information about the coordination of parts and processes. Thus the chief task of biology must be to discover the laws of biological systems (at all levels of organization). We believe that the attempts to find a foundation for theoretical biology point at a fundamental change in the world picture.¹⁶¹

Secondly, he argued that the idea of system had never grown into a scientific concept (but instead had remained ‘only’ a philosophical one), because ‘mathematical techniques [for the formulation of a new epistemology] were lacking’.¹⁶² As mathematician he therefore took on the challenge to elevate GST to a proper, unified scientific method, applicable in many different disciplines:

General Systems Theory is a logico-mathematical field whose task is the formulation and derivation of those general principles that are applicable to "systems" in general. In this way, exact formulations of terms such as wholeness and sum, differentiation, progressive mechanization, centralization, hierarchical order, finality and equifinality, etc. [growth, competition, allometry], become possible, terms which occur in all sciences dealing with systems and imply the logical homology.¹⁶³

This amounted to nothing less than postulating the ‘system’ as a new scientific category replacing the previously predominating ‘elementalistic approach’.¹⁶⁴

In summarizing, GST may be described as an ‘inquiry into the relationship between patterns and processes of organization in physical, biological, psychological and social systems, challenging the mechanism and reductionism inherent in earlier models, and emphasizing holism, emergence and the self-organizing nature of living systems.’¹⁶⁵ Telling of this approach – and at the same time revealing a very early and remarkably clear notion of embodied knowledge – is von Bertalanffy’s conviction of seeing science ‘as one of the “perspectives” that man, with his biological, cultural, and linguistic endowment and bondage, has created to deal with the universe into which he is “thrown,” or rather to which he is adapted owing to evolution and history.’¹⁶⁶ The activist in him speaks when he proposes that ‘possibly the model of the world as a great organization can help to reinforce the sense of reverence for the living which we have almost lost.’¹⁶⁷

Preceding James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis by 30 years, von Bertalanffy anticipated several of its core ideas, suggesting that ‘the stream of life is maintained only in continuous flow of matter through all groups of organisms,’ and that ‘biological communities are systems of interacting components and thus display characteristic properties of systems, such as mutual interdependence, self-regulation, adaptation to

¹⁵⁸ Von Bertalanffy, 410.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 410, my emphasis.

¹⁶⁰ For example Driesch and Bergson; *ibid.*, 410.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 410.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 411, 412.

¹⁶⁴ Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications* (George Braziller Inc., New York 1968), 252.

¹⁶⁵ Hammond, ‘Philosophical and Ethical Foundations of Systems Thinking’, 22.

¹⁶⁶ Von Bertalanffy, *The Historical Status of Gst*, 423.

¹⁶⁷ Von Bertalanffy in Hammond, *Philosophical and Ethical Foundations of Systems Thinking*, 21.

disturbances, approach to states of equilibrium'.¹⁶⁸ All criteria introduced here have since become stock ecological concepts.

Arguably his greatest contribution to the debate is 'the recognition of living systems as *open systems*',¹⁶⁹ i.e. as exchanging matter, energy and information with their environment 'as every "living" system does'.¹⁷⁰ Strangely, this suggestion seemed radical then and remains contested even today in spite of its ubiquitous manifestation, as it potentially compromises classically exclusive concepts (viz.: a system is precisely that which is different from its environment) and furthermore complicates the notions of boundary, inclusiveness, integrity, etc. However, von Bertalanffy, long before Morin and Lovelock, already argued that it is only due to their openness¹⁷¹ that living systems are able 'to evolve increasingly complex forms, in seeming violation of the second law of thermodynamics'.¹⁷²

By including in his considerations of open systems the 'human being characterized by dynamic, creative, and inner-directed activity'¹⁷³ or agency, he deliberately distanced himself from behaviourist and cybernetic interpretations and (what he called) their 'robot model of man'.¹⁷⁴ He was one of the first to apply the thermodynamic delineation of living systems as *not* in equilibrium (as the cybernetic view might imply), but rather as existing 'in a dynamic steady state, capable of self-transcendence'.¹⁷⁵

Also actively involved in the practical organization of establishing the envisioned unity in scientific approach, von Bertalanffy was one of the founders of the *Society for General Systems Research*. From 1954 onwards the society's *General Systems Yearbook* appeared which, for a while, was a highly influential publication with regard to the cross-application of cybernetic and general systems approaches 'to social systems and the industrial firm in particular'.¹⁷⁶

Today the notion of 'general' systemism is viewed somewhat sceptically for its dangerous proximity to empty proclamations of unity and holism, where such ideas arise from superficial 'analogies, homologies, and isomorphisms'.¹⁷⁷ As de Rosnay notes:

One of the greatest dangers that menace the systemic approach is the temptation of the 'unitary theory', the all-inclusive model with all the answers and the ability to predict everything. The use of mathematical language, which by nature and vocation generalizes, can lead to a formalism that isolates the systemic approach instead of opening it up to the practical. The General System Theory does not escape this danger. Sometimes ... it is nothing more than a collection of descriptive approaches that are often illuminating but have no practical application.¹⁷⁸

Von Bertalanffy is not to blame for the subsequent abuse of a highly productive initial approach. Suggested at a time when the concept of trans-disciplinary studies was considered completely out of bounds and untenable, his work may well have contributed to a situation where this notion is now sometimes considered rather too simplistically in both its application and its remedial effects. Hence, in spite of many developments since, the original challenge remains valid. Neither the trans-disciplinary approach nor the concept of complexity sits comfortably with institutionalized academe.

¹⁶⁸ Hammond, 21.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 22, my emphasis.

¹⁷⁰ Von Bertalanffy, *The Historical Status of Gst*, 412.

¹⁷¹ Openness is to be understood here as the physical possibility and capability of 'importing energy and resources from the environment and exporting ... entropy or wastes.' Hammond, *Philosophical and Ethical Foundations of Systems Thinking*, 22.

¹⁷² Von Bertalanffy in Hammond, 22.

¹⁷³ Von Bertalanffy, Ibid. 23.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 22.

¹⁷⁶ Joël de Rosnay, *The Macroscopic* (Harper & Row, New York 1979), 61.

¹⁷⁷ De Rosnay, *The Macroscopic*, 87.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 88.

PARENTHESIS I: COMPLEXITY AS DISCIPLINE?

'Complexity' only began to be understood as a formal and distinct field of study about two decades ago. Two popular books published at around the same time in the early 1990s and bearing the term in their titles¹⁷⁹ suddenly sparked a wide-ranging interest in the phenomenon as such. Both publications still strongly related complexity to the notion of chaos (which, as we now know, is inappropriate),¹⁸⁰ but nevertheless mark the beginning of a differentiated perception of a distinct phenomenon 'at the edge of chaos'. As by now 'discussions about the problems surrounding complex phenomena take place in virtually every discipline',¹⁸¹ it can safely be stated that the fascination with the *elusive* concept behind *tangible* experiences of complex situations or the perception of complex phenomena, has been growing ever since.

This is reflected in the vast body of literature that has since appeared¹⁸² and from which, as Cilliers points out, no overall 'convergence' of a set of primary ideas into a generally accepted and unified 'discipline' can be discerned.¹⁸³ Given the rising awareness of complexity in all fields as well as the diversity of approaches aimed at understanding the underlying principles at work in this respect, it seems advisable to speak of an 'emerging discipline'. It is (and will probably remain for the foreseeable future) a discipline as elusive as it is compelling; inherently resisting its formal institutionalization, while at the same time persuasively and increasingly proving to be an approach particularly suited to superseding current institutionalized paradigms. It would, once properly 'established', free the scholarly community from the necessity of further institutionalizations representative of the cumbersome and usually far too rigid manner of erecting power structures around any idea or value without which hierarchically thinking societies are apparently not able to appreciate, assess or esteem a value's own, inherent or contextual worth.¹⁸⁴

At this point in the argument – and with implicit reference to the context in which this thesis is written – it is necessary to sound a self-reflexive note: I posit that it is equally important to *acknowledge* (or even *concede*) that complexity is neither canonically recognized nor academically established as a discipline, but concurrently to *envision* (or even *claim*) that it may in fact be more than just yet another discipline. Its pursuit therefore requires an attitude of *humble assertiveness* – not to be disqualified as a contradiction in terms, but understood as a necessary and complementary combination. It is another way of saying that a complexity perspective can *only* be a provisional perspective, while concurrently asserting that there *can* only be provisional perspectives. It amounts to a capitulation with regard to any absolute and/or objective claims. And/but in doing so, it posits the notion of absolute and/or objective claims as principally untenable. Hence its apparent defeat (or defect) amounts to a much more important gain (or even victory). It means sacrificing empirical, *external certainty* or security in order to gain own and *self-critical confidence*.¹⁸⁵

How should complexity amount to 'more' than a confined discipline? The suggestion is that it contains in itself the very notion of a trans-discipline, that it is in essence an overarching discipline. This does not mean that

¹⁷⁹ M. Mitchell Waldrop, *Complexity: The emerging science at the edge of order and chaos* (Simon & Schuster, New York 1992) and Roger Lewin, *Complexity: Life at the Edge of Chaos* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1993).

¹⁸⁰ See pg. 17, footnote 138; One might say that while chaos is *predictably unpredictable*, complexity is *unpredictably unpredictable*.

¹⁸¹ Paul Cilliers, & Rika Preiser, *Complexity, Difference and Identity: An Ethical Perspective* eds. Paul Cilliers, & Rika Preiser, (Springer, New York 2010), v.

¹⁸² Too vast incidentally, to allow even a cursory overview within this discussion.

¹⁸³ Cilliers & Preiser, *Complexity, Difference and Identity*, v.

¹⁸⁴ This is a deep dilemma, holding true for 'institutions' from the family, over schools, societies and political parties to nation states. Instituted as supposedly vital, life- and value-preserving structures, the very act of the institutionalization of such (protective) structures, robs them to a certain extent of their vitality and viability. Put differently the (institutionalized) structure may never be perceived to be by default safeguarding the idea it intentionally represents. Much rather, it will by default pose the first significant challenge to its own appropriateness and will never escape from a degree of tension, of not fully adequately representing its own *raison d'être*.

¹⁸⁵ This paragraph builds on Cilliers's repeated elaborations on the innate links between complexity with 'modesty', 'provisionality' and 'criticality'. See for example *Ibid.*, 268 ff., 274 ff., 283 ff.

it should be better than, or elevated over, traditional disciplines, but rather that it essentially rests in or results from a particular combination of disciplines, considered as systemically interacting components.

It should not be too difficult to argue that no discipline can ever be completely and unambiguously closed or separated from other fields of study. While it will be defined around certain core questions and focus on specific phenomena, at its borders it will invariably overlap with and into other fields, questions and phenomena. Nevertheless (the current understanding of) academic integrity rests largely on upholding the concept of delimited disciplines, relying on specific and internal languages and procedures in order to guarantee specialized and focussed competence. Under these auspices the transfer of ideas from one discipline to another 'will never go beyond the metaphorical';¹⁸⁶ they may be inspirational at best, but will have to be translated to comply with 'internal procedures.'¹⁸⁷ Against this, 'general complexity ... allows for stronger interactions. It provides a language, which allows different disciplines to *transform* each other.'¹⁸⁸ But this statement must be qualified by including a reciprocal assertion: The concept of complexity not only *permits* trans-disciplinary enquiries, it *requires* them. In Cilliers's formulation:

Since [general complexity] 'involves self-reflection, emergence, multiple feedback, even contradictions, it cannot be caught in a formal language – as a matter of fact, we do not really have a language which can deal with general complexity. We can only approximate an understanding of such intensity by employing a plurality of descriptions. Trans-disciplinary activities are our only option.'¹⁸⁹

The problem can also be approached from a different angle. This concerns a distinction – even a 'disagreement' between different complexity approaches being upheld with some persistency – between so-called 'hard' and 'soft' complexity.¹⁹⁰ 'Hard' refers to complexity in the natural sciences, 'doing real work'¹⁹¹ in applying models in scientific procedures, whereas 'soft' reveals a perception of complex findings as being merely metaphorical interpretations transferred to 'a social context ... lacking the rigour of the natural sciences.'¹⁹²

The above argument for the trans-disciplinary nature of complexity obviously defies such a distinction between different 'types of complexities', which seems to be but another way of upholding the understanding of a principal difference between natural and social sciences. (This compliance only makes sense under the auspices of 'restricted complexity' which, confined to a specific topic and 'attached as a kind of wagon behind the truth locomotive, still remains within the epistemology of the classical sciences'¹⁹³ and does not escape from a positivist and reductionist paradigm.)

Against this, Morin's coinage of the term 'general complexity' does away with any distinctions on this level and eliminates the vague notions of 'hard' or 'soft'. It goes even further, suggesting the possibility of dismantling the necessity of separate and different epistemologies as they are currently upheld for the natural and the social sciences respectively. General complexity advocates the possibility of principally overcoming the disciplinary divide between anthropological and natural studies *per se*: As 'complexity sits at the interface between the[se] two worlds [it] allows them to interpenetrate in a way which leaves neither untouched.'¹⁹⁴ It demarcates a vantage point from which complexity *itself* is taken more seriously and considered more significant than traditional disciplinary divisions. Yet the recognition of an overriding complex reality, which thus becomes the base for meaningful interdisciplinary investigations, comes at a price: It 'necessitates that we undertake an

¹⁸⁶ Cilliers & Preiser, *Complexity, Difference and Identity*, vi.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, original emphasis.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, v.

¹⁹¹ Cilliers & Preiser, *Complexity, Difference and Identity*, v.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 94.

¹⁹⁴ Cilliers & Preiser, *Complexity, Difference and Identity*, vi.

epistemological, cognitive, and paradigmatic shift, which bears on the whole organization of knowledge'.¹⁹⁵ In short, it requires complex thinking.

If, as has been argued here, the acknowledgement of complexity in principle necessitates trans-disciplinary approaches and, by implication, complex thinking and pluralistic epistemologies, then this parenthetical reflection highlights a major dilemma that can be articulated as the challenge of *permitting complex thinking to transform traditionally institutionalized structures of knowledge acquisition*.

The dilemma concerns this thesis at its core, as the work's very motivation is to gain approval from the same academe, which it must – for reasons of academic integrity and rigour – question. Given established academic institutions' resilience towards change, as well as their insistence on bureaucratic procedures and the defence of acquired positions of power, it remains to be seen how such a challenge will be read.

6. GENERAL COMPLEXITY

The line of argument developed so far leads directly to an 'epistemology of complexity' as developed by Edgar Morin and complemented by Paul Cilliers. As it would be impossible in the context of this study to provide even a cursory overview of the countless other explorations and applications of systems thinking,¹⁹⁶ I chose to limit my final references in this section to the contributions of these two 'complexity philosophers'. While many studies of complexity deal with tenets derived from observations within specific disciplines, the advantage of Morin and Cilliers's work lies in the broad and general investigation of the phenomenon of complexity 'itself'. Presenting a general approach, it is apt to equip the astute observer from any given personal and subjective vantage point to begin recognizing the emanations of complexity in his or her own environment. In my case, the vocabulary adopted from complexity theory now enables me to express, formally and explicitly, many aspects of a musical approach I have long since intuitively pursued in my compositions but have been unable to ground and corroborate theoretically.

I owe my first introduction to the phenomenon of complexity (as an autonomous field of study) to Paul Cilliers, with whom I would soon share a deep fascination with an epistemology that promised to be enabling in areas of musical reflection where constructive engagement has become significantly compromised by stifling perceptions and unfruitful intra-disciplinary conventions.¹⁹⁷ Cilliers decisively influenced the direction of this study and subsequently also acted as its co-promoter until his untimely death in 2011.

Cilliers referred me to the writings of Edgar Morin, which I have found to contain some of the most profound reflections on complexity. Morin's unique thought trajectories follow many surprising loops that invariably emanate as fully logical deductions. His argumentation is rigorous and radical, yet always boldly creative and of quasi-mathematical precision, very much akin to the thinking of Simone Weil (with whom he has much in common¹⁹⁸ and whose texts proved decisive for the creation of a number of my earlier works).¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 94.

¹⁹⁶ For a quick reference Brian Castellani's *Map of Complexity Science* at www.art-sciencefactory.com/complexity-map_feb09.html offers a graphical overview. [Accessed on 23.8.2012].

¹⁹⁷ I refer here to dominant, often only half-understood yet habitual ideologies or prejudices, prevailing in the musical discipline, such as an extreme conservatism amongst performing artists (often fully denying contemporary music production); a reactionary positivist position (clinging to a canon of cultural masterworks in defiance of any post-colonial or pluralistic claims), a politically motivated (or instigated) transformation frenzy directed against perceived elitism, anachronistic claims of modernist avant-garde hegemonies, and many more. Note that this is not a critique of values *per se*: unproductive, stalemate positions occur on both the conservative as well as the liberal side of the value spectrum.

¹⁹⁸ Morin and Weil (12 years his elder) both hail from an intellectual background of French agnostic Jews. Both were active in the *résistance*, sympathized for while with communism, but, disappointed, soon turned away – Weil to catholic mysticism, Morin to sociology and philosophy. Yet, as Bélanger, Morin's translator, notes they 'resemble' each other in 'the honest search for transcendence in human values and in the primacy accorded [to] love over truth.' Bélanger in Morin, *Method*, xiii.

¹⁹⁹ Texts by Simone Weil form the basis of three of my vocal compositions: *Unerläßliches Leid* (Lent Cantata for soloists, chorus and Baroque orchestra, 1997), *A propos du malheur* (Trio for soprano, traverse and cello, 1999), *Wir sind Verlass'ne in der Zeit* (motet for mixed choir a capella, 2001).

a) EDGAR MORIN'S *MÉTHODE*

Edgar Nahoum (Morin was first adopted as code name during his involvement with the resistance during World War II) is generally not very well known outside France, as only relatively few of his works – all originally in French – have been translated to date.²⁰⁰ Yet his work is becoming increasingly influential, not only in his home country (where, as emeritus director of the CNRS, France's central research organization, as well as advisor and critic of the government,²⁰¹ he is a prominent public figure),²⁰² but especially in Latin America and French-speaking Africa.²⁰³ The esteem in which he is held may be gauged by the long list of honorary doctorates that he has received in disciplines ranging from sociology and psychology to political science. Apart from several research centres devoted to his work, a whole university, inherently structured on the principles of his work, has been founded in Mexico. Reflecting Morin's conviction that the generation of knowledge requires a trans-disciplinary approach, this institution in Hermosillo is conceived as a 'multiversity'. It is formally named the *Multiversidad Mundo Real Edgar Morin*.²⁰⁴

Morin is considered a 'foremost exponent' of communication theory, general systems theory, sociology, anthropology and complexity,²⁰⁵ but as his 'approach to' all these fields is better described as 'departures from' each of them, his scholarly quest becomes universal and – based on the credo that 'every branch of knowledge, though irreducible to any other, is tied to, conditions and transforms every other'²⁰⁶ – his prime concern is that of linking and relating conventionally segregated disciplines to each other.

The first emanations of this grand project of 'en-cyclo-peding' – encircling (embracing, circumscribing, looping, integrating) various branches of knowledge, especially the separate domains of natural and social sciences – were formulated as early as 1973 in *Le Paradigme Perdu: la nature humaine*.²⁰⁷ As could be expected from such an ambitious undertaking, but also reflecting a trait of Morin's thinking constantly to keep his arguments open to be evolved further, the 'project' would eventually grow into his *opus magnum*, a six-volume tome titled *Méthode*²⁰⁸ published over a period of 27 years. As a basis for the manifold references to Morin's work that follow in this thesis, an introduction to some of the key tenets underlying his work is necessary.

a. Principal approaches and strategies

In the opening chapter of Volume I of *Méthode* Morin quotes the verse *Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar*,²⁰⁹ a maxim taken from Antonia Machado's *Proverbios y cantares*,²¹⁰ which, with all its poetry, he assumes for his approach/departure: 'I am not furnishing the method; I am starting out on the search for the method. I am not starting out with a method; I am starting out with the refusal to simplify.'²¹¹ In fact this attitude fully acknowledges the etymological root of the word *method*, as a combination of *meta* ('over', 'across', 'after', in the sense of expressing the development of something) and *hodos* ('path', 'way'). In Gadamerian, hermeneutical spirit, Morin thus describes his *méthode* as a 'path laid down in walking'²¹² (i.e. where none previously exists), a 'method emerging from the research.'²¹³

²⁰⁰ Of his over 40 books only 4 have been translated into German, hardly more than ten into English.

²⁰¹ Already in the late 1960s he was commissioned as authoritative sociologist to interpret the student revolts. (Morin, 1992), xv.

²⁰² Montuori in the introduction to Morin, *On Complexity*, xxi.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, viii.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, ix.

²⁰⁵ Bélanger in his introduction to Morin, *Method*, xiii.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Edgar Morin, *Le Paradigme Perdu: la nature humaine* (Editions du Seuil, Paris 1973).

²⁰⁸ *La Méthode* (6 volumes): *La Nature de la nature* (1977), *La Vie de la vie* (1980), *La Connaissance de la connaissance* (1986), *Les Idées* (1991), *L'Humanité de l'humanité* (2001), *L'Éthique complexe* (2004).

²⁰⁹ Morin, *Method*, 17: 'Wanderer, there is no path, the path is made by walking.'

²¹⁰ Antonio Machado, *Proverbios y Cantares* (El Pais, Madrid 2003), originally published in *Campos de Castilla*, 1912.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²¹² Morin, *On Complexity*, xxv.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

In a certain sense this can also be seen as a deliberate ‘non-method’,²¹⁴ the avoidance of setting up rules for (or before) the search (and research) and thereby placing the cart before the horse. It affords the researcher the freedom to employ both logical and ‘non-logical’ steps, the first ‘to consolidate what has been achieved’, the latter ‘to keep all achievement open to further advance.’²¹⁵

Crucial to Morin’s thinking is his categorical rejection of the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body, and by implication between subject and object. (‘In all science, even the most physical, there is an anthropo-social dimension.’)²¹⁶ This leads him to the conviction that all knowledge is inescapably determined by ‘a looping of the physical, the biological, and the anthropo-sociological.’²¹⁷ (In fact, the concept of looping or ‘rotative recursivity’ – referring aspects of one realm to conditions in another – is considered to be one of Morin’s most significant contributions.²¹⁸)

Closely linked to this is the notion of ‘uncertainty as the only point of departure’:²¹⁹

Descartes could, in his first discourse, at the same time exercise doubt, exorcise doubt, establish preliminary certitudes and have Method spring up like Minerva armed from head to toe. The Cartesian doubt was sure of itself. Our doubt doubts of itself; it discovers the impossibility of starting from scratch, since the logical, linguistic, cultural conditions of thought are inescapably prejudging. And this doubt, which cannot be absolute, can no longer be absolutely resolved.²²⁰

Once again closely linked (and thus demonstrating the looping principle) is Morin’s constant vigilance against any form of simplification, which perhaps lurks most dangerously behind the common praxis of ‘idealizing’, ‘rationalizing’ or ‘standardizing’.²²¹ This vigilance is evident in Morin’s characteristic manner of concurrently deploying seemingly ‘divergent, even antagonistic’ arguments which, on closer scrutiny, prove to be ‘inseparable’.²²² One encounters this trait throughout his writings and, indebted to his influence, it will become discernible in this thesis as well. I posit that in this principle of ‘concurrently operating with complementary opposites’ an acknowledgement of complexity already manifests on a most basic, technical level, from which it intrinsically imbues the methodological and argumentative level. Rika Preiser makes the same observation when she states that ‘the concept and its counterpart (the *yes* and the *no*) are thought simultaneously’ in what Morin calls a ‘logical core of complexity’ and which he suggests being *dialogical* rather than *dialectic*.²²³ Instead of opposing two positions to arrive at an advanced synthesis through a dialectic process, a dialogue continues – in fact can *only* continue – as long as different positions persist and are not ‘resolved’.

This ‘dialogical approach’ deserves further elaboration, as it is of course far more than just a methodological strategy. In what may be described as another aspect of Morin’s anti-Cartesian move, he tends to consider as *inseparable* what conventional thinking considers as *conflicting*. Consequently he will guard against *reducing* one concept to another, upholding *distinctions* where they are necessary. His conception of ‘order’ and ‘disorder’ (one of the key topics discussed in Volume I of *Méthode*) may serve as prime example in this regard.

Reflecting on the notion of ‘order’ (thoroughly informed by recent scientific observations regarding the ‘principle of organization by disorder’ in the cosmological, chemical, biological and mathematical realms),²²⁴

²¹⁴ Morin, *Method*, 9.

²¹⁵ Lonergan quoted by Bélanger, *Ibid.* xix.

²¹⁶ Bélanger, xx.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xviii.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, xx.

²²⁰ Morin, *Method*, 10.

²²¹ Bélanger, xx.

²²² Bélanger, xx.

²²³ Rika Preiser. ‘The Problem of Complexity. Re-thinking the Role of Critique’, Ph.D thesis, Dept. Philosophy, University of Stellenbosch (Stellenbosch 2012), 19.

²²⁴ Morin, *Method*, 49, e.g. Prigogine’s ‘spontaneous dissipative structures’, von Foersters notion of ‘order from noise’, Atlan’s findings regarding ‘chance as organizer’, René Thom’s understanding of ‘catastrophe’ (see also xxi).

Morin suggests that ‘morphogenesis’ must be perceived as inherently linked to ‘schismogenesis’.²²⁵ The crucial connection between order and disorder arises through the phenomenon of ‘interaction’ – previously unrecognized but now elevated to prime systemic importance – and leads to the formulation of one of Morin’s loops:

Interaction thus becomes the turntable notion among disorder, order, and organisation. By the same token, this means that the terms disorder, order, organisation are henceforth bound, *via* interactions, in a solidary loop, where none of these terms can any longer be conceived without reference to the others, and where they are in complex relation, that is to say complementary, concurrent, and antagonistic.²²⁶

This model should not be considered to represent a static relationship. Rather, it intends to depict an on-going ‘simultaneously and reciprocally’ co-producing loop.²²⁷ Read backwards, this ‘tetralogical loop’²²⁸ clearly shows the interrelations: Order arises from organization, ‘to have organisation there must be interaction; to have interaction, there must be encounters; to have encounters there must be disorder.’²²⁹

The loop signifies that order is inconceivable without ‘disorder, that is to say inequalities, turbulences, agitations’.²³⁰ It also signifies ‘that order and organisation are inconceivable without interactions. No body, no object can be conceived outside of the interactions that have constituted it, and of the interactions in which it necessarily participates.’²³¹ The loop further signifies – and here a relation between systemism and complexity comes to the fore – ‘that the more organisation and order develop, the more they become complex, the more they tolerate, use, indeed necessitate disorder. In other words, the terms order/organisation/disorder, and, of course, interactions, mutually develop on another.’²³² The loop finally signifies ‘that we cannot isolate or hypostatize any of these terms. *Each takes its meaning in its relation with the others. It is necessary to conceive of them together, that is to say as terms simultaneously complementary, concurrent, and antagonistic.*’²³³

Morin’s emphasis on praxis, understood as ‘intended action’, is important in this regard.²³⁴ Conducting fieldwork as a sociologist in the 1960s he already follows a ‘participatory approach’, pursuing what he called, a ‘sociology of the present’ and which has since become known as ‘action research’.²³⁵ According to Montuori he must be credited for the advancement of qualitative over quantitative research, arguing that the assumption of an ‘objective expert’ position of the researcher is untenable.²³⁶ Morin’s is a powerful voice advocating the admission of the ‘subjective’ (and its subject i.e. the fully living human being embracing ‘the existential reality of daily life’²³⁷) into the academe. By ‘actively dismantling’ the ‘pretence of objectivity’²³⁸ (and by implication a narrow understanding of professionalism) he not only reminds us of the inevitable subjectivity of the researcher, but also of the unacknowledged reductionist logic that underlies such a pretence.

²²⁵ Bélanger, xxi.

²²⁶ Morin, *Method*, 48, original emphasis.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, xxi.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² *Ibid.*, 53.

²³³ Morin, 53, original emphasis.

²³⁴ Montuori in Morin, *On Complexity*, xviii.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, xvii.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, xviii.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, ix.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, xix.

b. Scope of Morin's reflections

This section will briefly outline the scope (direction and trajectory) of Morin's work, thereby already framing or highlighting to some extent what will be of immediate relevance for this study. The outline is based on Morin's essay '*Complex Pattern and Design*',²³⁹ written in 1976, in which he succinctly summarizes many of the core considerations fleshed out in far more detail in the first section of *Méthode*.

Departing from the historical and continuously perceived schism between 'human phenomena' and the 'natural universe' – the 'super-naturality of the human'²⁴⁰ most prominently apparent in the ideologies of Christianity and Western humanism – Morin sets out on a 'movement on two fronts': 'We must *reintegrate* humans with nature and we must be able to *distinguish* humans from nature, thereby *not reducing* humans to nature.'²⁴¹

The apparently opposing notions of reintegration *and* distinction (in which the dialogical technique already becomes visible) amount to a call for the 'unification of science' *along* with that for 'a theory addressing the very high degree of human complexity'.²⁴² Such an endeavour does not allow a compromise on either side, as this would entail a compromise on the other as well. Upholding this kind of tension instead of dissolving it into a 'solution', and withstanding the temptation to simplify or reduce the depth of an initial question, are hallmarks of Morin's thinking. They lead him to a position where what is formulated here with regard to the segregation between the natural and the anthropological world, may be read as a declaration of principal intent:

I situate myself, therefore, well outside the two antagonistic clans: one that destroys difference by reducing into simple unity, the other that obscures unity by only seeing differences. I see myself well outside both, but I'm attempting to integrate the two truths. In other words, I'm attempting to go beyond the either/or alternative.²⁴³

Instead of the conventional, modernist strategy of reducing (delineating, breaking down) the complexity of a problem in order to reach a 'solution', Morin opts for the opposite, the 'going beyond'. But this has severe consequences and amounts to nothing less than an uprooting of existing hierarchies. Instead of finding solutions that fit prevailing epistemologies, the quest is rather to develop and if necessary change the epistemology, if evidence requires this. According to Morin (and here it should be mentioned that his conclusions are always based on thorough insights into scientific research) evidence *does* require this. A 'fundamental change, a paradigmatic revolution, seems necessary and near' as 'the "going beyond" must lead to a chain reaction, a reorganisation of what we understand under the concept of science.'²⁴⁴ The 'going beyond' is the impulse leading to a complexity perspective.

Morin's voice is but one in a chorus of scientists when he points at the deep 'breaches in the epistemological framework of classical science'²⁴⁵ that have become apparent through the work of Einstein, Planck, Gödel, Heisenberg, Poincaré²⁴⁶ and others. However, it seems that he takes the consequences of these discoveries more seriously than many others:

²³⁹ Reprinted in Morin, *On Complexity*, 8-35.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ Morin, 8.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9: 'The breach of micro-physics revealed the interdependence of subject and object, the insertion of randomness into knowledge, the de-reification of the notion of matter, the eruption of logical contradiction in empirical description. The breach of macro-physics unites in a single entity the concept of space and time that have until now been absolutely heterogeneous...'

²⁴⁶ By implication reference is made to the theory of relativity, quantum mechanics, the principle of incompleteness, the uncertainty principle and the notion of 'dynamical instability' respectively.

There is no more firm ground, no terra firma. 'Matter' is no longer the massive elementary and simple reality to which we can reduce physics. Space and time are no longer absolute and independent entities. There is no longer any simple empirical base, not even a simple logical base (clear and distinct notions, non-ambivalent, non-contradictory, a strictly determined reality) to constitute the physical substrata. From this stems a consequence of capital importance: *simplicity* is no longer the foundation of all things, but a passage, a *moment between complexities*, between micro-physical complexity and macro-cosmo-complexity.²⁴⁷

The 'path' from simplicity to complexity concurrently leads 'from the object to the system'.²⁴⁸ Postulating 'objectivity' as the foundation of classical science (based on the assumption of 'isolated *objects* (in a neutral space), governed by laws objectively universal ... autonomous in their environment, outside our understanding, endowed with their own reality',²⁴⁹ Morin vividly reimagines the triumph of reductionist research, successful beyond expectation throughout the nineteenth century: Here, before the breach, at the height of objective science (ironically contemporaneously coinciding with arguably the most 'subjective' period in musical history...) 'the atom glitter[s] as the object of objects, pure, full, indivisible, irreducible, the universal component.'²⁵⁰

But then, early in the twentieth century, the discovery that the atom is no primary unit but itself a system of interacting particles, causes a 'crisis of the idea of object' and a 'crisis of the idea of element'.²⁵¹ Not even these particles are final (indivisible) units and, moreover, they cannot be isolated clearly 'from the interactions of observation'.²⁵² At this moment 'the atom steps forward as a new object, the organized object or system whose explanation can no longer be found solely in the *nature of its elementary components*, but is found also in its *organizational and systemic nature*, which transforms the characteristics of the components.'²⁵³ 'Therefore,' Morin writes, 'on all horizons, physical, biological, anthropo-sociological, the system-phenomenon must henceforth be accepted.'²⁵⁴

There looms a danger of principally agreeing that all objects really are systems, but then to continue as usual and just consider these systems as new objects. Once acknowledged, systems must be acknowledged on all levels: 'Life is a system of systems of systems, ... nature is a polysystemic whole',²⁵⁵ the universe 'an astonishing architecture of systems built ... on ... between ... against [systems], implicating and dovetailing one with the other',²⁵⁶ and there 'exist really only systems of systems, the simple system being only a didactic abstraction'.²⁵⁷

This does not yet clarify, however, what exactly a system is, as 'systems [as root concepts] are everywhere', with 'the system [being] nowhere'.²⁵⁸ Even though conceived and acknowledged *de facto* for centuries, 'the system' had never been 'studied or reflected upon' before von Bertalanffy.²⁵⁹ And even while the *General Systems Theory* 'revealed the systems problematic', Morin posits that it never attempted a 'general theory of the system'.²⁶⁰ Hence he embarks on this long overdue task: that of interrogating the idea of system.

Summarizing prevailing understandings, Morin distinguishes between three different theories of systems. According to him, of these only 'generative systemism' acknowledges the 'principle of complexity'.²⁶¹ He hence

²⁴⁷ Morin, 9, my emphases.

²⁴⁸ Morin, *Method*, 92.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 95 my emphasis.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁵⁵ Morin, 97.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 96.

²⁵⁷ Lupasco quoted in Morin, 97.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Morin, *On Complexity*, 9.

discards what he calls a ‘flat systemism’, which exhausts itself in vague proclamations of holism, as well as ‘systems analysis’, which he considers a misnomer as it ‘transforms systemism into its opposite, ... as the term analysis indicates, into reductive operations’.²⁶²

Thus distinguished, the notion of system – understood as a ‘generative’ phenomenon – is integral to Morin’s thinking. His remarkable discernment of the concept adds significant depth to all previously proposed generic definitions of systems. He opens his list of properties by recapitulating that systemism has the ‘virtue’ of replacing the notion of ‘elementary, discrete unity’ with that of ‘a complex unity; a whole that cannot be reduced to the sum of its parts’.²⁶³ Further he posits that the system is neither ‘real’ nor purely ‘formal’ (i.e. abstract), but in fact ‘ambiguous’ (he even calls it ‘ghostly!’).²⁶⁴ Reiterating the point that it is situated ‘at a trans-disciplinary level’, he states that ‘the scope of systems theory... extends to all that is knowable’.²⁶⁵

Finally and perhaps most importantly (not least for musical reasons to be expounded duly) Morin, following von Bertalanffy, suggests that all systems existing in disequilibrium – and this therefore includes all living systems²⁶⁶ – must be considered ‘open’.²⁶⁷ According to his definition this attribute applies to all systems ‘whose existence and structure depend on an external source. In the case of living systems, this means not only energy and matter, but also [– and here his definition exceeds that of von Bertalanffy –] *organisational and informational resources*’.²⁶⁸

The reason why Morin considers the ‘exchanges with the exterior’ so significant, is because the very ‘disequilibrium in the energetic flux’ upholds the organizational regulation, i.e. the structure or ‘constancy of the internal environment’.²⁶⁹ It should be noted that – counter-intuitively – only a ‘nourishing disequilibrium’ guarantees a ‘state of stability and continuity’.²⁷⁰ The fact that ‘structures remain the same *even though* the constituents are changing’²⁷¹ can be attested by the observations of flames, eddies, waterfalls or any living organism. This is remarkable enough, yet what is really significant is that systemic structures remain the same only *because* the constituents are changing. (‘Here we find a primary, central, obvious, key problem of living beings... ignored and obscured by Western Cartesian metaphysics, for whom all living things are considered closed entities.’²⁷²) Without renewing change (consider the case of death, or equilibrium) the organization that maintains systemic structures collapses and the structure disintegrates.²⁷³

These considerations lead Morin to link systemic ‘openness’ directly to its organization and, by implication, to its ‘intelligibility’.²⁷⁴ From this follows that a system’s identity rests ‘not only in the system itself, but ‘also in its relationship with its environment.’ Moreover, ‘this relationship is not a simple dependence: it is *constitutive* of the system’.²⁷⁵ This is a significant and consequential advance in the context of the work I pursue in this study, and I therefore quote Morin at length:

²⁶² Morin, *On Complexity*, 9.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.* This sentence should of course not be understood as a sweeping statement, in the sense that ‘all knowable is contained in systems thinking’, but rather that (‘as all known reality can be conceived as systems’) systems thinking is universally applicable and meaningful.

²⁶⁶ In analogy systemic equilibrium (as a physical state) signifies death.

²⁶⁷ Morin, *Method*, 10.

²⁶⁸ Morin, *On Complexity*, 10, my emphasis.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 10, 11.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 11.

²⁷¹ Morin, *Method*, 11, my emphasis.

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.* It should be noted that Maturana’s concept of ‘organisational closure’ does not imply a systemic isolation, but rather refers to the organisational integrity and autonomy *within* a system and is in fact guaranteed ‘by the very fact that the system is open.

²⁷⁴ Morin, *Method*, 11.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.* my emphasis.

Reality is therefore as much in the connection (relationship) as in the distinction between the open system and its environment. This connection is absolutely crucial epistemologically, methodologically, theoretically, and empirically. Logically, the system cannot be understood except by including the environment. The environment is at the same time intimate and foreign: it is a part of the system while remaining exterior to it. Methodologically, it becomes difficult to study open systems as entities that can be radically isolated. Theoretically and empirically, the concept of open system opens the door to a theory of evolution, that can only come from the interaction of system and eco-system, and, in its most significant organisational leaps, can be conceived of as the “going beyond”, the surpassing of the system into a meta-system.²⁷⁶

This understanding of an intricate relationship between system and eco-system is bound to change conventional perceptions of the notion of ‘context’, potentially elevating it from its status as a rather vague concept (often used as mere placeholder to indicate some undefined relation) to one of structural and even defining importance. This idea will duly be investigated more specifically with regard to the question of musical contexts.

PARENTHESIS II: OBJECTIVE VERSUS SYSTEMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Morin’s argument up to this point leads to the realization that what is often conventionally perceived as ‘objective characteristic’ should, more appropriately, be termed ‘systemic property’. This entails somewhat more than just replacing the notion ‘object’ with the notion ‘system’. It further implies that characteristics do not altogether ‘reside’ with or within their bearers, but in addition result from the constellations in which they are situated and from the relations that make up such constellations. What is more, certain properties in fact rely on what might initially seem to be conflicting contributions.

Morin’s findings – seemingly innocuous reflections – are poised to instigate revolution when considered consequentially in the ‘real world’: He claims nothing less than that

- integrity rests on openness,
- identity is guaranteed by change,
- autonomy can only be established through strong connections to a supportive environment.

Each of these claims holds revolutionary potential by rigorously challenging conventional modernist assumptions prevailing in the political sphere, as well as in the humanities and the arts as institutionalized in the universities of the twenty-first century.

b) PAUL CILLIERS’S CRITICAL COMPLEXITY

In introducing Cilliers’s approach to complexity thinking, I reflect on three key issues that arguably constitute his most important contributions to the field. They are, firstly, the specificity with which he points out how the notions of *post-structuralism and deconstruction* rely on an understanding of complexity; secondly, the connection between complexity thinking and ‘complexity living’, if that formulation be permitted as a way of referring to his focus on an *ethical dimension* intrinsic to complexity; thirdly, his emphasis on the *conditionality and temporariness* of positions, insights and strategies to which complexity thinking must invariably lead.

‘Complexity & Postmodernism’,²⁷⁷ Cilliers’s only individually authored book, comprehensively relates a historical period to what may be perceived as this period’s defining (historical) problem. Judging from the countless very precise characteristics and conditions of complex systems that Cilliers provided in numerous articles and book chapters, I posit that this explicitly formulated link should be read as a deliberate attempt to restore the reputation of the term ‘postmodernism’. By grounding it in a clear concept of complexity, the

²⁷⁶ Morin, *Method*, 11, original emphasis.

²⁷⁷ Paul Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems* (Routledge, London 1998).

designation becomes 'useable' again, as it may be distinguished from its frequent association with complete relativism (and the resulting cynically futile *anything-goes* attitude).

A chapter in the book is dedicated to Derrida's deconstruction of Saussure's structural model of language as an example of a post-structuralist approach, which – as Cilliers argues – constitutes 'an excellent way of conceptualizing the dynamics of complex systems from a philosophical perspective.'²⁷⁸

Focussing only on selected aspects of Saussure's model that pertain to this discussion, his explanation concerning the conveyance of meaning in language can be summarized as follows: Saussure considers words or terms to be 'signs' whose own characteristics (as sounding combinations of phonemes or written combinations of letters) are arbitrary, variable in different languages and thus mere conditional conventions. The sign consists of a signifier (the linguistic unit) and its signified concept (something outside and different, which the signifier merely represents). Such a 'linguistic sign' becomes 'a two-sided psychological entity that ... unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image.'²⁷⁹ The meaning of language thus arises from historical (traditional, acquired) relationships between signifier and signified and not from any natural or essential links. Even though such relationships are 'unmotivated',²⁸⁰ no speaker can freely make up individual definitions as the relationships form and are bound into a system: 'The system of language is constituted not by individual speech acts, but by a system of relationships that transcends the individual user.'²⁸¹

Two important aspects, as well as their eventual entanglement, should be noted here. The sign does not possess a 'natural identity', no essence *per se*, 'but has to derive its significance from the relationships within the system.'²⁸² Also due to its systemic nature it 'transcends the choice of an individual user and therefore has stability.'²⁸³ ('The signifier, though to all appearances freely chosen with respect to the idea that it represents, is fixed, not free, with respect to the linguistic community that uses it.')284 The understanding and meaningfulness of a language is 'constituted' by the integrity of such a system. Conversely it may be said that the systemic integrity relies on the meaningfulness of a language and will perpetuate itself as long as there is an understanding of such a meaning.²⁸⁵ Hence the sign becomes remarkable tightly tied to the concept it designates, even though it does not contain the concept essentially nor is bound to it by any formal rules.

Given the arbitrariness (contingency, conditionality, conventionality) of relations between signifiers and the signified, perpetuation over time will inevitably result in shifts of such relations. 'Evolution is inevitable',²⁸⁶ yet it takes place under complex conditions determined by contradictory influences. The 'immutability of the sign' (guaranteed by systemic stability and the impossibility for any agent to change language 'as a product of social forces and time'²⁸⁷) plays out against the 'mutability of the sign'²⁸⁸ (effected through gradual shifts in the relation between 'phonetic substance and ideas').²⁸⁹

From Saussure's arguments several cardinal systemic properties may be deduced: A 'system as a whole is never modified directly',²⁹⁰ only its elements can be changed. Interacting with the rest of the system these changes will eventually effect the whole system; they however will not alter it completely but rather 'transform'

²⁷⁸ Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 37.

²⁷⁹ Saussure quoted in Cilliers, 38.

²⁸⁰ Saussure's formulation stating that the signified concept as a rule does not directly determine its signifier with the exception, perhaps, of onomatopoeic words. But even here the degree and quality of 'echoing' will depend on an interpretative conceptualization and its communal meaningfulness will depend on conventional agreement.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁸⁴ Saussure quoted in Cilliers, 39.

²⁸⁵ Cilliers, 39.

²⁸⁶ Saussure quoted in Cilliers, 40 with the added empirical proof of this statement: 'There is no example of a single language that resists it.'

²⁸⁷ Saussure quoted in Cilliers, 40.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 39, original emphases.

²⁸⁹ Saussure quoted in Cilliers, 40.

²⁹⁰ Cilliers, 40.

its existing structure. Instead of an ‘external telos that provides a direction ... change is the result of contingencies’²⁹¹ resulting from the operations of a system. (This is another way of describing the auto-poietic, self-organizing forces inherently at work in a system.)

Things become even more interesting when considering Derrida’s critique or deconstruction of Saussure’s sign. Derrida’s work amounts to pointing out the untenable assumption that ‘the meaning of a sign is *present* to the speaker when he uses it’,²⁹² a ‘fallacy’ for which Derrida blames traditional Western philosophy in general and which he calls the ‘metaphysics of presence’.²⁹³ Instead of assuming such a given *presence* – which would essentially contain the whole, complete, absolute concept, even if only mental or psychological – Derrida insists that meaning can only be ‘constituted by a system of differences’.²⁹⁴ He thus proclaims the self-same arbitrary link (which Saussure acknowledges for the relation between signifier and signified) for the signified concept itself, stating that ‘the signified never has any self-present meaning. It is itself only a sign that derives its meaning from other signs ... [and as such] functions just like another signifier that has to take its place in the endless interaction between signifiers.’²⁹⁵ In this manner Cilliers arrives at a clear systemic elucidation for Derrida’s otherwise often rather clouded notion of deconstruction, which states that ‘meaning is never simply present’ and that hence we can never ‘escape the process of interpretation.’²⁹⁶

Other than Saussure, who ‘understands language as a closed system’ (assuming an unambiguous, linear relationship between signifier and signified), Derrida argues for ‘language as an open system’.²⁹⁷ This follows logically from the denial of a pre-existing outside: ‘There is no place outside of language from where meaning can be generated. Where there is meaning, there is already language. We cannot separate language from the world it describes.’²⁹⁸ The following quote by Derrida resonates strongly with Morin’s reflections on the system and its environment:

The outside bears with the inside a relationship that is ... anything but simple exteriority. The meaning of the outside, was always present within the inside, imprisoned outside the outside, and vice versa.²⁹⁹

For Derrida ‘the sign is an entity without any positive content. Because it is constituted by nothing more than relationships, it consists only of traces.’³⁰⁰ Since obviously no sign is self-sufficient (stands out, exists on its own, may justifiably claim any hegemony), signs cannot be deduced or emanate from each other; hence every sign can only be constituted by a ‘system of differences’.³⁰¹ ‘Nothing, either in its elements or in the system, is anywhere simply present or absent. There are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces.’³⁰²

Here we arrive at a key concept of Derrida’s and Cilliers’s thinking: ‘meaning is generated through a play of difference’. Cilliers must be credited for having recognized in this specific linguistic explication a core systemic characterization. Depending on the system under investigation, ‘meaning’ can be replaced with ‘integrity’ (for organizations, organisms, personalities), ‘sustainability or resilience’ (for ecosystems), ‘logic’ (for mathematical systems) and so forth. The important insight is that any complex system’s binding factor – its ‘telos’, ultimate aim or reason – does not lie within its components, nor does it exist outside. This neither-here-nor-there

²⁹¹ Cilliers, 40.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁹³ Derrida quoted in Cilliers, *ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42, 43.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁹⁸ Cilliers, 43.

²⁹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1976), 35 quoted in Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 43.

³⁰⁰ Cilliers, 44.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² Jacques Derrida, *Positions* trans. Alan Bass (The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1981), 26; quoted in Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 44.

condition forces us to drop the absolute distinction between inside and outside, and consequentially, the notion of fully closed systems. ‘Meaning’, ‘integrity’, ‘logic’ – as well as by implication phenomena such as ‘consciousness’, ‘poetry’, ‘musicality’ – instead emanate from the *activity* and *organization* of a system, from the *interactions* and relations of its components. Rather than essentially pre-existing ‘somewhere’, such qualities can only *emerge*: fleetingly, momentarily, conditionally, provisionally, contingently. It is as though they have to pay with these severe restrictions for their somewhat ‘supernatural’ (in the sense of inexplicable, unpredictable, non-linear, novel) qualities.

There is a danger of complexity and systems theories inadvertently assuming a hegemonic rank by virtue (or vice) of their seemingly universal pertinence. As Joël de Rosnay warns: ‘A purely descriptive [systemic] approach... leads rapidly to a collection of useless models of the different systems of nature. The greatest generalization of the concept of system can also turn against itself, destroying its fecundity in sterilizing platitude.’³⁰³

Cilliers’s coinage of the term ‘critical complexity’ may be read as a warning and deliberate measure against such a potentially self-defying position. If ‘the signified never has any self-present meaning’,³⁰⁴ no *a priori* existence outside itself, this must of course hold true for complexity as well. The notion of ‘critical complexity’ can thus be understood as ‘radicalisation of a general theory of complexity’.³⁰⁵ It carries within itself an emphasis ‘on a self-critical rationality, which Cilliers defines as ‘a rationality that makes no claim for objectivity, or for any special status for the grounds from which the claim is made. A self-critical rationality is, therefore, the *outcome* of acknowledging the irreducible nature of complexity.’³⁰⁶ It becomes a kind of self-referential complexity in the sense that it applies complex thinking to itself, takes the concept of ‘complexity’ seriously, as something that will always be more complex than any singular ‘take’ on it, even one that fully acknowledges complexity.

Cilliers’s ‘radical’ understanding of complexity may be clarified further by referring to Allenby & Sarewitz’s notion of different levels of complexity. These two authors describe this concept in relation to what they term the ‘Techno-Human Condition’.³⁰⁷ With this they refer to the idea of ‘trans-humanism’, the age-old phenomenon that *living conditions* for humans (through tools and technology in the widest sense) and more recently *humans themselves* (through drugs, implants, genetic modification, etc.) can be ‘enhanced’ technologically. The thrust of their argument is not moral indignation at on-going developments that increasingly blur the boundaries of ‘the natural’ or ‘the human’, but instead highlights the inevitable and apparently ‘natural’ and localized acts of humankind’s interaction with its planetary environment that have lead to multiple-level complexity in which different ‘categories’ inextricably permeate each other.

On a first level the specific and intentional ‘goal-directedness [may still be] detectable and traceable in the function of [a] technological artefact.’³⁰⁸ [Aeroplanes are developed to conveniently travel long distances.] At ‘Level II’³⁰⁹ these goals already become embedded in various different systems, unintended consequences and side-effects, related strategies, such as precautions, interventions, etc. [Apart from offering a very convenient mode of travel, the excessive use of planes brings forth unintentional side effects, such as the threat to the ozone layer, delays or fatal crashes.] As systemic complexities begin to unfold or rather to explode (considering the non-linearity, unpredictability and dynamism of feed-back loops) Level III is reached – and this defines the current anthropogenic moment in our planet’s history – where ‘technological systems need to be understood as transformative Earth systems.’³¹⁰ [From the once ‘innocent’ dream of swift travels a whole airline industry has

³⁰³ De Rosnay, *The Macroscope*, 87.

³⁰⁴ Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 42.

³⁰⁵ Preiser, *The Problem of Complexity*, 209.

³⁰⁶ Woermann, *On the (Im)Possibility of Business Ethics*, 93.

³⁰⁷ Braden Allenby, & Daniel Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2013).

³⁰⁸ Preiser, *The Problem of Complexity*, 211.

³⁰⁹ Allenby and Sarewitz’s term for ‘categories of technologies’ and ensuing complexity within their ‘taxonomy of levels of technological functioning’, 36.

³¹⁰ Allenby, & Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition*, 65.

originated, offering convenient travels on a global scale, but just as much affecting and being affected by previously unimaginable problems, ranging from issues such as the commodification of global mobility, climate change, international terrorism, the spread of diseases to dumping fees, airport taxes, lost luggage, etc.] They assume planetary scale, not because human technology is so powerful, but because of the resulting ‘emergent behaviours, which may be difficult to perceive’ and even more difficult ‘to understand and manage.’³¹¹ Consequently the authors argue ‘that interventions that employ technologies in a Level I context – where a means-end rationality is followed – cannot be plausibly extended to tackle the *wicked problems* that exist at Level III. The intention to solve Level III problems with Level I or II analyses is not just a technical error, but amounts to being a *category mistake*’.³¹²

I posit that Cilliers’s notion of ‘critical’ ‘radical’ understanding of complexity arises from an acknowledgement of Level III complexity. This entails a ‘move from a mere abstract kind of thinking to the pragmatics of what it means to encounter complexity in the world.’³¹³ Here ‘thinking’ becomes a fully encompassing act, which subsequently informs an attitude and ultimately a way of living. Preiser aptly summarizes the consequences of such a move:

This understanding of complexity departs from the modernist idea that problems are things to be solved on our way to Utopia. By re-casting the problem of complexity as the condition in which we find ourselves on this planet, we are challenged to imagine different ways of coping with it in light of its inescapability. Complexity as condition is not something to be solved, but calls us to re-think what it means to be human in relation to all other aspects of our existence. In this sense, it inaugurates a normative dimension into our encounter with complexity and suggests that we remain radically critical about all attempts to solve complexity with a master plan or one theory-of-everything.³¹⁴

Cilliers’s emphasis on ‘the ethical moment in the study of complexity’³¹⁵ stems from at least two considerations. One is the aforementioned absence of any absolute ‘objective theoretical position (or “frame of frames”)³¹⁶ from where the usefulness and congruence of models of complexity would be decidable. According to Preiser, ‘Cilliers argues that it is impossible to model *complexity-an-sich* in a correct and all encompassing way. The pretension that our models are congruent with reality is only possible by *ignoring* [all unacknowledged] variables that have not been taken into consideration in the calculations and encodings of our models.’³¹⁷ But, Cilliers continues in close analogy to Allenby & Sarewitz’s statement, ‘the failure to acknowledge the complexity of a certain situation is not merely a *technical error*, it is also an *ethical one*.’³¹⁸

This tenet amounts to a harsh criticism of modernistic (positivist, reductionist) ‘problem-solving optimism’. It also indicates the moment of ‘convergence of critique and complexity’ in an intentional ‘double bind: *complexity and/as critique*.’³¹⁹ The harshness of the criticism correlates with the gravity of the situation:

The failure to acknowledge the complexities of the world, to deal with them as if our simple scientific models are adequate, is not only destroying the world, it is destroying our humanity. As we slip more and more into a linear, instrumental kind of thinking which relies on oversimplified models of society, economics and even scientific understanding, we become more like those models: linear, one-dimensional, machine-like, self-centred, heartless. In light of the above, the call of the condition of complexity is a call to proceed differently in this world.³²⁰

³¹¹ Allenby, & Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition*, 63.

³¹² Preiser, *The Problem of Complexity*, 212-213, terms in italics quoted from Allenby & Sarewitz.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 209.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ Cilliers, ‘Complexity, Deconstruction and Relativism’, *Theory, Culture and Society* vol. 22, no. 5, (2005), 256.

³¹⁹ Preiser, *The Problem of Complexity*, 220, original emphasis.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.

The last sentence of the previous quote designates the other ‘ethical moment’, which is by comparison much more gentle. It is the simple acknowledgement that ‘ethical considerations are not to be entertained as something supplementing our dealings with social systems. *They are always already part of what we do.*’³²¹ This applies, even when we’re not deliberately engaging with specific tasks or moral responsibilities. It follows from the *fully subjective* mode of existence – the *only possible* mode of existence – into which complexity jettisons us.

The final point about provisionality as a condition of complexity has already been implied in many ways. If complexity forever forestalls ‘complete knowledge’, then what remains is provisional knowledge, ‘knowledge in terms of a certain theoretical framework’,³²² bound to change with different frames of reference. In contrast to a modernist/positivist assumption that such a shortcoming should be addressed and could in principle be ‘rectified’ (by increased efforts, better means, more sophisticated technology, higher morals, etc.), Cilliers’s post-structural tenet is that this is an existential condition – not a shortcoming, and not remediable. Even though our knowledge might increase in jumps and leaps, its temporariness is not principally alterable.

What might seem like a rather bleak prospect – no final answers to be found, limited knowledge, a principally constrained scope of interpretation and action and no escape from this condition – must, however, not lead to resignation, nor to despondency. Cilliers’s ‘concessions’ indeed declare the project of modernism as failed, but by the same token announces the good riddance of false pretensions and aspirations fostered under the auspices of this conceited approach. The acknowledgement of complexity *does* limit our options, but in return it offers a homecoming of sorts to a *localized* (contextual, restricted), *sustainable* (affordable, prudent, economical) and *human* (subjective, individual, potentially even caring and friendly) domain. This is not to be read as Arcadia or Utopia: It is the world in which we live, subjected to the violence and contingency of physical existence, subjected further to change, degradation, illness and death. But from its very constraints emerge the qualities that have nevertheless always made life worthwhile for those fortunate enough to be alive. To live in full acknowledgment of the unpredictable openness and transience of life is arguably the most appropriate way of recognizing and appreciating the adventure that it is.³²³

Rika Preiser points out that Cilliers developed the notion of critical complexity only during the last three years of his life³²⁴ and due to his sudden death ‘never had the chance to develop it in more detail.’³²⁵ His emphasis on the ‘provisional position’ as the only possible (justifiable) position has thus tragically been underlined and a planned book developed around the idea of the ‘Provisional Imperative’ will – grimly proving its very point – remain unwritten.³²⁶ In the afterword to *Complexity & Postmodernism* Cilliers stresses that the ideas presented therein ‘merely present a framework ... [which] will have to be filled in with the ... detail relevant to the specific case[s].’³²⁷ Speaking about his attempt to characterize language ‘in terms of a complex system’, he asserts that ‘this has to be seen as a very tentative first step’ and that ‘for the development of useful, wide-ranging ... models ... a great deal of hard work lies ahead.’³²⁸ To this he adds: ‘My hope is that this study could provide a certain theoretical orientation, when difficult and complex projects such as these are attempted.’³²⁹

I consider this thesis as part of a process of accepting Cilliers’s challenge of ‘filling in the details’ – in this instance for the case of music. Hard work it has indeed been, and hopefully adequate to do justice to his ground-breaking initial steps. While Cilliers might have considered them to be only tentative, they have proved visionary enough to provide an all-important opening to finally set my thoughts free.

³²¹ Preiser, *The Problem of Complexity*, 214, my emphasis.

³²² Rosen quoted in Preiser, 226.

³²³ Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 142.

³²⁴ Preiser, *The Problem of Complexity*, 216.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

³²⁷ Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 141.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 142.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER 2

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMPLEXITY

After having sketched the historical emergence of complexity – or rather its gradual dawning on current perception and awareness – it is apposite to assess where these developments have taken us. An attempt to summarize what might be called a ‘current understanding of complexity’ will be resisted by acknowledging the impossibility of ‘summarizing’ complexity. In this regard one is confronted by the irreducibility of the concept: there ‘simply’ cannot be simple definitions for complexity; ‘by definition’ complexity defies the notion of a finite ‘de-finition’; it can never be ‘captured’ and a comprehensive description must in principle be just as complex as that which it attempts to describe. Even so, there is no reason for a fatalistic conclusion that *nothing* should be said at all, just because *everything* cannot be said. Instead I hold that *a lot* can be said, knowing that *not all* can be said.¹ In Paul Cilliers’s words, ‘a strong argument can be made’² for complexity.

It is in this conditional and provisional manner that I propose the following tenets on characteristic features of complex systems. They may equally be read as ‘provisions’ (in the sense of requirements, conditions, qualifications, including ‘coercing’ constraints) for complexity to manifest. What follows is a circumscription entailing the feature as well as its enabling ‘eco-feature’ (conditional context), replacing the one-dimensional scope of a clear-cut conventional definition.

The twelve characteristics-cum-conditions proposed here have emerged from a close and simultaneous reading of Paul Cilliers’s and Edgar Morin’s reflections on the topic³ and may be understood as a highly condensed compilation, translation and interpretation of ideas that recur frequently and in various contexts in the writings of both authors.

It should be noted that in this context ‘complexity’ refers to ‘general complexity’. Similarly, ‘system’ here always designates ‘complex system’. ‘Complex system’ implies ‘general complexity’ and *vice versa*.

1. *There is no formal language to describe general complexity.*⁴

This tenet refers to the impossibility of modelling complexity formally and comprehensively.⁵ At first it might seem to express only a linguistic limitation, rather than a characteristic of complexity. However, I posit that it implies and describes an epistemological as well as an ontological condition. It entails the recognition of a predominantly characteristic trait of complex phenomena: that describing, delimiting and defining them inevitably remains insufficient, preliminary and incomplete.

The problem does not rest with the principal philosophical or metaphysical problem of the ‘unutterability’ (inexpressible) of the ineffable or the absolute, with which Wittgenstein was concerned⁶ but which, from a complexity perspective, arguably seems but a self-recursive and hence non-generative (negative, even resigned) feedback-loop. Instead the pertaining problem is rather more immediate and pragmatic – even banal – and results from the human perceptual propensity of *abstracting* (concretizing, capturing and hence ‘freezing’)

¹ I posit that this in effect amounts again to the principle considerations of critical realism.

² Personal communication, CSC seminar, 25.7.2011.

³ Cilliers offers a ten-point list as a means of ‘developing a description of the characteristics of complex systems’ (Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 3-5). Morin arrives at (various aspects of) complexity in his reflections on order, disorder and organisation, which form the first part of Volume I of his ‘Method’ (Morin, *Method*, 29-152).

⁴ Cilliers, & Preiser, *Complexity, Difference and Identity: An Ethical Perspective*, vi.

⁵ As noted earlier, an adequate model of a complex system would have to be just as complex as the original system, hence would replicate the system, defying the notion of ‘model’.

⁶ ‘Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.’ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus*, *Tagebücher, philosophische Untersuchung* (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1960), § 7.

observations and interpretations. As a consequence of this mode of perception and resulting conception, modern languages semantically tend to *reify* all observations into concepts, including dynamic occurrences such as experiences, events and processes.

Western languages are based on ‘terms’ (‘nouns’), which must be considered abstractions (in the sense of ‘constructions’) from temporal occurrences (actions, events), perceived, interpreted and internalized as (inter)active experiences. Concepts such as ‘love’, ‘pain’, ‘joy’, ‘anxiety’, ‘hope’ should more appropriately be considered verbs (i.e. experiences or actions – ‘to love’, ‘to endure pain’, ‘to enjoy’, ‘to suffer anxiety’, ‘to hope’). As nouns they resemble but a single still frame from an on-going, unceasing ‘movie’. But even physical objects, which could reasonably be considered ‘things’ (e.g. people, stars, trees, cars, etc.) or intangible ideas (e.g. nations, politics, consciousness) cannot appositely be considered static, as all are caught in processes and interactions that continually change them. In this regard language – and especially written language – pins down what flows, changes, evolves, develops, integrates or disintegrates in nature.

The dilemma or condition of complexity thinking to which I refer here, arises from the fact that it has to operate from *within* conventional language while – with its emphasis on the dynamic (instead of the static) and the systemic (instead of the objective) – it must reach *beyond* the usual definitive, static and objective linguistic qualities. Hence already on a linguistic, semantic level, complexity thinking becomes operative (generative) as it seeks to ‘verb’-alize the conditional, contingent, particular, individual, historical, local, inter-active and processual qualities of nature. This task of ‘verbalizing’ – in the double sense of ‘expressing’ and ‘making dynamic’⁷ – must be acknowledged as an initial necessity of complexity thinking. It not only requires a reconsideration of *what* one is thinking, but also of *how* one is thinking.

2. *Complex systems are characterised by close, rich, nonlinear, dynamic, recurrent, looping interactions.*⁸

The basic assumption here is that *complexity* results from *interactivity* (between components of a system). Read superficially it indicates nothing more than a mechanism and a simple relational condition. Only by *constraining* and thus *qualifying* it in various manners, does it begin to reveal something of its complexity. Put differently, it might be said that the *constraints* result in specific *qualities* that ‘translate’ as follows:

- Close interactions between components in a complex system are immediate, local and distributed. There are no long-range interactions. Neither is there a central steering or decision-making instance. Local interactions occur in ignorance of each other. Nowhere is the system represented completely or centrally; it only exists in a distributed manner as in a network.
- *Rich* interactions are lavish in quantity and quality: with regard to quantity *numerous* and *abundant*; with regard to quality *meaningful* and *differentiated*. From this follows a dense reflexivity in the sense that any element is influenced by, and concurrently influences, many others.⁹ Interactions are therefore impacting and repercussive and in that way even immediate interactions spread out eventually to have wide-ranging influence. Richness may also be understood as potential for change. Because of the many steps involved in transferring stimuli, these are subject to modulations on the way, in turn constraining and differentiating and hence ‘enriching’ (changing, transforming, adopting) the original impulse.
- *Non-linear* interactions between components in the system or between the system and the environment result from constraints, feedback-loops, deviations and the combination of all of these,

⁷ While in German one might express this with the verb ‘dynamisieren’, the English language tellingly refuses any verbal expression to the effect of ‘dynamicizing’ (on the basis of ‘actualizing’, ‘realizing’, etc.).

⁸ This statement is an interpretation and summary of a list of characteristics of complex systems compiled by Paul Cilliers. (Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 3-5), filled in with overlapping reflections by Morin.

⁹ Cilliers, 3.

thereby ‘interfering’ with linearly causal interaction. The abundance of simultaneous interactions overrides simple cause-and-effect relations and thus result in open and often unpredictable or inexplicable behaviour. Non-linearity is a ‘crucial ingredient’ in the emergence of complexity.¹⁰

- That interactions are *dynamic* has many implications: It means that they are original, temporal, and finite – they begin in time, exist through time and are destroyed by time. Hence their existence is preliminary (unfinished), historical, conditional and thus unique (individual).
- The *recurrence* of interactions indicates that they are energised, i.e. continuously stimulated by the flow or dissipation of energy. Recurrent interactions result from energetic non-equilibrium. (A system in equilibrium – where no energy is flowing – is dead, or rather, it ceases to be a system.)
- To speak of *looping interactions* is another way of acknowledging retroactive feedbacks, which may be positive or negative. What sounds like a mechanical process must be considered as underpinning the notions of responsibility, autonomy, integrity and even of identity. The feedback-loop thus gains special importance in the context of complex systems.

The analytical separation of these specific qualifiers of complexity should not be understood as a reduction of complexity into a catalogue of parameters or individual constituents. Rather, each description is intended as a momentary emphasis on a certain aspect which – interacting and merging with all the others ‘con-currently’ – will disappear in the unified manifestation of complexity. Hence the characteristic *unification* of diverse traits and components will be scrutinized next.

3. A system is more than the sum of its parts.

This adage indicates an intuitive understanding of the relation between the whole and its parts. Yet the statement deserves a more thorough investigation. The apparent paradox rests in the ‘fundamental complexity of a system, [which] *associates in itself* the idea of unity on the one hand, of diversity or multiplicity on the other, which in principle repel and exclude each other.’¹¹ Since a system is constituted by numerous components it is no ‘elementary unit’ but instead must be considered a compound¹² unity, or – considering the complexity of relations at play – a ‘complex unity’.¹³ This is a central term in Morin’s thinking, which he adamantly defends as one ‘can neither reduce the one to the multiple, nor the multiple to the one’ and hence has to ‘conceive together, in a way *simultaneously complementary and antagonistic*, the notions of whole and parts, of one and diverse.’¹⁴

The ‘more’ of a system in relation to its parts is given by its organization, its unity and ‘the new qualities and properties emerging from organization and global unity.’¹⁵ In short, what is ‘more’ and, moreover, ‘new’ (original, unpredictable) is *emergence*. In a sense even the ‘whole’ of a system is an ‘emergent quality’, thus emanating simultaneously as its own *cause* and *consequence* (its ‘fruit’):¹⁶ ‘the whole being emergent, and emergence being a trait proper to the whole.’¹⁷ The notion of ‘totality’ or ‘*Gestalt*’ encompasses the idea of such a ‘complex whole’, thereby unifying on a meta-level what is already bound systemically. Seen from another (‘higher’) level, this interaction merely repeats principal systemic behaviour (i.e. complex interactions leading to

¹⁰ Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 4. See also Cilliers, ‘Rules and Complex Systems’, *Emergence* vol. 2, no. 3, (2000), 46; De Rosnay, *The Macroscope*, 65-66.

¹¹ Morin, *Method*, 102, my emphasis.

¹² Morin calls this ‘global unity’, a term which I consider somewhat ambiguous.

¹³ Morin, *Method*, 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* my emphasis.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁶ ‘Like fruit, emergence is always ultimate (chronologically) and always first (by quality). It is both a product of synthesis and the force of synthesis. And in the same way that the fruit, ultimate product, is at the same time ovary-bearing reproductive power, likewise emergence can contribute retroactively to producing and reproducing what produces it.’ Morin, 107.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

a system). Here the systems principle, ‘acting’ infinitely and irreducibly in both ‘directions’ of macro- and micro-systems, is revealed.¹⁸ ‘Emergent qualities, in their turn ... become primary materials... rise one on the other, the heads of some becoming the feet of others, and systems of systems of systems are emergences of emergences of emergences.’¹⁹

In this overview of systemic characteristics it is neither possible nor necessary to reflect exhaustively on the concept of emergence, fascinating as it is. It suffices here to recognize and emphasise its existence as that ‘which is more’ to a system, other than its material components. Inasmuch as emergence is *relative* to the system from which it originates, it exists (appears) *phenomenally*. But it must, concurrently, be acknowledged as existing *ontologically* and *absolutely* through the quality of (its) ‘newness’.²⁰ Here ‘new’ means ‘discontinuous, unpredictable and unforeseen’. Moreover, it means ‘irreducible’ once manifested. It emerges ‘out of the blue, inexplicable, suddenly existing’. In Morin’s words: ‘Emergence imposes itself as *fact*’,²¹ with the ‘force of an event’²² – an audacity or impudence almost. It pre-empts its deductibility, constitutes a ‘logical jump’,²³ which first of all must be recognized before it can be understood and thereby confronts our very understanding of (scientific) understanding. By its forceful ‘factualness’ it opens in our understanding the breach through which the irreducibility of the real penetrates...²⁴ Hence, from a systems perspective, a significant connection between ‘emergence’, ‘novelty’ and ‘reality’ appears.

4. A system is less than the sum of its parts.

While a narrow Cartesian worldview might be critiqued for its ‘reductionist blindness (which sees only the constitutive elements)’,²⁵ Morin points out that a ‘holistic blindness (which sees only the whole)’ is equally flawed. New age evocations of ‘holistic approaches’ meant to redeem reductionist limitations may easily overlook the inherent systemic property of constraining components. This property manifests in obvious organizational ‘mechanisms of regulations and control’, restrictions, adjustments and specifications that could be deemed ‘acceptable’ means of maintaining systemic order. But it must also be recognized that every system subjugates its parts to the point of completely and existentially inhibiting certain qualities and prohibiting certain ‘possibilities of action or of expression’.²⁶ It is not an exaggeration to say that without constraints there can be no system. The streamlining of components towards a specific purpose, i.e. the realization of a systemic functionality, inevitably entails the suppression of alternative potentialities.

By logical extension, one arrives at the seeming truism that doing A entails not doing B: If I speak German, I don’t speak French. However, while I don’t speak French, somebody else may do so and the French language will still be spoken and is not suppressed by my speaking German. On a genetic level, however, where ‘repressor’ proteins may attach themselves to genes and prevent them from being transcribed and ‘expressed’,²⁷ the restriction leads to transient biological fixtures. Even more generally on the scale of societies, there is a long and tragic history of inhibited, oppressed, marginalized, ostracized and even fully eliminated potential energy and creativity that was suppressed by less benign constraints.

¹⁸ ‘From the nucleus to the atom, from the atom or molecule, from the molecule to the cell, from the cell to the organism, from the organism to society, a fabulous systemic architecture grows.’ The point to note is that this universal architecture ‘is conceivable only by introducing the notion of emergence.’ Morin, *Method*, 108.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 106, original emphasis.

²² *Ibid.*, 105, original emphasis.

²³ *Ibid.*, 106.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 111.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

With regard to the dormant potential of the individual (component), a system amounts to a decision – literally a ‘de-scission’ – separating what will emanate and ‘materialize’ from what is banned from existing. This leads to another significant systemic connection: that of constraints ‘allowing structured presence into existence’. By virtue of ‘ob-structing’, constraints ‘structure’.²⁸ By the same token, they (simultaneously, complementary, antagonistically) ‘de-struct’.

5. *A system is other than the sum of its parts.*

For all its radicalness this tenet follows logically from the previous two. If the ‘systemic sum’ is concurrently more *and* less, a noteworthy difference must be accounted for somewhere. The answer, obvious and enigmatic at the same time, must be that a system transforms itself and its parts.

To recapitulate: A system emerges from the organized interaction of its parts, which it in turn binds, constrains, directs and aligns, repressing certain partial potentials and enabling others. The new qualities arising from the retroactive and recursive feedbacks will eventually allow new interactions leading to new emergences and thereby to a new system. As long as this is a dynamic process (occurring far from equilibrium), the system carries in itself the seed for its constant adaption, change, transformation, growth as well as potential decline.

Transformation is not (only) the consequence of systemic interaction. It must equally be recognized as its cause and initial impulse. A system arises in the first place because ‘organization *transforms* a discontinuous diversity of elements into a global form’.²⁹ Hence Morin posits a ‘key systemic law’ at the fulcrum ‘between formation and transformation. *Everything which forms transforms.*’³⁰

6. *The whole is more – and less – than the whole. (The whole is not whole.)*³¹

As has been explained, the whole is the totality of global form, including emergent qualities and retroacting³² constraints incorporating an adaptive, self-transforming propensity. But in another sense it is not ‘whole’ (unimpaired, complete) at all. It only appears whole by virtue of its hegemony over its parts; it only functions as a whole as long as its parts function as parts.³³ It ‘exists’ only in relation to the organization from which it emerges and moreover only as frame to this organization. Due to its nature as ‘complex unity’ it carries in it, in Morin’s words, ‘scissions, shadows, and conflicts’.³⁴

The shadow of the ‘emergent’ is the ‘immersed’. The shadow of the ‘expressed’ is the ‘repressed’. Both are traces of constraints at work on the level of the parts. Morin posits (very poetically) that every system includes its ‘immersed, secret, obscure zone where suppressed virtualities stir.’³⁵ Expressed more prosaically it must be acknowledged that inherent dualities of emerged/immersed, expressed/repressed, actualized/virtualized³⁶ are not fully nullified by systemic regulations, but somehow smoulder along as potential conflicts, creative antagonisms or even as destructive for. This makes it clear that a system is no utopian construct; it is a very real and existentially situated ‘project’ or manifestation that has to withstand inner and outer tensions and which will ultimately and finally succumb to its decomposing forces.

²⁸ Note how in this case the semantics quasi literally manifest in the phonemes.

²⁹ Morin, *Method*, 112.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 124

³² The way in which Morin employs this term (or at least in the English translation of his work) needs some clarification.

Whereas ‘retroaction’ conventionally refers to something ‘taking effect from a date in the past’, it here denotes ‘interactions resulting from feedback’ in the sense of ‘reverse interaction’ or ‘positive (self-reinforcing) feedback’. The German equivalent would be ‘Rückkopplung’.

³³ Morin, *Method*, 124.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

Even the systemic totality is permeated by the outside/inside duality. This is not so much a structural fissure between ‘extrovert phenomena’ and ‘organizational rules’,³⁷ as a distinctness of organizational levels that are in a sense ‘unaware’³⁸ of each other. This ‘qualitative jump’ between levels results from systems that are merely indirectly and organizationally related, as opposed to immediately or materially related. Despite the bond of organizational forces there remains in the heart of the system (that is in the potentially antagonistic multiplicity of components and levels) a measure of ‘dissociation’.³⁹

In many cases the idea of ‘the whole’ of a system is an observational abstraction. This is inevitably true for abstract systems (such as sets, classes, styles, families, social strata, etc.), where the observer’s subjective choice of framing inherently ‘defines’ the system. But it also applies to the natural realm, where boundaries are fuzzy or exclusivity is not unambiguously defined (delineating ecologies, economies, societies, etc.) This does not imply that there is no ontological basis for such an ‘interpretation’, but rather that the ‘reality’ is sufficiently complex that multiple interpretations are adequate. Such observations are thus not relative (random), but relational (connected).

It follows that the notion of the whole can be *both* an abstraction and an ontological reality. In addition, there is a strong relation between the domain of the observed (interpreted, transitive) and the domain of the ‘real’ (given, intransitive).⁴⁰ Hence observation must be recognized as establishing an interaction that opens up a new system in its own right with its own dynamics (of emergence, constraints, feed-back, contradictions, etc.). Its observation must thus be considered an intrinsic part of a system’s whole; its ‘complete wholeness’ thus including the observation thereof. As a large number of different observers will ‘create’ a large number of different ‘complete wholenesses’, we must arrive at a conception of the ‘whole’ as complex, dynamic, interactive, contingent, fully contradicting any classical notions of the whole as supreme, autonomous, complete, independent or closed.

7. *The part is more – and less – than the part.*

This statement, seemingly paradox, follows logically from the above. The first instance (the ‘more’) may be described as ‘micro-emergence’:⁴¹ ‘[Q]ualities inherent to the parts within a given system are absent or virtual when these parts are in an isolated state; they can be acquired and developed only by and in the whole.’⁴² As an example Morin considers the individual in a human society: Through the ‘constitution of culture individuals develop their aptitudes for the development of language, craftsmanship, art, etc. – that is to say that their richest individual qualities emerge within the social system’.⁴³

By the same token the opposite (the ‘less’) is also (concurrently, simultaneously) true: ‘Qualities [and] properties attached to the parts considered isolatedly disappear inside the system.’⁴⁴ From a bottom-up perspective (e.g. of the individual in a conservative society, or the slave in a colony, etc.) this is far more conspicuous than from the top-down view (the state president’s considerations of the welfare of the state or benefit of the community) and hence hardly needs much explication. It is an everyday experience that

³⁷ Morin, *Method*, 125.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ ‘Transitive’ and ‘intransitive’ are used here in the way Bhaskar and other critical realists understand the terms, principally distinguishing the transitive domain (TD) from the intransitive domain (ID). The first denotes ‘human constructions and models’, the second designates ‘a domain of events that are independent of our perceptions of them’. Mingers, *Realizing Information Systems*, 100, 20, etc. See also Parenthesis III, pg. 42 ff.

⁴¹ Morin, *Method*, 105.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 109.

'association implies constraints',⁴⁵ or, formulated more precisely, that 'the presence of an organization between variables is equivalent to the existence of constraints on the production of possibilities.'⁴⁶

Against the *enabling* propensities of systemic circumstances, their *disabling* effects must equally be recognized. The example of the individual in a human society is apposite: 'It is certainly society which constitutes a solidary whole protecting the individuals who respect its rules. But it is really also society which imposes its coercions and repressions on all activities, from the sexual to the intellectual.'⁴⁷ There can be no denial of this systemic aspect as a historically indelible and tragic fact.

This is a suitable moment to point out that the acknowledgment of the overarching and ubiquitous presence of systems does not imply that systems are 'something good'. The recognition of systems is probably in very many instances apposite and in that sense 'good' (appropriate, fitting, apt). But, like any other natural phenomenon, systems and their complexity are 'neutral' occurrences and can lead to wonderful or terrible outcomes. While we now believe that organized systemic interaction lies at the heart of the marvellous phenomena of 'life' and 'consciousness', the very same laws may lock constellations into systems that could be perceived as unethical or even evil, such as those of slavery, inquisition, or state-, clan- or family-enforced tyranny.⁴⁸ The 'wickedness' of third level complexity, as described by Allenby & Sarewitz,⁴⁹ is another example of the 'standoffishness' or immutability of overarching systems intrinsically and irreducibly linking the good (intentions) with the problematic (side effects).

Therefore the recognition of complexity is not morally superior, although the aptness or circumspection of an approach contains an ethical dimension. Similarly, the advocacy of this recognition will not principally change the 'real world', which has since time immemorial been marked by death and destruction, just as much as by life and rebirth. It may be stated though that the postulations of systemism (instead of objectivism) and complexity (instead of simplicity or reductionism) *arguably amount to more apposite models* of how natural phenomena emanate and natural processes take place. Given the perceived congruence, such models might lead to a better understanding of an intrinsic (ubiquitous, overarching) relationality and could thereby enable us to make better choices in accordance with the lawfulness of such a relationality.

PARENTHESIS III: CRITICAL REALISM – AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXPLICATION

The engagement with complexity is a complex task in itself, one that requires and inspires complex thinking. It follows that an epistemological approach is needed that acknowledges this challenge. For this reason I *cannot* follow conventional modernist views (e.g. empiricism, positivism, pragmatism), nor underwrite typical post-modernist perspectives (such as relativism or constructivism). Instead, I have found that my conception of the world and the role and function of music in this world can best be described from a 'critical realist' perspective as proposed by Bhaskar,⁵⁰ Archer,⁵¹ Mingers⁵² and others.

The term 'Critical Realism' (CR) may firstly be understood as a distinction from all forms of 'naïve' realism. While the latter might be described as assuming the world 'to be is as it appears to be' regardless of the observer, the former holds that any perception of the outside world is strongly influenced not only by largely differing individual cognitive (biologically and sensorily conditioned) capacities, but just as much by culturally primed worldviews, epistemological frameworks, philosophical concepts etc. Since cognitive processes

⁴⁵ Morin, *Method*, 110.

⁴⁶ Ashby quoted in *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁸ The final verdict of 'globalized capitalism' is not out yet, but in all probability it will go into history as one of the most destructive systems of all times.

⁴⁹ Allenby, & Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition*.

⁵⁰ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science* (The Harvester Press, Hassocks 1978).

⁵¹ Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, *Critical Realism: Essential Readings (Critical Realism: Interventions)*.

⁵² Mingers, *Real-izing Information Systems*.

invariably mediate between the outside world and its respective perception, CR acknowledges that our 'access' to 'reality' (the outside world) is indirect. The degree to which our perception accords with reality is in constant flux. Scientific enquiry (the development of knowledge) can thus be understood as the on-going attempt of increasing the congruence between perception and reality. While it is acknowledged that no full accordance between these two 'categories' can ever be reached, the degree of congruence nevertheless between them becomes a measure for the quality of knowledge generation. Since this quality can never finally be assessed objectively, but will depend to a greater or lesser extent on subjective positions, circumstances and belief systems, an ethical dimension must be acknowledged alongside a normative dimension. In a sense, the quality of science will depend on a critical vigilance ascertaining that scientific activity is guided and balanced by both these considerations.

CR thus centrally postulates the existence of two separate domains for which Bhaskar has coined the terms 'transitive' and 'intransitive'⁵³ domains respectively. The latter denotes the outside world,⁵⁴ 'a domain of events, ... independent of our perceptions of them,'⁵⁵ which Bhaskar perceives as consisting of three subsets nested inside each other. Encompassing all is the 'real', consisting of the 'whole of reality', i.e. propensities, mechanisms, structures, events, etc. A second strata is the 'actual', consisting of events that actually occur, i.e. 'actualize'. Of these only those that are actually observed form the third (innermost) subset, the 'empirical'. These distinctions are made to guard against reducing 'all events to only those that are observed', and further reducing 'enduring causal mechanisms to events.'⁵⁶

Bhaskar's 'picture of the real is thus one of a complex interaction between dynamic, open, stratified systems, both material and non-material, where particular structures give rise to certain causal powers, tendencies, or ways of acting.'⁵⁷ Bhaskar refers to these complex interactions as 'generative mechanisms', which can enforce but just as well counterbalance each other, thereby either causing the presence or absence of actual events.⁵⁸

As opposed to the intransitive domain containing the 'objects of knowledge', the transitive domain is the man-made realm of the 'production of knowledge'. Sometimes also referred to as the epistemological domain, it can merely interpret the ontological domain of 'science's intransitive objects.'⁵⁹ By using this terminology CR can be defined as an attempt 'to re-establish a *realist view of being* in the ontological domain whilst accepting the *relativism of knowledge* as socially and historically conditioned in the epistemological domain'.⁶⁰

Following from this categorical distinction and centrally inscribed into critically realist thinking is the cautioning against confusing these two domains. Such a slippage, which Bhaskar calls an 'epistemic fallacy',⁶¹ occurs very easily and its avoidance depends on a highly nuanced perception. A typical example is the conviction that 'a constant conjunction of events is a requisite condition of scientific laws.'⁶² On closer scrutiny it should be clear that 'laws are statements not of regularities ... but of underlying mechanisms that account for them'⁶³ (as well as – collaterally – for the observed resulting regularities). In this case the 'fallacy' lies in (mis)understanding 'laws to be descriptions of sequences of perceptual events', when more precisely they are 'statements about the powers of entities.'⁶⁴ Bhaskar even goes so far as to state 'that regularities are neither sufficient, as the Humean would have it, nor even necessary, as the Kantian would maintain, for the formulation of a scientific law.'⁶⁵ For

⁵³ Mingers, *Real-izing Information Systems*, 92.

⁵⁴ 'Intransitive', in the sense of 'not having passed over'.

⁵⁵ Mingers, 92.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 91, my emphases.

⁶¹ Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science*, 36-38; Mingers, *Realizing Information Systems*, 93.

⁶² Ruth Groff, *Critical Realism, Post-positivism and the Possibility of Knowledge*, 33.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

the purpose of this brief overview it is sufficient to summarize that in critical realism 'ontology is [principally] irreducible to epistemology'.⁶⁶

In its initial thrust – as a theory of science, investigating the mechanisms and conditions of scientific activity and knowledge generation – Critical Realism was developed to some degree as a critique of certain aspects of Karl Popper's Critical Rationalism.⁶⁷ Popper's proposal may be summarized briefly as a critique of the principle of induction (i.e. the assumption that verifications may be deduced from consistently similar observations), by showing that it is principally impossible to arrive at final 'verifications'. Instead he proposes that scientific results should be tested by virtue of their resistance to 'falsification'. A single fault will irrefutably shatter a truth. Not being able to find a fault is thus the more reliable proof that something must be true, rather than inducing this assumption from a limited number of observations. Critical Rationalism thus 'stipulates that a theory is scientific only to the extent that it can be falsified by a test on observable data.'⁶⁸ Anything beyond the reach of falsification must be considered speculative.

However, as Vandenberghe argues, the falsification method – just like the verification approach – still 'presupposes the existence of a closed model'.⁶⁹ In fact, this is the core of Bhaskar's critique of Critical Rationalism, showing that it never quite escaped from an ingrained positivism, in spite of Popper's claims. The nature of empirical experiments calls for 'meticulous control of all the factors and antecedent conditions (... smuggled into the *ceteris paribus* clause...)',⁷⁰ which amounts to nothing else than working in under artificially closed conditions. If only for this reason, Critical Rationalism remains intrinsically unsuitable for research in the humanities or social sciences.⁷¹

Furthermore, Critical Rationalism excludes the conditions under which science is conducted from the scientific investigations themselves. Drawing an unacknowledged boundary between scientific 'activist' (and all human, emotional, institutional, cultural connotations which belong to this complex) and scientific 'activity' (understood as isolated closed task) it presupposes that the latter is fully independent from the former. But of course this presupposition principally jeopardizes the scientific endeavour, whose very purpose lies in overcoming *a priori* presuppositions by replacing them with evidence *after* the fact.

To avoid this kind of 'performative contradiction',⁷² Critical Realism deliberately incorporates the observation of the scientists – i.e. the subjective agents involved in the purportedly objective activity of scientific work, as well as their institutional, cultural and ethical environment – into the scientific observation. Accordingly CR emphasizes that no scientific activity takes place in isolation, but that it is always (also) a social activity. Further, it calls to attention that no scientific investigation ever starts at zero, but always departs from previous results; hence science rather transforms than creates knowledge. Similarly, since it never arrives at final results, science must be understood as a never-ending and inconclusive activity.⁷³ As theory of science, concerned with the efficacy of the processes of scientific knowledge generation, Critical Realism has arguably falsified the falsification method of Critical Rationalism.⁷⁴

What does Critical Realism enable us to do? Admitting that our sensory perception can neither be sufficient nor objective proof for the *de facto* existence of such an absolute reality, critical realists take observable causality as a *sufficiently strong indicator* of a 'real world'. The argument is the following: Scientific enquiry will cause (bring about) 'experimental conditions but ... not cause the results [which rather] depend upon the

⁶⁶ Vandenberghe, *The Falsification of Falsification*, 4.

⁶⁷ It should be stressed that even though Critical Realism as well as Critical Rationalism are both occasionally abbreviated and referred to as CR, they are not certainly not the same should therefore not be confused.

⁶⁸ Vandenberghe, *The Falsification of Falsification*, 4

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷² Vandenberghe, 3.

⁷³ Pühretmeier et al., *Grundlagen sozialwissenschaftlicher Denkweisen: Critical Realism*

⁷⁴ Hence Vandenberghe's title: *The Falsification of Falsification*.

causal laws that are operative.⁷⁵ Hence ‘causal laws must be different from and independent of the patterns of events they generate... Thus, the intelligibility and success of experimental activity demonstrates the existence of an intransitive domain of causal laws separate from the events they generate.’⁷⁶ It is, in other words, adequate to ‘call a spade a spade’, if – upon exerting sufficient force to this tool – it effects the digging of a hole, stumbling into which, I may break my ankle. There will have been sufficient instances of causal laws leading to events and experiences to justify the assumption that all of the above ‘actually’ happened, rather than to consider it all ‘imagined’.

Furthermore the ‘corrugibility of perception’ is understood to demonstrate ‘the separation of events from particular experiences of them’.⁷⁷ In other words the (admittedly) subjective ability to learn to understand external events better or react more adequately to them (i.e. mind one’s step, when someone has been digging with a spade) is seen as indication that the outside is no mere construction of perceptions.

To summarize in John Mingers’s words: ‘The heart of this argument is that of a *causal* criterion for existence rather than a *perceptual* one. In other words, for an empiricist only that which can be perceived can exist, whereas for a (critical) realist having a causal effect on the world implies existence, regardless of perceptibility.’⁷⁸

Obviously these considerations do not change the basic condition that we can never escape the limitations of our senses and our measuring instruments, and hence our biologically, structurally and sensorily limited perceptions. This is the basis for Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela’s argument that the very conditions of knowledge arise from our minds and senses and not from the outside world.⁷⁹ Potentially, this would be a strong argument for subjectivism. However, to make it a constructivist argument (claiming that we can ultimately know nothing of the outside world or that it ultimately does not exist at all) once again amounts to an ‘epistemic fallacy’ as explained above. Here the ‘essential mistake is in reducing the *ontological* domain of existence to the *epistemological* domain of knowledge – statements about *being* are translated into ones about our (human) *knowledge* or experience of being.’ Somehow this reflects a dubiously anthropocentric, if not altogether conceited attitude. Conversely, the assertion of ‘the primacy of ontology – [that] the world would exist whether or not humans did’⁸⁰ – is far more humble and, as this epistemological explication now liberates me to say, far more ‘realistic’.

Another important ‘critical realism’ argument is that *for* a ‘critical naturalism in social science’.⁸¹ This means that in principle ‘one general approach to science’⁸² should apply, straddling the natural as well as the social sciences. One of the arguments *against* this is based on the claim that ‘the social world is intrinsically different to the natural world, being constituted through language and meaning, and thus involves entirely different hermeneutic, phenomenological, or social constructivist approaches.’⁸³ Since ‘ontologically social objects do not exist in the way physical ones do (i.e. as subject-independent) and that epistemologically there is no possibility of facts or observations ... independent of actors, cultures or social practices’, a different kind of science driven by different methodologies applies for the humanities.

Currently this is the prevailing attitude, manifesting for example in the rigidly upheld separation of disciplines in academe. Ironically, in exceptional cases, where it is challenged and a single epistemological approach is implemented, the endeavour is hampered by a (mis)understanding of science as being by default positivist, so

⁷⁵ Mingers, *Real-izing Information Systems*, 92.

⁷⁶ Mingers, *Realizing Systems Thinking*, 21.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, my emphases.

⁷⁹ See the section on second-order cybernetics, Chapter 1, pg. 13, footnote 96.

⁸⁰ Mingers, *Real-izing Information Systems*, 93.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

that the ‘canons of positivism/empiricism’ (and concomitantly the hope for ‘universal generalizations from empirical observations’)⁸⁴ are forced from the natural sciences onto the social sciences – leading to problems such as the ones described in the preface to this dissertation.

Critical realism holds that indeed natural and social phenomena are inherently different, the main argument being that – other than in the natural sciences – no universal (natural) ‘laws’, nor any context-independent phenomena, exist in the social sciences,⁸⁵ therefore necessitating contextual, methodological differentiations. But such a multi-methodological approach is deemed necessary as a matter of general principle: ‘CR does not have a commitment to a single form of research; rather it involves particular attitudes towards its purpose and practice... [as it] is to be expected that gaining knowledge in any particular situation will require a variety of research methods...’⁸⁶ The inclusion of ‘multimethodology’⁸⁷ in fact underlines the pursuit of a universal scientific quest. In the natural as well as the social sciences critical realism is driven by the assumption of ‘an intransitive domain of generative mechanisms; a recognition of the epistemic (but not judgmental) relativity of knowledge,⁸⁸ and a ‘retroductive methodology that explains events by hypothesising causal mechanisms.’⁸⁹ While the scientific *impetus* is universal, its *findings* are considered to be contextualized and local: ‘Critical realism asserts that the conditions for knowledge⁹⁰ do not arise in our minds but in the structure of reality, and that such knowledge will not be universal and ahistorical.’⁹¹

In many ways CR is informed by complexity thinking and in turn offers an eminently suited epistemological framework for complex reflections. As will become evident, its hallmarks of multi-methodological, contextualized and trans-disciplinary research are not only congruent with those of complexity but are in fact mandatory for the development of complexity thinking. This thesis is underpinned by a ‘critically realist’ epistemology.

8. Complex systems are bounded.

Distinguishing a system from its environment entails defining a boundary. In this sense the recognition, perception and drawing of boundaries is a basic, constitutive and potentially even ‘initiating’ systemic act.⁹² However, systemic boundaries are elusive phenomena. As they are intrinsically part of the system they entail (and not some kind of separate, enclosing entity), they manifest as complex in themselves.

Many different kinds of boundaries may be perceived: in the physical realm they can be edges, surfaces, enclosures, membranes or demarcations.⁹³ Incidentally, even physically tangible boundaries are never absolute (exact, tight, impenetrable). Their ‘definition’ or degree of permeability hinges on the type of interaction to which they are exposed. This is evident when considering the example of skin, which is a boundary for light waves and (mild) physical touch, but not for X-rays, bacteria or a scalpel.⁹⁴ In Mingers’s words: ‘in specifying a boundary we should also specify classes of interactions or agents for which the boundary is a boundary.’⁹⁵ This

⁸⁴ Mingers, *Real-izing Information Systems*, 91.

⁸⁵ Hans Pühretmayer, Armin Puller, *Grundlagen sozialwissenschaftlicher Denkweisen: Kritischer Rationalismus*

⁸⁶ Mingers, 99-100.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Due to the ‘inevitable fallibility of observation’ (Mingers, 100).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

⁹⁰ Note that this statement apparently directly contradicts Maturana’s view on the ‘condition of knowledge’ mentioned earlier. However, as Maturana is concerned with a biological description of the aptitude of cognition, his findings can be upheld and more precisely described by stating that ‘organisms respond to their environment in ways determined by their internal self-organization.’ (Hayles, 442) Strictly speaking it is exactly this limitation that prevents anybody from a metaphysical (empirical, objective) comparison of internal (biological) and external (ontological) ‘conditions’ of knowledge.

⁹¹ Mingers, 92.

⁹² Mingers, *Realising Systems Thinking*, 65.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

can also be formulated in reverse, stating that a system has multiple boundaries relative to the multiplicity of environmental agents.

Further, depending on the proximity from which they are observed, boundaries appear more or less fuzzy. As the microscopic gaze reveals, the fuzziness increases (theoretically infinitely) with closer proximity and higher resolution.⁹⁶ However, this ‘fuzziness’ may turn out to be more than just a border condition: the relative observational distance may at different stages reveal completely different systems and hence collapse the concept of ‘boundary’ into that of ‘system’.⁹⁷ Finally, as systems adapt, evolve and change, so do their margins.

Even more types of boundaries appear in the conceptual realm. Conventions, norms and rules (progressing from the broad to the more specific) may be considered as demarcations or distinctions. Such boundaries may be more rigid than those in the physical world, potentially even absolute. (Whether a word belongs to a certain language or a value to a mathematical set can usually be determined unambiguously.)

Moving to the social and anthropological realm where the predominant form of boundary is that of alliance or ‘membership’ (of families, classes, social strata, societies, ethnicities, religious groups, political parties, nationalities, etc.),⁹⁸ the concept becomes less precise, more problematic or even highly contentious. Very often the criteria of differences and distinctions qualifying or disqualifying membership are ambiguous, or result from subjective decisions. Hence it is widely accepted that – especially in the social realm – boundaries do not exist independently from the observer:

A system is not something given in nature, but something defined by intelligence. ... [It is selected] from an infinite number of relations between things, a set which, because of coherence and pattern and purpose, permits an interpretation of what otherwise might be a meaningless cavalcade of arbitrary events. It follows that the detection of system in the world outside ourselves is a subjective matter. Two people will not necessarily agree on the existence, or nature, or boundaries of any systems so detected.⁹⁹

I will argue that for all practical complexity considerations it does not matter whether a boundary is ontologically real or (‘merely’) epistemologically constructed. Both types must be acknowledged as ‘contextually relevant’ and add to the complex diversity and quality of boundaries. The constitutive (constraining, identifying) functionality of a boundary may be given in either case. It is thus highly appropriate to include the observer as agent in the framing and bounding of systems. But, as was shown in the explication on critical realism, it is inappropriate to deduct from this the absolute non-existence of ontological boundaries.¹⁰⁰

More important than a final decision on the ultimate reality of system boundaries is the conception and recognition of their double nature, of *distinguishing and linking*, a quality aptly captured in the metaphor and model of the ‘permeable membrane’:

Instead of functioning as what logicians call an exclusive disjunction (either/or, but not both)... permeable boundaries of dynamical systems are best conceptualized as sites of phase changes ... The paradoxical characteristics of permeable membranes – which both exclude some potential inputs (thereby maintaining system integrity) at the same time as they include others (thereby allowing for the possibility of dynamic transformation) are thus ultimately responsible for both a system’s actual identity as well as its potential and actual evolution.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Mingers, *Realising Systems Thinking*, 71.

⁹⁷ This phenomenon is vividly demonstrated in the 1968 short film ‘Powers of Ten’ by Ray and Charles Eames. www.powersof10.com/film [accessed on 1.9.13].

⁹⁸ Mingers, 83.

⁹⁹ Stafford Beer, *Decision and Control: The Meaning of Operational Research and Management Cybernetics* (John Wiley & Sons, London 1966), 242–3 quoted in Mingers, *Realising Systems Thinking*, 86.

¹⁰⁰ This would yet again amount to an instance of Mingers’s and Bhaskar’s ‘epistemic fallacy’. Mingers, 89.

¹⁰¹ Alicia Juarrero, ‘Complex Dynamical Systems and the Problem of Identity’, *Emergence* vol. 4, no. 1/2, (2002), 100.

It appears that boundaries are, in a sense, the most interesting areas of a system, ‘active sites where qualitatively new phenomena emerge.’¹⁰² This derives from the fact that, given that they are not absolutely rigid and impenetrable barriers, boundaries manifest as ‘only opportunities of transgression’, representing at once (*concurrently, antagonistically, complementarily*) a dynamic system’s conservative structure as well as its creative audacity. In a paradoxical link only a boundary enables trespassing (allows for its very opportunity) by forbidding it. The element of ‘crossing, stepping over, exceeding’ contained in every creative impulse hence requires an ‘instigating boundary’.

Juarreo quotes Cilliers mentioning the eardrum¹⁰³ as an example of this principle: As the tympanic membrane obstructs arriving sound waves, it absorbs, integrates and transfers them through hammer, anvil and stirrup to the cochlea and the organ of Corti (all extended boundary- as well as amplifying elements), where the hair cells finally translate chemical to electrical impulses. A boundary constituting obstacles and constraints is requisite for the transformation of sound waves to nerve stimulation and the emergence of hearing.

To summarize: Within the concept of systemic boundaries, subtle relations between the notions of ‘open’ and ‘closed’, or ‘bounded’ and ‘porous’ must be recognized. Complex systems are *bounded* as far as their integrity is concerned, but *open* in as far as interactions with their environment are concerned. Both properties not only exist concurrently but are, moreover, mutually constitutive. Boundaries ‘are the (not spatial but dynamical) locus of emergent properties’.¹⁰⁴ By simultaneously effecting *constraint* and *permeability* they guarantee a system’s *identity* and *integrity* through the *differentiation from* and *connection to* its environment.

9. Complex systems are open.

This tenet is inherently linked to the complementary characteristic of complex systems being ‘bounded’. The notion of openness is hence not absolute, but must be recognized as complex in itself. A differentiation of qualities or degrees of ‘opening’ is therefore necessary.

As a system arises from the organization of the interactions of its components, its integrity, functionality and identity rely on its ‘*organizational closure*’.¹⁰⁵ Put simplistically, to be functional in a certain way entails not being functional in other ways. Hence such potential organizational options are constrained or ‘closed’. If a system’s organization were to change, it would become an altogether different system. In Minger’s words: ‘A system is organizationally closed if all its possible states of activity must always lead to or generate further activity within itself.’¹⁰⁶ As any specific organization will be ‘realized’ through an equally specific structure it may be said that systems are ‘structurally determined’.¹⁰⁷ Their organization (functionality, integrity, generativity)¹⁰⁸ results or emerges from their structure.

The distinction between *organization* and *structure* becomes important when considering the system’s relation to its environment. Any environmental influences can only affect structure. Should such influences change the structure, this *could* change the organization, though not necessarily so, as systemic resilience usually allows for a fair degree of adaptation to changing environments before the organizational integrity or functionality is effectively affected.¹⁰⁹ Strictly speaking, the environment cannot make an *input* directly into a system’s *organization* as this is closed and structurally determined. Hence it is more precise to speak of ‘perturbations

¹⁰² Juarrero, 100.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 101.

¹⁰⁵ This is an important principle underlying the concept of autopoietic systems as proposed by Maturana. Mingers, *Real-izing Information Systems*, 41.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰⁷ Mingers, 41. This corresponds with Maturana’s autopoietic concept.

¹⁰⁸ Another of Morin’s terminological creations: ‘generativity’ is a deducted noun to describe the quality or propensity of ‘being generative’.

¹⁰⁹ Even if a system is destroyed by its environment, arguably the disintegration of its *organization* only follows from that of its *structure*. Even in this case the systemic organization is hermetically ‘sealed off’ from the environment.

and compensations' rather than 'inputs and outputs'.¹¹⁰ Environmental changes might well affect the systemic structure and thereby *trigger* a certain organizational change. But, in their propensities and functional options, organizational changes are structurally (systemically) and not environmentally, dependant.

This conception has led to a widespread understanding of systems as principally closed entities.¹¹¹ However, such a perception overlooks a third 'vital concept', namely that of 'structural coupling'.¹¹² Structural coupling allows us to acknowledge a qualitatively different, somewhat 'deeper' link to the environment. Mingers summarizes this as follows:

The environment does not determine the [autopoietic system's] changes but it can be said to select states from among those made possible at any instant by the system's structure. In an environment characterized by recurring states ... continued autopoiesis will lead to selection in the organism of a structure which is suitable for that environment. The organism becomes structurally coupled to its environment and, indeed, to other organisms within that environment.¹¹³

'Structural coupling' thus replaces the somewhat problematic 'idea of adaptation',¹¹⁴ and concurrently considers the system's *autonomous integrity* as well as its *environmental dependence*. Thereby both notions gain depth and, moreover, can be recognized *without* the classical dichotomy of being mutually exclusive opposites. Whereas 'adaptation' implies a somewhat slavishly determined dependence, 'structural coupling' emphasizes the creative (autopoietic, individual, unique, diversified) element of 'solutions' to 'environmental conditions or challenges'.

A striking example of structural coupling becomes evident when considering the global environment of the earth's atmosphere with its high levels of (the potentially poisonous and highly reactive gas), oxygen. Aerobic organisms not only 'adapted' to this 'constraining condition', but (forced to 'interpret' the constraint as an opportunity) 'invented' the notion of breathing as an ingenious device of surviving and efficiently extracting energy from their surroundings. This allowed for significant evolutionary evolvments of life forms as access to high levels of energy enabled faster metabolisms. Our lungs (and by implication our large brains with their high energy consumption) reveal our structural coupling to earth's specific atmosphere. During every moment of our lives they have to maintain a connection to our environment, which is crucial to our very existence. Yet nobody considers the atmosphere (or the lungs) to limit human autonomy. Much rather the conception is that they in fact grant and enable our autonomy.

Structural coupling further suggests conceiving the environment as part of a bigger, 'nested structure' consist[ing] of other structure determined systems that are themselves changing through their own processes of structural coupling'.¹¹⁵ It aptly circumscribes the nature of non-linear, yet structurally relational and interpenetrating ecological interactions. I posit that the intrinsic 'openness' of systems should be conceived on this level. It is an implicit, indirect, 'covert' openness, not immediately and superficially evident, but undeniably manifesting in complex structural relations.

It has now been argued that systems are both bounded *and* open, indicating a 'complex link'¹¹⁶ between both notions. Morin reflects on this apparent paradox by suggesting that the decisive distinction to be made is not that between 'open' or 'closed', but between 'active' and 'non-active' systems where different combinations of

¹¹⁰ Mingers, *Real-izing Information Systems*, 44.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 41 Luhmann prominently represents this position, arguing that systems can only refer or 'speak' to himself in their own 'language' and hence have no way to 'know' the environment.

¹¹² Another term coined by Maturana, *ibid.*, 45.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Morin, *Method*, 196.

relative 'openings' and 'closures' may be at work concurrently.¹¹⁷ Complex systems principally exchange energy, matter and information with their environments,¹¹⁸ but not necessarily all of these at all times. Yet, no living (complex) system can ever be absolutely closed,¹¹⁹ as this would imply its (organizational) death. A degree of opening is vital and this leads Morin to the radical conclusion that 'the idea of opening ... transcends the idea of system'. Hence he proposes not to speak of 'open system, but of systemic, organizational, and also ontological, existential opening.'¹²⁰ (This idea will be considered in more detail in the discussion of *The Songs of Madosini* in Chapter 9.)

10. Complexity requires complex epistemology.

The juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory tenets should be recognized as characteristic of complexity thinking, so that 'resolving paradoxes' – perceived as epistemic irritations from a the vantage point of 'rational' and 'logical' thinking – is no longer necessary.

A conventional method of resolving paradoxes entails qualifying positions more precisely in order to replace contradictions with distinctions. Thereby one might arrive at the 'solution' that 'the part *in a system* is more, less or different than the part *in isolation*'. However, on closer scrutiny this 'clarification' actually means a separation of states during which a part is either *in a system* or *outside*. But ontic existence does not allow for such a separation, nor for such clarity. Rather, a part will be inside *and* outside concurrently and not exclusively *either inside or outside*. (e.g.: A woman is always also a daughter and remains that, even when she herself becomes a mother.) A part may belong to different systems in completely different roles at the same time. (The same woman might also be a sister, aunt, lover, trained professional, refugee, catholic, etc., all at the same time.) A part may also be a component in one system and act as a system in its own right in another context. (To her grandmother the woman stays the little grandchild, even as a successful manager of her own company.) Finally all these 'roles' are constantly changing and interacting, thereby creating their own systemic complexity.

Such overlapping 'realities' are for the biggest part 'invisible', even from the inside and for the 'role-playing' protagonist. For an outsider they are mostly not even 'knowable', unless such an external observer is introduced to the various relationships. This entails another crucial component in dealing with complexity, namely that of a requisite process of familiarization, understanding and learning 'over time': Complex states cannot be grasped instantaneously – not even by a supercomputer or a 'photographic brain' – due to their non-linearity. They are non-collapsible to simpler relations. The temporal dimension of the process of their recognition corresponds to that of the history of their realization.

To the astute observer – and especially to the rational, rigorously and scientifically inquisitive mind – it should become clear that complexity cannot be 'grasped' by just slightly expanding positivist, reductionist, and linear thinking; that it will not do to 'acknowledge' complexity in the world and 'leave it at that', but that such an acknowledgement will sooner or later require, compel, instigate, motivate and inspire an appreciation that in itself is complex.¹²¹ This would in principle amount to a complex epistemology.

Admittedly, such a knowledge system does not exist. Moreover, it cannot exist in a ready-made state. It can only arise in and from its (local, individual, historical) application. Hence *complexity thinking must entail a courageous heuristic component*. From a complexity perspective this is its virtue; from a positivist perspective it might well be perceived as a vice.¹²²

There is no way that conflicting value judgements such as these about different epistemological approaches can be resolved 'empirically' by means of assessing objective references. Instead, the value of each approach can

¹¹⁷ Morin, *Method*, 196.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 196.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹²¹ Arguably this may be perceived as a case of 'structural coupling' at work.

¹²² See footnote 164 in Chapter I, pg. 20.

only be known subjectively. It must be accepted that complexity may lead to empirical undecidability. Put differently, complexity thinking inevitably opens into the ethical domain.

11. Complexity invokes ethics.

This aspect has already been touched on in the overview of Paul Cilliers's work, where it was also shown that his coinage of 'critical complexity' was decisively influenced by ethical considerations. 'The ethical stance ... is an inevitable result of the inability of the theory of complexity to provide a complete description of all aspects of the system.'¹²³

It may be argued that the characteristic ethical dimension of complexity is inherently ingrained into any complex epistemology for reasons of its openness, incompleteness, undecidability, multi-methodology, etc. – in short, all aspects that could and would be perceived as 'shortcomings' from a conventional modernist perspective. In fact, the 'shortcomings' of such a knowledge system may be compared to that of an ineffective prison cell. And while a degree of openness (an escape route, a leak) would certainly be considered a deficiency from an overseer's perspective, it would be seen as a huge advantage (a convenience, a blessing, potentially even a life-saving opportunity) for the prisoner. Hence the question *what* this opening ultimately entails *per se* shifts to the question: *What* does the incompleteness entail *for whom*, i.e. for whose point of view and hence which ethical position?

Certainly the fully closed cell (of knowledge, traditions, conventions, laws, habits) affords much more control and in that sense possibly represents 'more order'. But this will apply only on a limited scale. Viewed from a perspective that recognizes not only the immediate and apparent 'positions of power', the stifling effect of rigid orders may in fact constitute a severe disruption of 'order on a higher level', stifling the creative, inspirational, spontaneous, lively and even antagonistic forces that might otherwise effect balancing interactions, necessary for the sustainability of higher level 'order'.

Though the metaphor of the prison cell is an admittedly radical and simplified image, it does highlight another aspect of closed (watertight, coherent) knowledge systems. Such systems merely need to be administered. The prison warden (the institutionally empowered scholar, expert, representative, 'official') is given external authority to guard the cell, without a personal conviction (certainty) of the other's conviction (opinion and judgment) being required. In fact, the efficient fulfilment of official duty – as the only measurable entity – suffices. Personal conviction is considered irrelevant as long as it doesn't interfere with the duty, and undesirable if it does. Orwellian as it might seem, this model aptly describes the essential structures of modern institutions, educational institutions included.

While 'liberal' or 'enlightened' managers will immediately attest the need for individual space, decisions, responsibilities and contributions, they will be hard pressed to consider eliminating in principle the hierarchy that affords them the power to 'grant' a benevolent 'degree of freedom' to their subjects. But it is exactly here where a 'complexity claim' of profound implications should be recognized: The ethical dimension is that of the subject endowed with a responsibility arising from his or her *own* perception and *self-responsible* judgement, not because it is *permitted* from a meta-position, but because it is *required* in the absence of a meta-position. In fact, it is essentially necessitated by the impossibility of there being any meta-position.

Perhaps it should be added that the principal acknowledgement of this structural analysis of hierarchies does not amount to a call for anarchy, or even for the dissolution of all hierarchical structures. In many cases there are good reasons for such structures, i.e. withholding responsibilities from children, minors, uninformed or untrained subjects. However, it should be noted that the reasons are only good as long as they are also temporary. In due course children outgrow parental supervision and once information has been gained or training completed, it is natural to gain an 'accreditation' that amounts to a shift in systemic relations.

¹²³ Cilliers, & Preiser, *Complexity, Difference and Identity: An Ethical Perspective*, 268.

The notion of 'shift' is also important here. It implies gradual, historical, temporal changes. Systems tend to grow and not emanate suddenly; to favour evolution over revolution; to write history and not manifest in cataclysmic events.¹²⁴ The dawning of the political idea of democracy may serve as telling example. Against the fear of ruling sovereigns to devolve responsibility and, by implication, power to the plebeian subject, the idea has nevertheless proven irresistible. Modern democracies – far from representing 'perfect' systems – nevertheless indicate a deep appreciation for the fact that there exists no 'sovereign' capable of 'ruling' to the benefit of all, but that this must become a responsibility of the sum of individual subjects.

An acknowledgement of the complexities affecting human society and its eco-sphere necessarily leads to increased ethical awareness. Conversely the recognition of the ethical dimension inherent to all human and societal behaviour must invariably lead to an acknowledgement of the complexities involved. Once again the 'double movement' – complexity as mutually reflexive *condition* and *characteristic* – becomes apparent.

12. Complexity necessitates (and strengthens) subjectivity.

The notion of cognition as 'bringing forth' the world¹²⁵ requires more detailed reflection. As discussed earlier, the concept would seem to lead straight into a *constructivist epistemology* under the auspices of second-order cybernetics, but could also be connected to *emergence* from a third-order perspective.

The difference is at once subtle and profound. As the observer can never escape from his own condition there remains in all perception an irreducible dimension of subjectivity. This does not mean that perception amounts to mere projection or imagination. Rather, as an activity, perception is repeated on various systemic levels (the observer-system relationship being one of them). The 'bringing forth' of tangible or immaterial qualities results from interaction on all levels. In this sense perception may be described as an *emerging* quality or propensity, resulting from the interactive engagement we conventionally call observation. Observation and perception are thus *not automatically linked*: it requires the organizational closure of the (uniquely organized) observing organism, *as well as* the phenomenon that stimulated the observer into the act of processing the stimulus, to bring forth – that is 'to make' – the connection.

This 'making' may now be understood rather more literally than convention would have it. Once *made*, observation and perception are in fact *structurally linked*¹²⁶ and the established link should be thought of as something real, if only as a relationship resulting from the connection. Phenomenon, stimulus, response, interpretation (and potentially further on with re-action, feedback, intervention, etc.) all manifest in an eventful (embodied, experienced) circular interaction. Hence this 'circle' amounts to a complex system in its own right, with all the characteristics as spelled out in these reflections. It 'makes' sense to describe cognition (perception, apprehension) as a 'close, rich, nonlinear, dynamic, recurrent, looping interaction',¹²⁷ complete with constraints and emergences. It flows from and contributes to a general systemic generativity, concurrently complementary and antagonistic.

Remarkably, linguistic convention has long since 'made' and hence firmly established the 'connection' with the concept expressed in the term 'realization' – through its profound double sense of *perceiving by making real*. This captures precisely the double dimension of 'bringing forth', indissolubly (and profoundly) binding together the *subjective*, the *emergent* and the *real*.

The connection made thus *strengthens* the notion of subjectivity, *substantiates* the notion of the emergent and *extends* the notion of the real:

¹²⁴ In each of these examples the latter alternative could be ascribed to external forces, which might of course occur and severely affect existing systems, but do not stem from their own intrinsic trajectory.

¹²⁵ See footnote 124, pg. 16.

¹²⁶ In Maturana's vocabulary: 'structurally coupled'.

¹²⁷ For reflections on 'loops' see pg. 25 ff.

- The systems perspective frees *subjectivity* (subjective perception, knowledge, interpretation, etc.) from the baggage of relativism or *randomness*, with which it is often associated. Instead the subject, defined by its very subjectivity, is understood as deeply embedded, actively integrated, physically embodied into a web of relations. Remarkably and contrary to its perceived randomness, it is precisely the quality of *subjectivity* that grants for unique *specificity*, once the subject is anchored in systemic relations. Instead of assuming that subjectivity is *relative* in an *absolute* sense it should be recognized as *relational* in a *systemic* sense. By its very nature it must always be *dedicated* (directed, applied, attentive, involved) and hence cannot be *random*. (A distracted subject would be a random observer.)
- In this context *emergence* loses some of its ‘ghostly nature’¹²⁸ – Morin’s term by which he indicates the ambiguity of the concept of being neither ‘fully ‘real’ nor ‘purely formal’. By the same token it can be circumscribed as being ‘real’ and ‘construed’, which is another way of saying that speaking about anything ‘real’ inevitably implies speaking subjectively. But whereas previously this was perceived as mutually diminishing the (absolute) value of both concepts, it may now be argued that supplementing each other both notions respectively substantiate each other. The subject and its subjectivity – itself *emerging* from countless embodied interactions – is real by virtue of *not* being isolated, *not* emanating from itself, but by existing from and in relation to something outside and other.
- Finally, the understanding of *reality* is extended beyond its physical, tangible and conventionally verifiable domain to include the subjective realm. Obviously it would be futile to attempt postulating an unambiguous definition of ‘reality’ *per se*. Instead, it should be noted that subjectivity ‘prevents’ not only a *final definition* (of reality), but in fact prohibits the notion of a *final reality* itself. If the subject is real, than reality (really) is subjective; once again, not because there is nothing out there beyond the perceiving subjects, but because billions of subjects are part of that reality. Subjectivity and reality imply, entail and constitute each other, hence neither can exist without the other. Yet, as in any complex relationship, neither can simply be reduced to the other either. An irresolvable tension remains, emanating (for example) in the indefinable boundaries between the *subjective* and the *real*.

The concept of ‘perceptual realization’ should be distinguished from a constructivist understanding of randomly ‘cognizing’ a solely sensory reality. It concerns the necessary ‘framing’ or contextualization of any observation. This is not only a matter of physical necessity (to recognize *something* requires a certain focus, which hence makes it impossible to see *everything* at the same time), but also a matter of deliberate choice. Depending on what s/he wants to see, the observer ‘frames’ the systemic borders. The decision how ‘to cut them’ out rests fully in the subjectivity of the observer’s choice. Referring to the example given earlier,¹²⁹ I may (and *must* for a meaningful interaction) choose whether I see in the woman the mother, daughter, refugee, manager or lover, all of which she is at the same time, but from which ‘capacities’ only a specifically ‘framed’ interaction is meaningful at a given moment. This subjective choice is thus far from relative, random or meaningless. On the contrary, the framing is crucial with regard to an adequate response and any ensuing engagement, which – as this simple example shows – can be meaningful in very many different ways, depending on the chosen context.

While subjectivity may thus on occasion turn out to be a potentially haphazard and inappropriate facility or condition, it is at the same time *the only possible* observational (perceptive, interactive) option in the face of systemic plurality. As the *object* has on all levels given way to the system¹³⁰ there can be no *objectivity*. In an enigmatic loop contained in a systemic bond, observation, appreciation and ultimately *realization of complexity* allows, necessitates and *generates subjectivity*.

¹²⁸ Morin, *On Complexity*, 10.

¹²⁹ In the section on complex epistemology, see Chapter 1.6. pg. 23 ff.

¹³⁰ Morin, *Method*, 96: ‘Our organized world is an archipelago of systems in the ocean of disorder. All that was object has become system. All that was even an elementary unit, including and especially the atom, has become system.’

CHAPTER 3

MOORINGS IN COMPLEXITY

The previous chapter was intended to clear sufficient operational space to embark on a preliminary exploration of thinking about music from a complexity perspective. I propose to conduct these investigations from and towards the moorings of the already-mentioned concepts. DIFFERENCE, IDENTITY, CONTEXT and NOVELTY have rich, yet remarkably differing connotations in music and complexity theory. From a complexity perspective they are considered enabling and constructive, even crucially constitutive concepts, directly associated with core systemic properties. In remarkable contrast to this, mainstream musicological perceptions seem to view all four as vexing issues.

1. DIFFERENCE

a) CONTESTING DIFFERENCE

As I have elaborated elsewhere,¹ an unwritten taboo on speaking about difference hovers above current musicological discourse. The discipline's discomfort with this notion stems from post-colonial sensibilities objecting to previously common colloquial postulation of musical differences that flaunted colonial attitudes in their hierarchic perception. The Princeton-based Ghanaian musicologist Kofi Agawu has been especially vocal in 'contesting (this kind of essential) difference',² proposing instead a reading of 'sameness' underlying superficial musical and cultural differences. Representing an African perspective, he has thoroughly sensitized the musicological community towards 'an inherited tradition of European representations' as 'persistent strategy of differencing' with – as he claims – the aim of maintaining an 'imbalance of power.'³

Agawu's objection to an abusive play of power is valid and his observation that power games might covertly be at work in the rigid postulations of musical (ethnic, stylistic, etc.) difference should be heeded as an important warning. However, I believe the consequence of dismissing the notion of difference altogether just to avert a given danger arising from its inappropriate understanding is untenable (ontologically) and ill-advised (epistemologically, strategically).

By positing that 'differences... are propped up by textual constructions'⁴ and that they are 'made' not 'given', Agawu takes a constructivist position, and thus blames anyone postulating the existence of musical differences not only for erring musically, but implicitly also for subscribing to an essentialist attitude. Adamantly arguing against the 'violent hierarchy in which Self is subject, Other is object',⁵ he seemingly fails to see that it is ultimately impossible to distinguish neatly between 'made' and 'given' and that in any case either category produces difference ('real' or 'perceived'), whether he likes it or not. I certainly follow Agawu in his call for an ethical consideration in naming or constructing differences. However, I do not believe that a 'presumption of sameness' will 'guarantee [such] an ethical motivation.'⁶ Much rather I would trust a *full recognition of the richness of difference* (diversity, variety, multiplicity, heterogeneity, distinction) to inspire a respectful (astute, careful, differentiated) and, hence, ethical engagement.

Agawu errs in blaming 'difference' for the ethno-musicological misrepresentations of 'African' music. The point, I would hold, is not to contest difference, but to contest its abuse. Arguably instances of such abuse

¹ Hans Huyssen, 'Music Production in the Intercultural Sphere: Challenges and Opportunities', *Acta Academica Supplementum: African and other cultures: traces and processes of mutual translation.* vol. 1, (2012).

² Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (Routledge, New York & London 2003), 151 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, 156-157.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 171, original emphasis.

result from a misunderstanding (if not full ignorance) of the complexity surrounding the notion of difference. Before a (musicological) position can be regained, from which difference may once again be 'faced', acknowledged, appreciated, esteemed, potentially even be celebrated, it will first be necessary to reinstate a clear understanding of the concept of 'difference', that is: 'decontaminate' it from hierarchic, modernist and colonial associations. It is my hope that this may be achieved by revisiting and investigating the 'phenomenon of difference' from a complexity perspective.

b) ADVOCATING DIFFERENCE

No two existing entities can ever be exactly the same, if only for their particular histories of coming into being or the impossibility of existing at the same locality at the same time. Thus, principally and ontologically, *difference* in the form of *particularity* is inscribed into the very notion of existence.

Further, nothing exists *on its own* or *of its own*. No final, 'elementary unit' ('primary, irreducible and indivisible')⁷ which is not made up of smaller interacting particles and which is not, itself, interacting with other parts, has ever been found. In fact, if we accept that even the atom must be considered a system 'constituted of particles in mutual interaction',⁸ it follows that there would be nothing – no universe, no substance – if it weren't for *different* particles (protons, neutrons, electrons), which, through their interactions, constitute matter on the atomic level.

Continuing this line of thought, it may be observed that differences become ever more *differentiated* on subsequent levels. The notion of 'differentiation' may perhaps best be understood as the reflexive application of the principle to itself: noting and relating differences amongst differences. Hence, most remarkably, related differences do not lead to dissipation or segregation, but instead play into complexity characterized by asymmetrical (non-linear) *interactions of heterogeneous parts*.⁹

By stressing the *heterogeneity* of components it is posited that *difference* lies at the heart of complexity. (Conversely, if the components were homogenous, their relationship could be described as symmetrical, linear and predictable. In the absence of any tension no interesting or enabling interaction could arise between them.) But another crucially important phenomenon manifests concurrently: *interactions* lead to *interrelations* and hence to a *unity* based on *diversity*. Morin speaks of 'unitas multiplex'¹⁰ in this regard, a 'unity of and in diversity'¹¹ as another prime example of a dynamic, dialogical phenomenon that is irreducible to either of its antagonistic components.

This (complex) understanding indicates a subtle shift of perception from the elementary, static 'unit' to a composite, dynamic 'unity'. If it is thus accepted that such 'unities', rather than 'units', underlie 'all known reality'¹² (and this can easily be demonstrated by referring to the systemic character of atoms, molecules, organs, organisms, societies, eco-systems, and just as much to that of logic, languages, consciousness, beliefs etc.), then it must be attested that by the same token *difference* – at once a *diversifying* and *uniting* agent – lies at the base of everything. Difference therefore makes *the* difference between existence and non-existence.

Paul Cilliers arrives at a similar conclusion from a slightly different angle, namely that of unpacking the notions of difference and diversity 'in the context of post-structural theories of meaning'.¹³ Once again the point of departure is an understanding of complex systems, where 'difference is not merely one of the characteristics of such systems, but a precondition for their existence.'¹⁴ Cilliers understands such foundational 'preconditions'

⁷ Morin, *Method*, 94.

⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁹ See pg 35 ff, Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 4, etc.

¹⁰ Morin, *Method*, 144.

¹¹ Ibid., my emphasis.

¹² Morin, *On Complexity*, 9.

¹³ Paul Cilliers, 'Difference, Identity and Complexity', *Philosophy Today* (2010), 55.

¹⁴ Ibid., 56.

in terms of Derrida's notion of 'traces' (i.e. signs stripped of inherent meaning and own 'positive content'¹⁵): 'The sign has no component that belongs to itself only; it is merely a collection of the traces of every other sign running through it.'¹⁶ All signs are therefore constituted solely by a 'system of differences'.¹⁷ The conviction that the meaning and identity of any sign *results* from such differences and not *precedes* them, leads him to the radical formulation of a 'non-foundational ontology' in which 'there are really only differences.'¹⁸

This 'logic of difference' is based on the argument that 'difference is a necessary condition' for meaning: 'For something to be recognisable as being that something, it must be possible to differentiate it from something else. ... The more differences there are, the more distinctions can be made. Meaning is the result of these distinctions, of the play of differences.'¹⁹ From this principal observation Cilliers develops a 'law of meaning' that eventually contains some additional qualifiers, but in principle states that '*without differences there can be no meaning*'.²⁰ Adamant that this should be no abstract concept, Cilliers immediately offers an extrapolation: 'If we accept this, it will follow that if we want a rich understanding of the world and of each other (i.e., a lot of meaning), if we want resilient and dynamic organisations, then we need an abundance of differences.'²¹

With this induction of principal systemic observations into the self-same mechanisms at work on social and ecological levels, Cilliers underwrites the trans-disciplinarity and universality of a general systems theory. This transferral should not be misunderstood as a 'recipe' solution or quick fix of very real and level-specific constraints. As both Morin and Cilliers have emphasized, complexity is more a 'problem concept' than a 'solution concept'.²² However, the applicability of a single, overall epistemology proves extremely helpful, as it helps to distinguish principally between incidental and structural conditions, guiding one through contingencies equipped with a general understanding of the relationships at play.

Another striking example for such a 'systems extrapolation' is Cilliers's classical formulation in which he asserts that 'diversity is not a problem to be solved [but that] it is the precondition for the existence of any interesting behaviour.'²³ The optimism of this tenet is especially conspicuous in South Africa, where the 'messiness'²⁴ resulting from cultural and ethnic diversity is often perceived as exceedingly problematic. Viewing the country's diversity from a complexity perspective will not automatically solve its deep-rooted problems, but it will highlight a unique inherent potential that colonial, modernist, socialist or capitalist views have all failed to recognize and bring to fruition. Establishing conditions in which this potential could come to fruition may well be a gradual and in all probability lengthy process. It may even fail. Yet, to have envisioned it is the decisive point. Without this vision, the possibility of its realization will not exist. It is with this kind of 'reading' of inconspicuous but deeply entrenched systemic characteristics that the general systemic epistemology proves helpful and potentially even path-breaking (... *se hace camino al andar*).²⁵

Difference is often connected to the notion of 'resource'. The usual argument is that a system needs a minimum of 'requisite variety'²⁶ to allow it to react and adapt to changing environmental conditions. Moreover, Cilliers raises the point that a system is generally better off if it 'has more diversity than it needs in order to merely cope with its environment', as this allows it 'to experiment internally with alternative possibilities.' This capability to experiment may be understood as a propensity (or a metaphor) for 'being creative',²⁷ doing

¹⁵ Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism*, 44.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 56.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² 'We must go towards system as problem, not towards system as solution.' Morin, *Method*.

²³ Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 55.

²⁴ This term is used here not as a derogative assertion, but as an expression of the impossibility to establish a notion of functionality or order that would be acceptable to all.

²⁵ See Chapter 1, pg. 24, footnote 209.

²⁶ Ashby quoted in Cilliers, 62.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

something out of the ordinary, unexpected, unpredictable, with a certain non-functional playfulness. In fact, it seems that the phenomenon of ‘excess diversity’²⁸ (redundant variety, which would seem superfluous under normal conditions) is no luxury, but an ingrained systemic measure to safeguard survival in the long term, when it might become necessary to develop alternative strategies to adapt to changing conditions.

Finally, and as I have elaborated in more detail elsewhere,²⁹ *difference* should not be confused or equated with *opposition* and the associated notions of conflict and competition; nor should it invoke an impulse towards resolving the apparently uncomfortable tension arising from such a contradictory relationship. Instead, *difference* – understood as constitutive in its antagonism – is necessary as a constant ‘measure’ (in the double sense of *gauging* and *intervening*) by ‘which the components of the system acquire meaning’.³⁰

c) DIFFERENTIATING DIFFERENCE

Difference must be conceived as *solely relational* (something ‘between’, not ‘within’), as a mere referential term with no ontological *a priori* existence. Bateson³¹ stresses this point by emphasizing that ‘difference is an abstract matter.’³² Obviously it cannot be anything like an ‘inherent quality, as nothing can be ‘different to itself’ or ‘other than itself’. Yet ‘difference’ is somewhat more than just an ‘external attribute’, as it is not added to the entity under scrutiny but arises from its properties. In a sense ‘difference’ is a mere construction of the observer who perceives, compares and subsequently differentiates. Yet the observer doesn’t really ‘construct’ anything. He or she merely processes information, which is precisely where difference becomes relevant. For ‘what we mean by information – the elementary unit of information – is a *difference which makes a difference*.’³³ This formulation (one of Bateson’s ingenious expressions) elucidates the metaphor of ‘the territory not being the map’³⁴ describing the irreducible dichotomy between any *Ding an sich* and its perception: The territory (the objective, ‘real’ world) remains forever elusive. What is mapped (into our sensory organs, minds and ideas) are the differences that differentiate the ‘morphology’ of the real thing while granting us a perception thereof. Differences make the world around us intelligible. Differences are the only instances that trigger sensations onto which our sensory capacities are able to latch. Differences – albeit merely abstract and not endowed with any inherent essence – lie at the base of our existence: They allow us to navigate, to extract meaning – ultimately to exist in this world.

Bateson’s explications of the role and even physiological functionality of differences – more precisely what he calls ‘transforms of differences’,³⁵ which underlie our very ability to perceive, to conceptualize and to act – further highlight the crucial importance of the notion of differentiation. He points out, for example, how the idea of an ‘impulse’ in an axon ‘is a misleading metaphor’.³⁶ For clearly there is no analogue nervous impulse flowing in response to a sensory trigger, but ‘what travels is a difference, or a transform of difference.’³⁷ ‘What travels’ (in the body) is quite different from the original impulse, as it must adapt to the immanent propensity of the pathway, whether this be an axon, a beam of light or a sound wave. In each case, information travels along such pathways as changes of states (electrical charges in the case of axons, degrees of air pressure in the case of sound waves, waves of an electromagnetic field in the case of light), and thus as *differences* that get passed on.

²⁸ Viz. Peter Allen’s ‘law of excess diversity’, quoted in Oliver Human. ‘Potential Economies: Complexity, Novelty and the Event’, Philosophy Ph.D, Dept. Philosophy, Stellenbosch University (Stellenbosch 2011), 84, 85.

²⁹ Huyssen, *Music Production in the Intercultural Sphere*, 51 ff.

³⁰ Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 56.

³¹ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1972) This collection of essays by a twentieth century polymath with a remarkable ability of straddling hugely diverse fields of knowledge reveal repeated reflections on the notion of difference as a matter of pivotal importance.

³² *Ibid.*, 458.

³³ *Ibid.*, 459, original emphasis.

³⁴ Korzybski, quoted in Bateson, 455.

³⁵ Bateson, 318.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

This ‘Batesonian’ model fully supports the tenets proposed earlier when expounding Mingers’s understanding of Critical Realism.³⁸ Opposing a constructivist view, CR holds that a real world exists and that existing entities must therefore be imbued with some kind of inherent (own, particular) substance and/or essence. However, concerning any perception of such things or entities it must be accepted that they only become intelligible through a process of differentiating, (‘distinguishing from’) and relating (‘linking to’, ‘identifying with’). Existence – by definition individual, particular, historical, different from other (equally individual and particular) existences – necessitates the crutches of *differentiation* and *identification* to bridge the ingrained existential abysses gaping between different beings. These schisms inevitably manifest and result from the ‘de-scission’ of an entity being ‘as it is’ (and therefore ‘not different’) and ‘being itself’ (and therefore ‘not another’). Existence amounts to ‘choosing’ one option by cutting out all others; one ‘possibility actualized’³⁹ by constraining all others.

As a concept or ‘quality’,⁴⁰ difference can only be determined negatively, as it were, by comparison with an external ‘other’. Yet its ‘non-existence’ does not render it insignificant. On the contrary, it becomes decisively important by heavily implicating the notions of *identity* and *meaning*. By implication the idea of ‘identity’ is equally insubstantial in itself and only gains significance in relation to its ‘distinction’ from other identities (or meanings) by establishing defining differences. Thinking of identities as ‘essential, inherent qualities’ (a cognitively ingrained, intuitive human habit) often overlooks the role of the external agent of difference or differentiation to arrive at any meaningful concepts or definitions of such presumed qualities.

The underlying point to be made here is that in all these differentiating and existential considerations subjectivity is a principal factor. The fact that we are forced to employ the mechanism of differentiation to carve out meaningful relationships may ultimately disclose more about this very mode of our existence than about any so-called ‘reality’. Conversely – and in full acknowledgment of this principal limitation of not having immediate and direct access to an objective reality – one may marvel at the ingenuity of the differential process at arriving at derivations, ‘giving’ meaning by incrementally ‘constraining’ the meaningless.

The reflections on difference have led us into a web of inextricably related ties. I posit that this *relational complexity must henceforth intrinsically be acknowledged* when dealing with considerations of difference, identity, subjectivity and existence. Below, a flowchart-model with a ‘tetralogical’ Morinian loop⁴¹ elucidates the multiplicity of relationships between these inseparably entangled components. By employing (or paraphrasing) such a model the following set of interactions may be proposed:

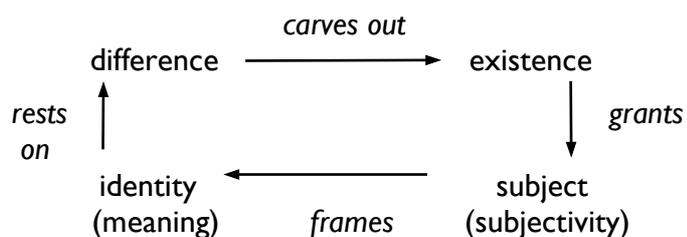


Fig. 2 Relational flowchart modelled after Morin’s idea of the tetralogical loop

The chart depicts an on-going circular and recursive process: Difference *carves out* existence that *grants* the subject its subjectivity, *framed* as perceived identity or meaning, which is once again *negotiated* by differentiation.

Elaborated somewhat it illustrates that difference allows (defines, constrains) identity and meaning. Any existence arises through difference and can only be recognized and distinguished by virtue of its ‘difference’, which in this context becomes almost interchangeable with ‘identity’. Concurrently (by implication) the ‘subject’

³⁸ Refer to the reflection on critical realism, Parenthesis III, pg. 42 ff.

³⁹ Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 59.

⁴⁰ In the light of its ‘non-existence’, I am somewhat undecided, whether ‘difference’ may actually be considered a ‘quality’, which would be somewhat more than a (merely projected) ‘concept’.

⁴¹ For example Morin, *Method*, 54.

– a concept determined by its ‘subjectivity’ and suspended between ‘existence’ and ‘identity’ – relies on difference just as much. Contesting ‘difference’ would in the same vein amount to contesting ‘subjectivity’. Finally, no ‘sameness’ (‘identity’) could be established without gauging this against ‘differences’. This relational web should clarify how all four concepts permeate, inform and even constitute each other.

No such (schematic) model can claim to represent comprehensively real-world relationships or causations. However, the model demonstrates that all of the involved concepts are interdependent and that none can be ‘resolved’ in any way by eliminating or reducing any one of the other components.

I hope to have established hereby a first ‘mooring’ from which a fruitful exploration of musical implications of this differentiated understanding of *difference* and, more specifically, *musical difference* will be possible. The pertaining reflections in Chapters 9 and 10 are scheduled to depart from here.

2. IDENTITY

It will have become clear from the reflections in the previous section that the concepts of ‘difference’ and ‘identity’ are inextricably linked to each other. Paradoxical as it might sound, from a certain perspective they appear as but two aspects of the same thing. To paraphrase Cilliers:⁴² ‘For something to be *identifiable*⁴³ as being that something, it must be possible to *differentiate* it from something else ... The more differences there are, the more distinctions can be made. *Identity*⁴⁴ is the result of these *distinctions*, of the play of differences.’

Accordingly, Agawu’s contestation of musical differences in a certain sense also implies a denial of musical identities. However, he strangely omits to reflect on this question, as though failing to assess the full consequences of his polemic against difference. It strikes me as noteworthy that for all the ruminations on ‘representing African Music’, the term ‘identity’ is not even registered in the index of Agawu’s book.⁴⁵ On closer scrutiny it appears to be conspicuously absent in other postcolonial texts as well.⁴⁶ In fact, I believe that there is a structural reason for the ‘misrepresentation’ of identity in postcolonial discourse, as I will show in the following section.

a) IDENTITY DENIED

According to Achille Mbembe, one of the most conspicuous topics in postcolonial studies is ‘a critique, not of the West per se, but of the effects of cruelty and blindness produced by a certain [Western] conception’.⁴⁷ Summarized under the term ‘colonial’, this conception is largely defined by ‘the violence inherent in a particular concept of reason, and the gulf separating European moral philosophy from its practical, political and symbolic outcomes.’⁴⁸ Analyses of this kind of violence highlight ‘colonial figures of the inhuman and of racial difference’⁴⁹ time and again, and often ‘race’ is interpreted as ‘the wild region, the beast, of European humanism, ... something that has to be called unconscious self-hatred.’⁵⁰ From here Mbembe concludes that ‘racism in general, and colonial racism in particular, represents the transference of this self-hatred to the Other.’⁵¹ It is here – in

⁴² Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 56, my emphases.

⁴³ I replace the original term ‘recognisable’ with ‘identifiable’.

⁴⁴ ‘Meaning’ replaced with ‘Identity’.

⁴⁵ Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions*.

⁴⁶ See Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (University of California Press, Berkeley 2001).

⁴⁷ Achille Mbembe, *What is Postcolonial Thinking? An Interview With Achille Mbembe By Olivier Mongin, Nathalie Lempereur and Jean-Louis Schlegel*, 2006, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-01-09-mbembe-en.html> [accessed on 3.5.10].

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

the guise of the 'Other' – that the notion of 'identity' makes its prime and, needless to say, badly thwarted appearance in the postcolonial discourse.

A similarly problematic perception of identity underlies another important postcolonial topic. In his analysis of characteristic traits in postcolonial literature, Ashcroft⁵² remarks on the predominance of the notions of 'exile' and 'displacement' and, as a consequence, the fate of the rejected, the outcasts and the outsiders. Since place, and by implication history and culture, may be seen as the main, tangible signifiers of identity,⁵³ 'displacement' amounts to a 'crisis of identity'.⁵⁴ Here the notion is not problematized as denigrating construct, but instead the contention is its absence. In this context 'identity' is viewed as an asset or a quality denied to the 'subaltern' by colonialism.⁵⁵

As one of the central tenets of postcolonial critique, this claim warrants scrutiny. The image of 'identity' as 'something' that every person should justifiably 'possess', but which under colonial auspices could be 'robbed' from its rightful owners, seems to reveal an essentialist understanding of identity.

Certainly there can be no denial of a serious 'crisis of identity' in the wake of colonialism. Slavery and racism – the inability to recognize the humanness in a foreign, fellow human being, which subsequently justified the brutal exploitation, marginalization or expatriation of people, cast off as name-, face- and soulless 'Others' – have not only inflicted unaccountable suffering on humankind, but have destroyed innumerable lives and, in that sense, identities. Postcolonial critique must certainly be credited for having revealed the full extent of damage inflicted on societies' and individuals' identities by abusive hierarchical structures. However, tragically, it now appears that postcolonial thinking somehow perpetuates these crises by being caught up time and again in 'gazes' that – beyond the pretext of their little prefix – remain 'colonial'.

In an ironic twist the critical understanding of the capitalized (stigmatized, labelled, denigrated) 'Other', has in recent decades invariably tainted the understanding of 'other' *in general*: 'other' in the sense of a relational and reciprocal 'vis-à-vis' to whom – as a 'self' in his or her own right – my self is in turn an 'other'. Postcolonial theory remains constantly and vigilantly suspicious of abusive intentions that may underlie any mention of 'identity'. Recognizing and naming a violent stigmatization, hidden under a linguistic misnomer and therefore unaccounted for, is one thing. However, effectively disqualifying and rendering useless a prime relational concept by incessantly reiterating its deprecatory potential, is another. If postcolonial thinking had originally set out to devise 'alternative ways of reading our modernity',⁵⁶ the time has arrived once more to focus clearly on this goal. For as matters stand now the stigmatization of the 'term' other – in a tragic adoption of worst practices of colonial mutilation on a linguistic level – blurs, if not perverts, such alternative readings.

If this sounds like a harsh judgement, it should be read as an adamant plea for an urgent and overdue clarification: Identity is not an *essential* quality, 'residing' only in the particular, the individual or the self. It is a *relational* quality constituted between the self and the other. Moreover, it is a quality of a relationship in which 'self' and 'other' are fully interchangeable, depending on the respective subjective positions of the involved parties. Hence the *self* cannot be thought, understood, perceived, appreciated or 'identified' without the *other*. Discarding the notion of 'other' not only perpetuates the denial of others' identities, *it amounts to denying one's own identity*. Moreover, it severely impoverishes all identities and relationships by preventing the deployment of any meaningful interactions, which may in fact be all the richer if significant differences between self and other exist and are permitted to persist. For an in-depth exploration of the notion of relational identity, it becomes necessary to bid the Postcolony farewell and purposefully enter Complexity.

⁵² Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, & Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (Routledge, New York 2002), 8.

⁵³ Denis-Constant Martin, *Sounding the Cape. Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa* (African Minds, Somerset West 2013), 5.

⁵⁴ Ashcroft, 8.

⁵⁵ Gayatri Spivak's term for the 'suppressed', which has become a generically used postcolonial designation.

⁵⁶ Ashcroft, 8.

b) IDENTITY NEGOTIATED

In its everyday use the notion of identifying (denoting the individuality of someone or the singularity of something by means of specifying, naming, describing and characterizing the person or thing) seems unproblematic. On closer scrutiny, however, it shows that such definitions are restricted by a limited vocabulary that allows anything to be identified solely from within itself. Very soon the act of *distinguishing* must be invoked in order to further delineate or specify an identity. Thus, what was initially or intuitively perceived to be *essential*, becomes *referential*.

The very root of the word 'identity' (the latin *idem* – 'the same') refers to a *comparison* rather than to any specific, own or inherent *quality*. This comparative element is even more pronounced when we speak of the action of 'identifying', which invariable calls for the preposition 'with'. Even on a grammatical level a relation is invoked. In the process of establishing *what something is* by *identifying it with something else*, the notions of comparison, relationship and association are implicit.

Here a short recapitulation of Cilliers's reflexions on difference and meaning is necessary, for the previously quoted statement that 'identification' rests on 'differentiation'⁵⁷ now needs to be qualified: While the recognition of meaning or identity does depend on differences, it should be added that it depends on a 'measure' of difference. A 'limitless play of difference'⁵⁸ would be meaningless, random or chaotic, as no relations would result and the deferral of interactions would be absolute.⁵⁹

The paradox is apparent: To define something as 'the same' (itself, unique, specific, singular) requires it 'to be different' from anything else. At the same time it cannot be completely different, as this would prohibit any meaningful comparison; it must have some shared (same) characteristics or properties, which allow for the perception of *nuances* of sameness and difference. From this follows that any thing or any person can only be partly identified and – by implication – partly distinguished. What we consider 'identity' is always made up of common (shared) as well as unique (individual) properties.

Strictly speaking, therefore, *identity* can always only be *partial identity*. There can be no such thing as a 'complete' (absolute, unmitigated) identity. This might sound surprising and even illogical, but it can in fact easily be demonstrated by a thought experiment:

If only a single 'thing' (entity, unit) existed in the universe it would arguably be fully unique and – in the truest sense of the word – singular. But of course nobody would know – not only because nobody would be around to know, but also because such a radical singularity would be fully unfathomable, unrelated, isolated, dissociated, inexplicable, inaccessible, meaningless.⁶⁰

As things stand, *no* thing exists on its very own. The universe is by definition a multiply occupied space. By mere virtue of existing, everything in it is already related on a most elementary level. From here on an almost infinite number of iterative distinctions can be made – continuous bifurcations departing from a shared trunk into a vast web of forever subdividing branches. Identity becomes increasingly pronounced towards the tips of the branches. (In this context it may be defined as *the end of a commonality*, the moment at which differences finally become distinguishable.) Yet, the further the advancement into singular specialization, speciation or individualization proceeds, the longer the journey on all previously shared junctions will have been. The image of the branching tree aptly illustrates the intrinsic and mutually *constitutive bond of sameness and differentiation*: intriguingly an increase in the one inevitably implies an increase in the other as well. The ultimate articulate, clear-cut, finite and singular 'identity' can only emanate as an *eventual* (subsequent, final) twig or leaf, *departing* from a multitude of shared bases. It cannot be considered as a *primal* (essential, elementary) quality, nor is it an *original* condition.

⁵⁷ See pages 55 and 58.

⁵⁸ See pg. 58.

⁵⁹ Viz.: comparing apples to motorcycles.

⁶⁰ In fact such a situation is essentially unthinkable and indescribable, as of course no mind or language would exist in such a void universe, to perceive and name it. The radically singular is by definition inaccessible.

Highlighting the substantial common (shared, mutual) aspects in this elucidation does not imply an underestimation of the importance of individual (unique, particular) properties. The well-known fact that humans and chimpanzees share almost 99% of the same DNA,⁶¹ may serve as a telling example that a minute, final difference can ‘make all the difference’. Once again (as stated in the previous section on ‘difference’), the point to be stressed is that the notion of ‘identity’ irreducibly relies on ‘sameness’ as well as ‘differentiation’.

Beyond these principal philosophical reflexions, other disciplines offer strong evidence for the relational dimension of identity as well. The social anthropologist Denis-Constant Martin points out that ‘[P]sychology and psychoanalysis insist on the *reflexive dimension of any process of identity construction*: it is through the discovery of Others and the exploration of the relationships that can be entertained with them, that an infant develops her own personality. Similarly, no social group can coalesce, become aware of its existence and act as unit without distinguishing itself from groups perceived as different. Distinction and feelings of difference are necessary ingredients of the emergence of selfness.’⁶²

Expressing current psychological conviction, Philippe Rochat claims that: ‘Descartes’s circular, self-referential proposition of being (oneself) by thinking (oneself) has long since been abandoned in this field.’⁶³ Instead of asking, “Who am I?” a much more pertinent and probing question is proposed: “Who am I *for whom?*”⁶⁴ The argument here is that the included relational social dimension leads to ‘a better approximation of what constitutes the conscious experience of our identity... as we always have *others in mind*, when we construe who we are.’⁶⁵

Following Dubar,⁶⁶ Martin purposefully speaks of ‘identity construction’ (an activity) rather than of ‘identity’ (as noun depicting a given property). Similarly Rochat emphasises the notion that self and identity must be seen as *processual* and *dynamic* as they are ‘the product[s] ... of a constant negotiation with others.’⁶⁷ Personal and social identity is thus understood to be *acted out*, rather than to manifest in a singular way of being. The social construct of identity is to a certain degree identical with a ‘re-presentation’⁶⁸ of the perceived self – again with others in mind.⁶⁹ Already in the second year of an infant’s life the ‘third-person perspective on the self, the sense and construal of what others perceive of “me”⁷⁰ begins to overshadow the earlier much more autonomously embodied “self-being”. From this very early stage in the life of any human being, the ‘sense of self becomes triadic and intersubjective, ... [relying] on the cues and construal of other’s view of the self, not just on the authority of first-person perspective.’⁷¹

The title of one of Paul Ricoeur’s books, *Oneself as Another*,⁷² may serve as a last example for the intricate process demanded by the attainment of any sense of selfhood. Ricoeur’s formulation amounts to stating that the other does not exist exclusively ‘outside’; nor that the self is fully contained within’: ‘The Other lies at the heart of the development of the Self and *affects* – in all meanings of the verb – the understanding of Oneself by Oneself.’⁷³

⁶¹ ‘DNA: Comparing Humans and Chimps’. Stub on the website of the American Museum of Natural History found at <http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/past-exhibitions/human-origins/understanding-our-past/dna-comparing-humans-and-chimps> [accessed on 27.12.13]. Nick Lane provides the figures of 98,6% for ‘DNA sequence similarity’ and 95% if ‘larger genomic changes, such as deletions and chromosome fusions’ are taken into account. Nick Lane, *Life Ascending: The Ten Great Inventions of Evolution* (Profile Books, London 2009), 38, 289.

⁶² Martin, *Sounding the Cape*, 4, my emphasis.

⁶³ Philippe Rochat, *Others in Mind: Social Origins of Self-Consciousness* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009), 191.

⁶⁴ Ibid. 192 (my italics).

⁶⁵ Ibid. (original italics).

⁶⁶ Claude Dubar, *La crise des identités* (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 2000), quoted in Martin, 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid. 193.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ An interesting observation in this regard is the etymological root of ‘person’, the Etruscan *persona* – ‘mask’. It concurrently refers to the hiddenness of the real identity as well as the staged self-presentation (Rochat, 194).

⁷⁰ Ibid, 203.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Editions du Seuil, Paris 1990).

⁷³ Ibid., 380 quoted in Martin, *Sounding the Cape*, 4 (original emphasis).

In everyday sociological contexts the other plays many pivotal roles with regard to the self, such as being a challenging or comforting counterpart, a competitor, a mirror, a resonating board or the external agent without whom it would be impossible to exercise the simple act of reaching out or develop the capacities of trust, compassion or love. Even only these aspects should already compel a far more profound perception and appreciation of the phenomenon of 'other'. Yet, the concept must be extended far beyond that of a linear relationship: Identity rests on a complex systemic relationship of self and other. As always in such cases, on closer scrutiny the two apparently opposite notions turn out to be tied together: 'The element of identity inaugurates the play of difference on the one hand, while on the other, it is the result of the very process.'⁷⁴ The relationship between identity and difference or, put differently, between different identities, is irreducible, antagonistic, meaningful and constitutive. As Paul Cilliers wrote: 'Identity and difference imply each other in an open dialectic.'⁷⁵

Neither 'self' nor 'other' can exist without 'each other': This relationship can only exist through each being an 'other' by each being a 'self'. Nor can 'self' or 'other' be reduced to 'other', as a simple deduction of the previous statement seems to suggest – viz. if each is at once a self *and* another, these must be the same. Different perspectives will allow a being to concurrently be self (to itself) and other (to another). Yet these two ways of being *are not the same*. Rather than trying to eliminate the differences between self and other (as modernist and postcolonial approaches have attempted), the notions of self and other must be understood as being complex.

c) COMPLEX IDENTITY

On summarizing and assembling all of the aforementioned arguments, the following rich identity of 'identity' emerges.

Identity can always and only be a *partly identity*, as any distinction only occurs as the final singular turn-off after many common bifurcations. Identity is therefore always a *mix* of same and different, of unique and common traits. Awkward and inconvenient as this might appear, *identity* must be accepted as *inherently hybrid*.

A terminological disambiguation is necessary, however. As the notion of 'hybridity' also entails a discredited component – the aspects of 'neither / nor', half-breed and sterility – it should be emphasized that 'identity' should not be reduced to the concept of hybridity in this deficient sense. To avoid such a misunderstanding it might be judicious to speak rather of the *ambivalent nature* of identity. Thereby its *processual* and *dynamic dimension* is also recognized as manifesting in *continuously provisional* activities of relating a particular or individual singularity to other similar and different singularities.

Asserting the ambivalence of identity does not impoverish or diminish its integrity. Rather it allows for the existence of multiple (different) simultaneous identities, a conclusion that follows logically from the given that identity is inevitably *subjectively* (i.e. individually and thus differently) framed by individual (different) observers. This then explains why identity can only be *approximate* and often seems *fuzzy*. It remains evasive and can of course never be modelled fully, nor be described or captured comprehensively.

Identity is *no essential inherent quality*, but *emerges as a nuanced and relational quality* from complex interactions between different and same systemic components. Even so it requires an inherent singularity even before its particularity is confirmed or determined externally. Existence must pre-empt identity (i.e. there must be something before it can be related to something else); yet, by virtue of existing, it will instantaneously be tied into systemic bonds and relations. Emphasizing the non-linearity of complex relations, it must be acknowledged that 'identity' concurrently *initiates* and *results from* differentiation. This prohibits a reductionist view of difference and sameness: identity emanates by virtue of being suspended between these two poles. And it is sustained by virtue of the tension upheld between opposites or differences.

⁷⁴ Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 61.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Having argued that identity is best understood if considered as emerging and complex phenomenon, it follows that the characteristics of general complexity apply to identity as well. Hence, in each of the twelve tenets proposed in Chapter 2, ‘complexity’ can unconditionally be exchanged with ‘identity’. Moreover, I argue, that what has been expounded here in philosophical and psychological terms, applies to the personal, social and cultural realms as well. In the context of this thesis the latter is of special importance and the notions of cultural identities and differences will receive more detailed attention in Chapter 9, while an instance of this perception’s compositional ‘application’ will be described in Chapter 12.

PARENTHESIS IV: ‘MODERNISM’ – DELINEATION OF AN AMBIGUOUS NOTION

A comprehensive discussion of ‘modernism’ obviously exceeds the scope of this study. Yet, as the topic immediately pertains to musical composition and will inevitably surface in various contexts, it is necessary to explicate how it is understood in the context of this study. In this respect I posit that a deep-rooted ambiguity results from a literal ‘equivocation’ of the term – a variety of distinctly different concepts being called by ‘the same name’. Due to the bewildering variety and interpretations of the notion, two parenthetical reflections will be dedicated to its evaluation: The first attempts a disambiguation of sorts amongst prevailing definitions. The second expounds the notion of progress and its pivotal role in modernist thinking.

The reason for the confusion surrounding the denotation of ‘modernism’ (and the necessity for a distinction of connotations) arises from the temporality of the adjective ‘modern’ which, strictly speaking, can only be a descriptor for the changing qualities of *what is developing and new at present* but which, at least in Western thinking, is strongly associated with *erstwhile novelties*, thus historical concepts. ‘Modernism’ in this latter, historical sense, is thus continually associated with such markers, which (for chronological, historical reasons) have long since shed their actual modernity, yet – implicitly connected to an ideology of modernism – continue to claim a degree of novelty, hegemony or advancement. In fact, since ‘Modernism’ has become a distinct historical term, strictly speaking nothing currently new can be described as ‘modern’, without explicitly delineating it from ‘Modernist’ notions, which are by definition dated and hence arguably anachronistic. (Postmodernism offers no refuge from this dilemma, as this term by now just as much refers to a delimited historical period and is arguably even more contested and less clearly defined than Modernism.⁷⁶)

As a short survey of generic definitions of ‘modernism’ shows, these refer indiscriminately to both the temporal and the ideological aspect of the notion. ‘Modernism’ is associated with thoughts, expressions or techniques that are ‘modern in character or quality’, i.e. display a ‘sympathy with or affinity for what is modern,⁷⁷ or are ‘typical of contemporary life or thought.’⁷⁸ In the same vein it is described as ‘a movement towards *modifying traditional beliefs* and doctrines in accordance with modern ideas and scholarship,’ or – more radical – as ‘a style or movement in the arts that aims to *depart significantly* from classical and traditional forms.’⁷⁹ From here it is not far to the historical understanding of modernism as ‘a general term applied retrospectively to the wide range of experimental and avant-garde trends in the literature (and other arts) of the early 20th century, including Symbolism, Futurism, Expressionism, ... Dada, and Surrealism,’⁸⁰ a movement thus, ‘that sought to adapt doctrine to the supposed requirements of modern thought.’⁸¹

⁷⁶ ‘Even though postmodern discourses expose many of the central ideas of modernism as false ... an implicit tension still remains in that the constellation of postmodern values are a direct extension of ideas and concepts put forth by modernist writers and thinkers.’ David Clippinger, ‘Modernism’, *Routledge World Reference* vol. Encyclopedia of Postmodernism, 2003, pp. 480.

⁷⁷ Oxford English Dictionary, www.oed.com.ez.sun.ac.za/view/Entry/120622?redirectedFrom=modernism#eid [accessed on 14.4.14].

⁷⁸ Reverso Linguistic Tools, <http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-definition/modernism> [accessed on 14.4.14].

⁷⁹ OED, my emphases.

⁸⁰ Oxford Reference, www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199208272.001.0001/acref-9780199208272-e-737 [accessed on 14.4.14].

⁸¹ Reverso Linguistic Tools.

To highlight the ambiguity of the term, but attempting to avoid the perpetuation of this ambiguity, references to 'Modernism' (as historical category) will be capitalized in this text, distinguishing it from 'modernism', understood as substantive form of the adjectives 'modernist' (insofar as its *stringency* is concerned) and 'modern' (insofar as its *currentness* is concerned), potentially conveying 'an evaluative judgment concerning those aspects of culture which are found to be '[a]live' or 'critical'.⁸²

In their everyday use claims to the effect of 'modern' approaches (attitudes, strategies, practices, etc.) rarely distinguish clearly to which understanding of 'modernity' they refer. Hence conflicts resulting from the confusion between denotation and connotation of the term abound: Most contemporaries will endorse a modern life-style, thereby presumably referring to a politically liberated, secure, mobile and technologically supported existence. Concurrently – perhaps unwittingly, but nevertheless contradictorily – they might be deeply critical of the 'Modernist' premises, on which the very possibility of such a life-style ultimately rests, i.e. the unabated pursuit of ever more 'progressive' (read: aggressive) means to secure a sought-after mode of living, even if this 'constitution' is at odds with the 'conditions'.⁸³ What generically holds to be fashionably and internationally 'modern' is, in many cases, but ideologically 'Modern' – in other words, the development of a truly *contemporary and circumstantially legitimized* 'modernism' is often impeded by a *fetishized historical* ideology. With its inappropriate (capitalized) name, 'Modernism' continues to condone – and even justify – grossly exploitive, destructive, alienating and commoditizing processes, which a mature, congruently 'modern' approach based on current, contextual insights would rightly disallow. However, as things stand modernism (the 'present historical situation and ... its attendant forms of self-consciousness in the West')⁸⁴ remains entangled with Modernist notions – a state that will arguably persist until clearer analyses and distinctions of the two notions are perceived more widely.

In order to deal with the irritations resulting from the confusion of both notions, it is necessary to pinpoint where exactly the frictions arise. Arguably they occur on those occasions, where what could be considered the movement's *authentic thrust* transmutes into a *fetishized invocation* of untenable principles. An unambiguous delineation of such instances has seemingly been impossible to date, as the contention over the undecided questions whether Modernism prevails, whether it still holds any relevance, or whether it has after all been superseded by Postmodernism shows. However, the impossibility of providing a final answer should not be a deterrent from attempting to unravel the pertinent complexity; arriving at a subjective clarification will suffice for the purpose of this thesis.

Conventional understanding of 'Modernism' defines it as 'literary, historic, and philosophical period from roughly 1890 to 1950 ... marked by the *belief in the unity of experience, the predominance of universals, and a determinate sense of referentiality.*' Modernism 'represents the residual belief in the (self-evident) *supremacy of logic and scientific rationalism* that assumes *reality as a whole can be rendered and comprehended, that ideas and concepts are determinate, and that human beings share a level of universal experience with one another that is transcultural and transhistorical.*'⁸⁵ Hence prominent modernist theories 'demonstrate the inclination toward totalization and determinacy' purported to transcend cultural and historical boundaries. (Bertrand Russell's 'logical positivism' or Sigmund Freud's 'schematic ... geography of the conscious-unconscious' may serve as examples of modernist theories aspiring to a 'universal system of meaning'.)⁸⁶ In the light of postulations of this nature Lyotard arrives at his famous summation of Modernism as the attempt of establishing a 'primacy of a universal or master narrative ... against which everything [can, and hence] must be understood.'⁸⁷

⁸² Charles Harrison, 'Modernism' in Robert Nelson, & Richard Shiff (eds.) *Critical Terms for Art History* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2003).

⁸³ Spencer: *Social Statics* (1841, 59) quoted in Margaret Meek-Lange, *Progress*, 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/progress/> [accessed on 28.4.14]. For an explanation of Spencer's use of these terms see Parenthesis V, pg. 70.

⁸⁴ Harrison, *Modernism*.

⁸⁵ Clippinger, *Modernism*, my emphases.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

The historical era during which Modernism emerges is determined by ‘processes of industrialization and urbanization’, which are perceived as the ‘principal mechanisms of transformation in human experience’ from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century.⁸⁸ George Herbert Mead describes these processes as ‘universalization of norms of action and the generalization of values’, which lead to experiences where particular ‘traditions’ lose their ‘quasi natural status’ and are instead substituted by ‘rationalized lifeworlds’.⁸⁹ In the same vein, such normative standardizations free ‘communicative action’ from previously narrowly restricted cultural contexts and drive ‘patterns of socialization that are oriented to the formation of abstract ego-identities’,⁹⁰ rather than by following traditional role models.

Modernism simultaneously endorses and critiques these developments, drives them and suffers from them or, as Harrison⁹¹ puts it, reveals ‘an active and a passive aspect.’ The former follows an ‘inclination to “modernize”, ... vividly exemplified through the stylistic and technical properties of [modernist] works of art’. The latter ‘refers to that cluster of social and psychological conditions which modernization accomplishes or imposes, for good or ill.’⁹² These conditions are often experienced as ‘overwhelming social forces’ in the light of which the quest ‘of preserving autonomy and individuality’ becomes the ‘deepest problem of modern life.’⁹³ On the one hand Modernism thus ‘confronts’ the ‘experience of modernity ... in the continuing pursuit of aesthetic standards set by the art of the past.’⁹⁴ On the other hand, what ‘specifically establishes the modernism of a discipline or a medium is ... that its development is governed by self-critical procedures addressed to the medium itself.’⁹⁵ As Greenberg has formulated: ‘The essence of Modernism lies ... in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline *to criticize the discipline itself* – not in order to subvert it, but *to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence*.’⁹⁶ Modernism stands for ‘the critical achievement of an aesthetic standard within a given medium in face of ... the pervasive condition of modernity.’⁹⁷

Followed through, these lines of thought reveal a striking characteristic of Modernism. The ideology not only entails conflicting forces but, more accurately, inherently *generates* them. The paradox is clearly visible in Modernism’s concurrent drive *and* critique of technological advances. These advances – ever-increasingly experienced globally since the onset of the industrial revolution – concurrently *alleviate and* inflict existential suffering, depending on the position of those reporting.

In Modernism’s artistic endeavour this dilemma results in an equally paradoxical strategy: The very source of contention becomes its strongest motivation and hence continuously permeates its modes of expression. What it seeks to criticise becomes the very means of critique *as a matter of aesthetic integrity* – as though underpinning the belief that the strongest, most credible criticism will be one that continuously endures its own harshness, i.e. that is able to face the ‘pervasive condition’ of modernity.

The complex relation between Modernist conditions and responses, ‘implying each other in an open dialectic’, i.e. simultaneously *inaugurating and resulting from* each other,⁹⁸ have led to remarkably pronounced, diverse and compelling artistic outputs during the zenith of this period. From an art-historical perspective, it must be acknowledged as one of the most liberally expressive eras, setting unsurpassed stringent artistic standards that continue to challenge their broader reception.

⁸⁸ Harrison, *Modernism*.

⁸⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1987), 2.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Harrison, *Modernism*.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Simmel quoted in Harrison.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Greenberg quoted in Harrison., my emphases.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 61, quoted in another context; see also footnotes 74 and 75 of this chapter.

3. CONTEXT

The choice of topics in this chapter was motivated partly for reasons of a perceived impasse in pertinent musicological discourses. The situation is especially conspicuous with regard to reflections on ‘context’, problematized by prevailing academic and scientific conventions, which intrinsically inhibit any serious consideration of the notion of context. I posit that the two main causes for this state of affairs are indeed both preferred methods of modernist enquiry and practice, namely *objective analysis* (by implication *reductionism*) and *isolated specialization* (resulting in *professionalism*). As the methods available to these approaches are considered sufficient for the purpose of scientific enquiry, including additional contextual ruminations requires a significant shift of perspective.

By definition, both methods cut out what is not immediately relevant and focus on ‘doing one thing at a time and doing it properly’. The success of both approaches since the late nineteenth century has prevented considerations of the respective contexts in which – or in spite of which – these effective methodologies are applied and function. Only after the invention of a new science in its own right, ecology, has the importance and relevance of the *outside* – the *environment* and *context* as a significant element *embedding* and *consubstantiating* that which it incorporates – gradually dawned on the analytically primed occidental mind-set.

In order to indicate the breadth of the required shift I present a deliberately polarized depiction of what I will term a Modernist and a Complexity methodology respectively. If the sketched positions appear in harsh and seemingly overstated relief, this should be viewed as a deliberate initial attempt to delineate, distinguish and explore differences of the respective vantage points, from which more nuanced analyses may be worked out subsequently

a) MODERNIST METHODOLOGY – INTEGRITY *VERSUS* CONTEXTUALIZATION

Reductionism is a highly effective manner of getting rid of unnecessary and cluttering detail to arrive at the essence, the underlying principle or law governing any issue under investigation. It is based on *analysis*, the careful cutting up of a whole into its components, the separation of parts, the framing and delineation of partial functions, the elimination of the redundant from the essential. Integral to this approach is the assumption that the required dissections would be objective tasks. The assumption is further that the clear delineation of parts (by implication the unambiguous recognition of edges, borders and margins of components and units) may be determined by their functions, and that objectivity can be obtained by recognizing independent functionality.⁹⁹

Once the essence or essential functionality is unveiled and determined, the next step is to find ways of manipulating and utilising these findings in reliable and, if possible, in productive and advantageous ways. These are the underlying principles of the employment or application of technology. The reductionist method lies at the heart of scientific investigation and as such has become one of the pillars of the industrial revolution. It safeguards technological advances at their base and is driven by (and respectively drives) an incessant quest for ever-increasing efficiency. Concurrently its efficacy is confirmed daily by unprecedentedly successful applications in all realms of life.

In a competitive world, in which any meaningful study or investigation requires a high degree of focus and attention, *specialization* is considered an inevitable scientific and academic requirement. But more than that, it is also esteemed as a moral virtue, assumed to assure disciplinary integrity. Hence is it often *de facto* equated with *professionalism*. Due to the success of the analytical (probing), rather than the synthetic (assimilative) methodology, Western standards of professionalism favour ‘depth’ (even if this implies narrow-mindedness) above width (as this is potentially too shallow).

⁹⁹ As objectivity is deemed an indispensable quality and characteristic of scientific investigation, the classical analyst will strive to ensure that personal, subjective interpretations are subordinated to objective assessments. Demonstrating autonomous (observer-independent) functionality is conventionally accepted as corroborating tenable objectivity.

Naturally, in a world and epoch determined by Modernist principles, mainstream musical practices are subject to the self-same concepts. However, in the musical domain, where there should be no need for predictable, measurable and profitable outcomes, this subjugation is in many respects questionable.

One reason why it would nevertheless have been endorsed to such an extent might be found in the notion of 'professional' musical practice. Inversely, it could be argued that the feasibility of a professionalized musical practice could only arise *as a result* of increasingly Modernist (i.e. reductionist, efficient, organized, streamlined, controlled) approaches. The professionalization and institutionalization of music may be understood as the introduction of formally quantifiable aspects into music making. Whether such aspects are actually intrinsic to music or constructed categories, they are today a given and endure in the form of 'examinable' technical grades, standardized levels of proficiency, canonical rules of harmony and counterpoint, music-historical facts etc. Systems of formal assessments further allow the accumulation of tangible career accolades (degrees, professional fees, prizes, awards, recording contracts etc.), which – in accordance with general reductionist principles – signify musical proficiency. Here the circle neatly closes again, indeed evincing strongly that Modernist approaches result in a competitive and vibrant musical scene.

Obviously any degrees of so-called 'professionalism' can only be measured in clearly delineated (specialized, narrow, and hence more readily comparable) fields. In this way so-called 'professional standards' are continuously raised at the cost of concurrently hardening disciplinary segregation. The cost of this segregation can be measured in the institutional disregard for musicianship as a lay activity, as well the rise of the 'international generic': an industry-driven, merciless erosion of all individual and localized idiomatic particularities in favour of commodified musical products and globalized merchandise. In its ultimate reductionist form, musical 'professionalism' is indicated by the ability of reproducing this generic style unflinchingly at any time and place, objectively (technically immaculate) and in isolation (regardless of context and occasion).

b) COMPLEXITY THINKING – INTEGRITY THROUGH CONTEXTUALIZATION

There can be no doubt as to the measurable and quantifiable efficiency of the Modernist approach. It is eminently suited to provide 'solutions' to clearly framed (isolated) questions or challenges. In spite of many unsolved problems it can probably be claimed that the vast majority of human beings on this planet benefits greatly from the 'techno-human condition'¹⁰⁰ that has been established in this manner. Criticizing the reductionist method would therefore appear unwise, if not self-damaging.

Yet there is reason to be cautious and critical – perhaps not so much of a well-conducted reductionist analysis *per se*, but of a world-view that will not admit that complex situations cannot be analysed and complex problems not solved in this way. Hence cogent critique will not be directed at the reductionist method as much as at its application *in isolation*. More specifically, the thrust of the critique is aimed at an attitude *that continues to exclude the environment and the notion of context from its transactions*.

From a complexity perspective these questions concern the framing of systems, the nature and function of systemic borders and the intrinsic link between their permeability and a system's organizational integrity. As I consider music to be a complex systemic phenomenon, I posit that the general (interdisciplinary) reflections on complex, living systems equally apply. Hence I foresee that an exploration of the notion of musical contexts will greatly benefit from a transferral of the pertinent systems insights.

Considering that the complex interactions between components are by definition *irreducible* and non-linear,¹⁰¹ reductionist thinking is principally resisted in the context of systems. (This does not disqualify the efficacy of reductive thinking under specific, clearly defined circumstances. There is just a clear understanding

¹⁰⁰ Allenby, & Sarewitz, *The Techno-Human Condition*.

¹⁰¹ For references to these qualities by Morin see pg. 55, by Bateson see pg. 57 of this chapter.

that systemic and complex phenomena ultimately elude reductionist explanations.) Moreover, it has been shown that the ‘component – system’ relationship must be considered inherently open:¹⁰² A component in one system might in fact be a system in its own right. Hence the correlation ‘component – system’ is synonymous to that of ‘system – eco-system’, potentially allowing for an extensive hierarchy¹⁰³ of systems nested in systems and meta-systems. In this sense no final, absolute distinction between the system and its environment, between a definite inside and definite outside, between ‘text’ and ‘context’, can be made.

In common usage references to ‘context’ often remain unsatisfactorily vague. With respect to music it might refer to perceived influences on a musical work or its performance, whereby ‘context’ may principally and broadly entail any aspect – be it stylistic, historical, political, cultural, local, etc. Often it seems to amount to hardly more than an acknowledgment of some kind of a general relationship between music and its environment or the circumstances under which it is practiced, with such relations often being described fairly linearly, in analogy to behaviourist models.

What I wish to address here is rather more specific, although I consent that the notion of ‘context’ itself should be kept universally broad. While a context (like a backdrop) may in fact entail anything, the nature of the relationships that render it a context should be elucidated specifically. Just as much as a system is a conception of an observer,¹⁰⁴ so a context can be created (i.e. will only originate) from an astute observation. While such a context will be subjective, this in no way trivializes its importance. On the contrary, it reveals a reflexively constitutive link: Subjectivity emanates from contextualizations. In other words, *the act of contextualizing is one of the most significant instances whence subjectivity emerges*; the ability to contextualize substantiates the notion of subjectivity. Concurrently, the independent (i.e. self-responsible, individual, localized, human, subjective) *observation corroborates the notion of context*, by confronting us with the fact that there can be no context-free perception, as such a perception would imply an absolute, finite recognition impossible to attain in a world of differences.

Any musical activity – more broadly: the idea of ‘musical culture’, which can be framed as a ‘vital’ or even ‘living’ system – must be considered principally contextual with regard to three crucial aspects: its *vitality*, its *autonomy* and its *sustainability* (survival). This statement can be corroborated by respectively referring to Morin’s concept of the ‘steady state’, Maturana & Varela’s idea of ‘structural coupling’ and Bateson’s ‘evolutionary unit’.

i) Dynamic context: disequilibrium of the steady state

As elucidated earlier,¹⁰⁵ the ‘steady state’ describes the ‘nourishing disequilibrium’ that allows a system to maintain an apparent equilibrium, a state of stability and continuity ... constant but fragile.¹⁰⁶ The somewhat paradoxical feature of such a system is that its structural organization remains the same while its constituents change. This covert exchange amounts to the ‘vitality’ of any animated system, from the waterfall, to the flame or any organism where ‘molecules and cells are renewing themselves incessantly, while the whole remains apparently stable and stationary’.¹⁰⁷

Interestingly, the notion of *equilibrium* or *disequilibrium* between system and environment is crucial in determining whether a system is ‘dead’ or ‘alive’. Equilibrium is a sure sign of death, of complete structural

¹⁰² Morin, *Method*, 97; see also Chapter 1, pg. 20 & 30.

¹⁰³ Term coined by Koestler, to describe the nature of systems ‘nested’ within systems and avoiding the notion of ‘hierarchy’.

¹⁰⁴ See Chapter 2, section 6, pg. 40 ff.

¹⁰⁵ see pg. 20 and von Bertalanffy in Hammond, *Philosophical and Ethical Foundations of Systems Thinking*, 22.

¹⁰⁶ Morin, *On Complexity*, 11; Against Morin’s description of the steady state as ‘fragile’ Jannie Hofmeyer argues that a system in a steady state is in fact most robust and stable.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

integrity without any organizational interference.¹⁰⁸ While disequilibrium in itself obviously doesn't spawn life, it is an essential condition for any living system and thus a defining factor of life. It describes a continuously dynamic and processual relationship that facilitates the necessary exchanges of matter, energy and information required to sustain a living being or system. This then not only requires and implies that the system is open, but that it is *structurally, energetically and informationally linked to its environment*. While the environment can obviously not cause or guarantee life, it is nevertheless crucial for its subsistence.

In this sense the environment as the 'space' (condition, leeway, margin, capacity) for a regenerative disequilibrium is a given (implicit, requisite, indispensable) context for any system. While it may not always be readily discernible, it may also not be overlooked. Therefore I postulate that upholding the tenet *that things, questions, systems, issues are potentially isolable* (and that it is advisable to deal with them in isolation, especially so, when they are important) is fundamentally flawed.

ii) Organizational context: structural coupling

The argument that the notion of 'context' is substantiated by the phenomenon of structural coupling was presented earlier in this chapter.¹⁰⁹ Coined by Maturana and Varela¹¹⁰ in an attempt to capture the 'mechanism' of ontogenic adaptation (as opposed to evolutionary adaptation) the concept of 'structural coupling' *highlights, links and reconciles* a system's *autonomy* (its *autopoietic integrity*) with its *interdependence* (with other systems and its environment). Considering such a pairing to be impossible (for being mutually exclusive by reductionist definition), Modernist and liberal approaches emphasize the aspect of autonomy in respect of living and creative systems, while discarding or overlooking the complementary dimension of dependence.

I posit that Modernism's underlying carelessness¹¹¹ with regard to all 'dimensions of environment'¹¹² result from this fateful omission. If the complex and *mutually constitutive* tension between autonomy and dependence unveiled by cognitive biology were to be recognized in the political, sociological, economic and the artistic realm, this would lead to an important conceptual advance. It would enable a more 'balanced'¹¹³ understanding of the individual in society (and, in the same vein, the political subject, the consumer in an economy, the artist in a culture, the administrative officer in an institution, etc.) as autonomous *and* dependent, creative *and* responsive, responsible towards the own integrity *and* that of his or her surroundings, able to take *and* able to return, 'free' to live *and* 'bound' to live. The musical consequences of such a shift would be equally far-reaching and will resurface on occasion in the reflections in Sections 2 and 3.

c. Evolutionary context: the survival unit

Another way of framing a principal contextual relationship is suggested by Gregory Bateson's hypothesis of the 'evolutionary unit',¹¹⁴ also sometimes called the 'survival unit'. Deducted from empirically proven negative consequences observed in an ecological context, an important systemic relationship is confirmed here.

Bateson's argument departs from an 'error' that he perceives in the 'identification of the unit of survival under natural selection'.¹¹⁵ In Darwinian evolutionary theory this unit is always considered to be either 'the

¹⁰⁸ Strictly speaking complete equilibrium does not exist, for even in stable matter, such as rocks or metals, 'organizational re-shuffling' occurs on very small spatial scales (at atomic levels) or over very large time-frames (decay, erosion). However, for all practical purposes such interactions remain beyond the scope of our perceptions.

¹⁰⁹ See pg. 49.

¹¹⁰ Structural coupling is the term for structure-determined process of engagement which effects a "... history of recurrent interactions leading to the structural congruence between two (or more) systems" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, 75).

¹¹¹ This attitude is perhaps most shamefully evident in the notion of 'consumerism' and its double excesses of exploiting and wasting.

¹¹² Here the term 'environment' may broadly encompass anything: ecosystems, natural, mineral and human resources, any foreign cultures, concepts, ideas - in short, any aspects 'outside' of controllable and predictable 'solutions'.

¹¹³ Here 'balance' does not imply a compromised reduction, but a 'complex' enrichment.

¹¹⁴ Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 457.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 456.

breeding individual or the family line or the subspecies or some similar homogenous set of conspecifics.¹¹⁶ However, as the ultimate ‘Modernist application’ of this Darwinian principle in its current guise of global capitalism shows, ‘if an organism or aggregate of organisms sets to work with a focus on its own survival and thinks that that is the way to select its adaptive moves, its “progress” ends up with a destroyed environment.’¹¹⁷ It follows logically that ‘if the organism ends up destroying its environment, it has in fact destroyed itself.’¹¹⁸

Clearly then the ‘evolutionary unit’ – the entity that would truly safeguard an organism’s survival and sustainable adaptation or evolution – must be framed somewhat differently. In nature, the genetic variety of wild (not homogeneous) populations principally expands such a unit, ‘potentiality and readiness for change [being] already built into the survival unit.’¹¹⁹ Yet, even more importantly, the changing environment itself must be included into this unit: ‘The unit of survival is a flexible organism-in-its-environment.’¹²⁰

Bateson’s quotes are taken from a paper that he presented in 1970. His suggestions have long since been integrated into the canon of ecological and complexity thinking. Though compelling and urgent, they are still tragically disregarded in other fields, among which has to be counted the musical profession that remains deeply stuck in nineteenth-century Darwinism. To this day the accredited ‘survival units’ in the discipline are tightly closed sets of homogenous conspecifics: the take-all-gigs professional musician, the world-renowned competition-winning super-star, the canonical masterwork promoted to the detriment of all alternative repertoire, the exclusive, gene-pool diminishing protected environment of the ‘conservatory’, etc. All of these practices have become institutionalized conventions, adamantly defended by Modernist conviction that they represent ‘the best solutions’ to safeguard the quality and standards of musical education, practice and dissemination.

In order for music to survive (music that is, as vibrant and vital emergence, not merely institutionalized and conventionally administered simulacrum), its evolutionary units must be considerably expanded. As it stands currently, ‘classical’ musical institutions generally hold at bay what could be crucially important, namely nourishing contexts: Indigenous music, folk music, contemporary and experimental music, period music (of lost or interrupted performance traditions), informal, occasional, spontaneous, lay music making. If narrow musical conventions end up destroying musical environments, they are destroying themselves. Suggestions about an alternative – thinking along the lines of a musical ecology, whereby the notion of ‘musical environment’ is inherently acknowledged and integrated – will be followed up in Chapters 6 and 8.

PARENTHESIS V: A SHORT HISTORY OF ‘PROGRESS’

Before engaging with the concept and phenomenon of novelty I offer a detour to the historico-cultural background and the ideological premises that first allowed novelty to exert what has become an irresistible spell against previously prevailing traditional outlooks.¹²¹ The emergence of the novel always implies a degree of liberation (from the *status quo*). Arguably this perception of liberation lies at the root of contemporary fascination, even obsession, with novelty. Since the twin aspects of innovation and liberation lie at the heart of the philosophy of progress, an investigation of this notion – as historical and philosophical category – is inserted here.

In historical or evolutionary terms the conscious notion of ‘progress’ emerges only very recently, during the late seventeenth century, characterizing this period as the Age of Enlightenment. It was bolstered by a wealth of contemporaneous scientific discoveries that not only corroborated the paradigm of scientific investigation but

¹¹⁶ Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, 457.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ In this statement ‘traditional’ implies both *continuity* and (hence by definition) the *interdiction* of (radical) novelty. An interruption of the tradition of ‘tradition’ therefore constitutes a doubly remarkable historical moment.

concurrently ‘encourage[d] an optimistic view of humans’ capability to understand and shape their world.’¹²² Early reflections on philosophical progress as ‘the deepest condition of scientific progress’,¹²³ such as those by Turgot and Condorcet,¹²⁴ take their cue from this optimism and accordingly postulate the scientific experiment as ‘centrepiece of the scientific method and the vehicle of further progress.’ Both emphasize that ‘scientific discoveries and political freedom reinforce each other and together further human well-being.’¹²⁵ This confirms the link between innovation and liberation.

Hume strengthens this link by stressing that ‘scientific and artistic progress requires a background of political security, ... that the arts and sciences cannot arise in a society without the rule of law’¹²⁶ and thereby firmly ‘connects political and intellectual development.’¹²⁷ Adam Smith duly provides the economical link by postulating that ‘individuals in pursuit of their self-interest nevertheless contribute to the common good ... as though led by an invisible hand ... to take socially beneficial actions.’¹²⁸ Smith perceives the division of labour – and consequentially growth in productivity – as a ‘spontaneous outcome of the human propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.’¹²⁹ Smith’s formulation of the ‘spontaneous improvement in economic life warrants treating him as a theorist of progress’,¹³⁰ especially as continuing invocations of this mechanism are upholding the hegemony of free market economies to this very day.

Although the notion of progress is not of prime importance in Kant’s thinking, he does reflect on the topic,¹³¹ suggesting that humanity is *naturally progressing* from barbarism towards ever more enlightened civilization. Arguing that ‘no human being can develop all of its faculties in a lifetime’ and thus, ‘if the faculties given to humans are not to be considered useless, then the only other possibility is that the human race as a whole, over time, will develop all the human faculties. The progress from one era to another is measured by the development of human faculties during that time.’¹³² Less optimistic than the Enlightenment empiricists, Kant concludes that ‘human psychology and the natural environment, rather than human reason [are driving] the human race forward’.¹³³ This happens almost inadvertently, through humankind’s ‘unsocial sociability’, whereby he means a forced resort to social behaviour by necessity (i.e. the inability to develop all capabilities in isolation). Hence progress will not necessarily be continuous or swift, but more probably follow a painfully slow process suffering occasional setbacks. It is Kant’s hope that education towards self-enlightenment and ‘a philosophy of progress can accelerate progress’.¹³⁴

In nineteenth century thinking Hegel’s idea of a ‘universal history’ stands out as most prominent ‘narrative of progress.’¹³⁵ Contrary to Kant, Hegel considers precisely wars and conflict as driving forces of progress. Without war, he argues, ‘individuals in liberal societies become self-absorbed and weak, unwilling to work for the common good.’¹³⁶ He perceives development to occur when conflicting forces are reconciled and lead to a synthesis on a higher, previously unimaginable level. ‘Historical change occurs when a new idea is nurtured in the environment of the old one, and eventually overtakes it. Thus development necessarily involves periods of

¹²² Meek-Lange, *Progress*.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, Baron de l’Aulne: *A Philosophical Review of the Successive Advances of the Human Mind* (1750); Marie Jean Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet: *Outlines of an historical view of the Progress of the human mind* (1795).

¹²⁵ Meek-Lange, *Progress*, section 3.

¹²⁶ David Hume, *Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences* (1777), quoted in Meek-Lange.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), quoted in Meek-Lange.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Meek-Lange, *Progress*, section 3.

¹³¹ In: Immanuel Kant: *Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht* (1784); *Zum ewigen Frieden. Ein philosophischer Entwurf.* (1795).

¹³² Kant, quoted in Meek-Lange.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Meek-Lange, *Progress*, section 4.

¹³⁶ Hegel, quoted in Meek-Lange.

conflict when the old and new ideas clash.¹³⁷ This concept of dialectic development not only offers a description of the mechanism of progress, but of history as a whole. Moreover, it ‘purports to show not merely *how* things change, but *why* things change. The stipulation that change has purpose turns random process into law.’¹³⁸

In fact, this perception prompts Hegel to formulate a law of history. Developed in his Berlin lectures on the philosophy of history¹³⁹ it can be summarized as follows: ‘The history of the world is the progress of the consciousness of Freedom.’¹⁴⁰ Hegel imbues Western philosophy with an understanding of history as ‘lawful process’ – primarily in the sense of ‘inevitable’ (regular, deterministic, purposeful), but equally implying the sense of ‘legitimate’ (rightful, warranted, sanctioned) – thereby inextricably tying together the notions of development, change, progress, conflict and clash between old and new. The interactions of this complex of components are considered to be of teleological significance.

Even though the Romantic era reacts decisively against Enlightened thought in many ways (rising up against aristocratic social orders, prizing intuition over rationalism, validating emotion as authentic experience, upholding individual imagination as ultimate critical authority, espousing the awe-inspiring, foreign and exotic rather than the classical and familiar, etc.), it unabatedly subscribes to the notion of progress. In fact, progress narratives reach their ‘high water mark’¹⁴¹ in the nineteenth century. Marx adopts Hegel’s historical model, replacing idealism as driving force with materialism¹⁴² and thereby incorporating further elements, such as ‘productive forces’, capital and property into the progress equation. August Comte coins the term (and founds the discipline of) sociology by scientifically studying ‘human societies and their development’,¹⁴³ thus defining yet another agent at once susceptible to, and responsible for, historical developments. Building on the political considerations that were always part of the reflections on progress since Voltaire and Kant, John Stuart Mill becomes the first to suggest that a ‘scientifically oriented society could be a liberal democracy’ as ‘such a society would best maintain the gains already achieved and nurture further improvement.’¹⁴⁴ The notions of liberty and, most pronounced, ‘utility’ (defined as ‘aggregate pleasure’) appear as specific goals of progress. Mill’s influence is discernible in the development of ever more liberal institutions and constitutions.¹⁴⁵

Departing from Lamarck’s discovery of biological adaptability¹⁴⁶ and subsequently Darwin’s theory of evolution based on that very propensity, Herbert Spencer grounds the notion of human progress in the biological sciences.¹⁴⁷ Considering evil as the ‘non-adaptation of constitution to conditions’¹⁴⁸ it can – by virtue of the universal law of adaptation (living beings gradually change to fit into their environments) – only be a passing state duly to be outgrown by adaptive corrections. Progress thus naturally manifests in the elimination of evil through increasing congruence between ‘constitution and condition’. Based on this observation Spencer formulates a law of progress,¹⁴⁹ stating that ‘every active force produces more than one change – every cause produces more than one effect.’¹⁵⁰ Progress, generically defined as ‘development from the simple to the complex’, or the ‘advance from homogeneity of structure to heterogeneity of structure’,¹⁵¹ had found a

¹³⁷ Hegel, quoted in Meek-Lange.

¹³⁸ Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century* (OUP USA, New York 2009), 413, original emphasis.

¹³⁹ Georg Friedrich Hegel: *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, posthumously published by Eduard Gans in 1873

¹⁴⁰ Hegel quoted in Taruskin, *Music in the Nineteenth Century*, 413.

¹⁴¹ Meek-Lange, *Progress*, section 5.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, section 4.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ In *On Liberty* (1859) Mill strongly argues against government interference.

¹⁴⁶ Also sometimes referred to as Lamarckian use-inheritance.

¹⁴⁷ Meek-Lange, *Progress*, section 4.

¹⁴⁸ Spencer: *Social Statics* (1841, 59) quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Herbert Spencer: *Progress: Its Law and Cause* (1857).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 37 quoted in Meek-Lange, *Progress*, section 4.

¹⁵¹ Spencer, 9 quoted in Meek-Lange.

universally valid explanation:¹⁵² It occurs by way of ‘successive differentiations’¹⁵³ caused in turn by conditional adaptation.

Even though all these ‘progress narratives’ arose in Europe, their universality was assumed up and until the nineteenth century. European models were considered to ‘set the standards’ but not to exclude the rest of the world, which would eventually catch up until every global citizen had become ‘a full participant in an enlightened order.’¹⁵⁴ Only with the ‘introduction of biological evolution into writings on progress’,¹⁵⁵ a perception of European superiority emerged, which – in its worst forms – threw the very notion of progress into jeopardy.

Criticism of this model arose from those marginalized and denied the benefits of perceived progress (although generally such groups did not disavow progress, but only insisted that it should be more justly distributed). A different kind of critique arises from within, finding expression in scepticism of the possibility of progress in a world of finite resources and, moreover, given humankind’s hubristic nature. Hegel’s justification of conflict as dialectically productive force hardly seems credible anymore considering the catastrophe of Europe’s self-mutilation in two world wars. As Fukuyama¹⁵⁶ notes, ‘modern war is destructive rather than invigorating ... devastating rather than re-energizing.’ Continuing conflict, excessive violence and environmental destruction even after the cataclysm of the world wars betray any remaining hope that such a devastating experience could have had a purging effect and subsequently propel humankind into a more enlightened state of existence. Historically and philosophically speaking, European progress narratives have proven to be untenable and came to an end in 1945.

For some this date implies the end of Modernism¹⁵⁷ – a logical conclusion if the term denotes an ideology based on the paradigm of progress. Yet, in spite of a complete disillusionment in respect of ‘progress’ as philosophical tenet, history not only continues to unfold, but continues to bring forth novelties on an unprecedented scale. Boosted by the technological impetus to supply ever more sophisticated weaponry, post-war developments carry on unabatedly, especially in the realms of science, technology and (in many ways as a consequence hereof) with respect to societal structures. Thus *the notion of progress – abandoned culturally – is transferred to the techno-human project*, where it continues to reign uncontestedly, regardless of any degree of culture pessimism. In fact, most probably it is so successful in the technological domain precisely by virtue of ‘no longer [being] burdened with the idea of a completion of modernity...’¹⁵⁸

Technologically speaking, therefore, the (global) progress narrative has only just begun. In this regard, an aspect of Modernism¹⁵⁹ persists and prevails. To distinguish this phase from the culturally driven movement at the end of the nineteenth century, Habermas (with reference to Max Weber) speaks of an era of ‘modernization’.¹⁶⁰ It differs from ‘Modernism’ in that its driving forces stem directly from a ‘social-scientific functionalism’, not primarily from an ethical, cultural impetus. In fact, in most cases modernization is decisively divorced from cultural considerations and may well be characterized as anti-cultural, anti-traditional, conspicuously material and pragmatic.¹⁶¹ ‘Modernization ... dissociates “modernity” from its modern European

¹⁵² Spencer finds evidence for this type of progress in astronomy, geology and linguistics.

¹⁵³ Spencer, 10, quoted in Meek-Lange.

¹⁵⁴ Meek-Lange, *Progress*, section 4.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Avon Books, New York 1992), 335, quoted in Meek-Lange, *Progress*

¹⁵⁷ See footnote 85, pg. 65.

¹⁵⁸ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, 3.

¹⁵⁹ Strictly speaking ‘Modernism’ here refers to ‘modernism’ (spelled without capital) as well, i.e. it entails both aspects of (temporal) currentness and (ideological) fetishization.

¹⁶⁰ Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 2.

¹⁶¹ ‘The concept of modernization refers to a bundle of processes that are cumulative and mutually reinforcing: to the formation of capital and the mobilization of resources; to the development of the forces of production and the increase of the productivity of labour; to the establishment of centralized political power...; to the proliferation of rights of political participation...; to the secularization of values and norms...’ Habermas, 2.

origins [the historical context of Western rationalism] and stylizes it into a spatio-temporally neutral model for processes of social development in general.¹⁶² Habermas summarizes the situation as follows:

A self-sufficient advancing modernization of society has separated itself from the impulses of a cultural modernity that has seemingly become obsolete in the mean time; it only carries out the functional laws of economy and state, technology and science... The relentless acceleration of social processes appears as the reverse side of a culture that is exhausted and has passed in to a crystalline state.¹⁶³

Because the notion of modernization overtly perpetuates the modernist impulse of innovation and ‘making new’, it is conventionally perceived as the present mode of a continuing Modernism. But there are decisive differences between *a culture fostering an innovative spirit, motivated by critical enquiry* on the one hand and *an industrial enterprise, employing innovative technologies, motivated by the critical aim of financial profit* on the other. The former goes out to inquire; the latter comes home to roost with comfortable ‘solutions’. The former questions existing comfort zones and departs from them; the latter establishes ever-greater comfort zones, discharging the uncomfortable questions. The former squanders, embraces challenges and adventures, opens up to the outside, the unknown, the foreign and other; the latter principally hoards, closes off, secures, limits, restricts and ignores all but its own interests.

Dissociated from an innovatively self-reflexive culture, the idea of ‘modernization’ is informed by a pursuit of innovation as a ‘fix’ (a technical solution or commodity), sometimes even only as a play with the novel *per se*, but certainly not as a critical inquiry into the mode of (modern) existence. Mistaken for a *continuation* of Modernism, while it at most acts as a seductive *substitute*, the notion of modernization has left a considerable cultural void since WWII, permitting brazen incongruities to thrive. Unchecked by ethical considerations (i.e. no longer linked to an underlying investigation into the possibility of genuine progress), modernizations may easily and unscrupulously alter erstwhile cultural artefacts into mere functional (and hence usually commercial) commodities.¹⁶⁴

Severed from an underlying cultural grounding and purpose, innovation has become an orphaned, unguided principle, potentially causing havoc by being applied ubiquitously and in an uncoordinated matter, seemingly unstoppable even in the face of severe environmental degradation or complete habitat destruction. With such scenarios looming as ever more probable outcomes of current developments, another watershed has been reached: Instead of hailing technological innovation as *alibi* for progress it must finally be recognized as ultimate *betrayal* of genuine progress and, more importantly, a sense of sustainable wellbeing. At the very least it should have become clear that purposeful innovation cannot proceed from an abstract reification¹⁶⁵ of novelty.

¹⁶² Habermas, 2.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶⁴ This explains the ‘digestion’ of symphonic motives to ringtones, the sole identification of classical works via their appropriations as sound tracks, the reduction of any musical expositions to the maximal length of a 30 second ‘infomercial’, the glamorization of soloists as superstars, the stylisation of singers as models, the fetishization of opera houses, concert halls and conservatories as temples of a ‘naturalized’ culture, etc. All of these phenomena are distorted remnants of quondam innovations, their only modernized feature being their distortion.

¹⁶⁵ A delineation regarding the use of the concept of ‘reification’ throughout this thesis is necessary: With ‘reification of novelty’ I refer to an understanding of novelty as an absolute, independent quality, isolated from specific contexts. The notion of ‘reification’ in the (Marxist) sense that Lukács has coined it to describe the commodification of all societal relations is not implied, although what I call a modernist or reified understanding of novelty it overlaps with his understanding of attaching ‘independent, quantifiable, non-relational features’ to experiences, making them ‘thinglike’ and thereby alienating them from ‘subjective meaning’ (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 25). My critique of reification is more generally derived from a Heraclitian thrust, wishing to uphold the dynamically changing quality and flux of phenomena, against the danger of their solidification into rigidly fixed Platonic concepts. As I have already expounded in Chapter 2.1 (see pg. 36, 37) a very general reifying tendency is conditioned semantically through the linguistic propensity of abstracting nouns (concepts) from verbs (activities).

changing, being perceived over time, etc. – yet this aspect depends on continuous physical persistence without which the identifying process would be impossible. With novelty this relation is inverted: it primarily occurs in a temporal dimension. The quality of novelty plays out in the flash of an unprecedented instance. In its physical (existential) emanation, what was novel may persist even if its novelty has worn off. In fact, its (existential) persistence *implies* that its novelty will have receded.

Both identity and novelty are *dynamic* and *relational* qualities, but whereas the first usually *dawns gradually* and can persist (the process to fully assess, recognize and get to know an identity takes time), the second *occurs in a moment*. In fact it can only be momentary, after which its novelty ceases to exist. Novelty is a self-contradictory riddle: it depends on ‘its recognition’ to emerge. Yet the recognition of its appearance is at once its demise.

Identity ‘effects’ itself over a long period of time and, by implication, identification (or familiarization) is usually a lengthy process. Hence *identity only emerges from protracted, continuously negotiated relations*. Antithetically, *novelty arises in a flash*, immediately. It is a birth, it has a way of breaking forth, inevitably containing an element of surprise. One can never be prepared for it. It cannot persist and thus requires quick recognition. Perhaps novelty can be described as the initial emanation of an identity, a moment of a spectacular, first-ever encounter. It is a dramatic introduction, after which the rather more complex and less dramatic process of understanding (familiarizing, relating, assimilating, accommodating, etc.) unfolds. As the appreciation of the *singularity of an identity grows* (or its perception deepens), so its perceived *novelty recedes*.

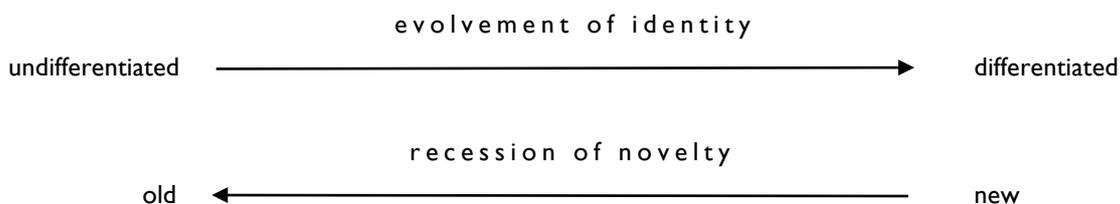


Fig. 4: When reflecting the processual dynamics of identity and novelty, opposite trajectories become evident. By definition they respectively frame each other inversely.

These reflections highlight the subjectivity of the notion of novelty. By definition, *the emergence of novelty incurs its own subject*. In order for novelty to manifest a subjective observer is required to perceive it as such. Even if the possibility of absolute novelty were to be considered, such an instance could only last for a split second instant until that which was absolutely novel for a moment will have been recognized and thus assimilated into the known. Such an instance of recognition would thus amount to a threshold between the unknown and the known. And so, straightaway, we are thrown back to a fully subjective qualification, for what is known or unknown is inevitably relative to a particular observer. It may be concluded then that – paradoxically – novelty depends more on its *intelligibility* than on its *novelty* to be novel.

ii) Novelty derived from context

In the previous section it was argued that novelty can only be determined by reference to a specific context. Oblivious to this relational condition, modernist thinking not only privileges ‘novelty’ over ‘context’, but fails to make a constructive connection between both concepts. Pronouncements of ‘novelty’ are ubiquitous, considerations of ‘context’ very rare. ‘Novelty’ – held to embody what is exiting, worthwhile, advanced – is perceived and employed as quantitative measure of progress. ‘Context’ – perceived as a contingent and often irksome condition – represents that which holds innovation back: It is often seen as backdrop *against* which modernist (or modernizing) strategies must be deployed, rather than facilitative, enabling set of circumstances *from* which specific opportunities arise. In its activist aspect, modernism seems to regard ‘novelty’ and ‘context’

as conflicting, oppositional forces. From a complexity perspective such modernist perceptions amount to *fabricating* or even enforcing novelties by *resisting* context.¹⁶⁷

Thinking the relation from context to novelty as an enabling one, makes possible a different scenario. Contexts, which abound always and everywhere, allow countless novel relations, synergies and opportunities to emerge instantaneously, systemically, automatically. If this process is not quite effortless, it is at least driven by the positive feedback of an increasing congruence and alignment. Such an approach is characterized by what might be termed ‘ecological’ thinking, which acknowledges and incorporates environmental¹⁶⁸ connections, as opposed to modernist thinking, which radically questions and resists contextual ties. Modernist thinking is understandable as reaction against naturalist models that tended to subsume history and culture under ‘natural phenomena’ without sufficient distinction. However, ecological thinking is a long-due reassessment, allowing for a differentiated view on history and culture as largely contingent on natural conditions, indeed *different* from such conditions but certainly *never separated* from these.¹⁶⁹

Reiterating a core thesis of this study I posit that such a differentiated view – beyond a modernist dichotomy of novelty and context – can only be gained from a complexity perspective. With regard to the systemic nature of ‘novelty *in* and *by* context’, it requires leaving behind modernism’s *either-or* distinction and adopting complexity’s *concurrently-antagonistic-and-constitutive* conditionality.¹⁷⁰

iii) Progress aimed at novelty

One of the defining ideas of modernism is its understanding of *modernization as means of progress*.¹⁷¹ This assumes not only *that things change* (which is undeniable), but concurrently *that they will get better* if it can be ensured that a modern approach is applied properly and efficiently to plan, organize and, if necessary, intervene and exhaustively control ‘everything’. ‘Finding the internal regularities [to guarantee the outcome hoped for and eliminating the threatening contingencies] ‘was the hope of what could generically be called Modernism.’¹⁷²

The method by which *progress* is implemented is innovation; the ‘unit’ by which it is measured and unambiguously distinguished from *regress* is the ‘novel’. Reified and idealized, ‘the novel’ represents and epitomizes the core idea (and/or agenda) of Modernism. It is imbued with extraordinary kudos, reaffirming on each appearance that the project is still on track. As long as there are ‘new things’ (inventions, machines, developments, fashions, ideas) the hypothesis of a ‘modern existence’ is corroborated.

Modernist progress narratives subscribe to the historicist notion that progress (historical development) follows a natural, evolutionary trajectory. By referring to ‘growth’ as a natural phenomenon and arguing that modernism merely emulates this model, its advocates argue that the approach is founded on ‘natural’ evolutionary principles. However, nature as model is used selectively, overlooking the fact that in nature it is living beings and not their accoutrements that ‘grow’. In addition, natural beings ‘grow old’ and towards death and do not become younger en route to ‘the new’, as modernist progress promises. The reference to natural growth also tends to ignore nature’s integrally complementary lifecycles that includes death and decay. The

¹⁶⁷ Modernisms’ response to ‘contextual resistance’ has been the founding of strong organizations and especially institutions as means of assembling sufficient leverage to overcome such ‘obstacles’ and successfully drive and implement innovative projects. Hence institutions – as focus of power in opposition to otherwise overwhelming contextual conditions – epitomize the modernist approach. The perceived necessity for strong institutions derives from the perceived inherent conflict between innovation and context. Also see Chapter 1, pg. 21, footnote 184.

¹⁶⁸ Environment should here be understood broadly to include natural (ecological) and cultural (historical, traditional) contexts.

¹⁶⁹ Summarizing his philosophical approach towards complexity, Morin deliberates on this dilemma: ‘We must, certainly, reintegrate humans with nature and we must be able to distinguish humans from nature, thereby not reducing humans to nature.’ Morin, *On Complexity*, 8.

¹⁷⁰ Morin, *Method*, 48; also see previous discussion of this Morinian ‘formula’ in Chapter 1, pg. 26, footnote 233.

¹⁷¹ Even though Romanticism reacts against Enlightened rationality, the idea of historical, philosophical, scientific and artistic progress remains influential throughout the nineteenth century. Hence postulations of progress first formulated in the Age of Enlightenment (e.g. by Turgot, Condorcet, Hume, Locke, Voltaire) persist in Comte, Mill and Spencer and therefore remain strongly influential at the dawn of Modernism. See Parentheses V for a detailed exposition of this question.

¹⁷² Zygmunt Bauman quoted in Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 55.

omission of this crucially important balancing aspect in modern growth and progress narratives renders the claim of an underlying analogy with nature specious.

Despite being confronted by glaringly conspicuous and threateningly accumulating imbalances,¹⁷³ there seems little prospect of paradigmatic modernist thinking being reassessed. On the contrary, its application seems invigorated by the mounting crises¹⁷⁴ as these continue to be considered as mere ‘contingencies’, reaffirming the argument that ‘modernism cannot be abandoned just now, as there are still so many problems to be solved’. Ironically, such a modernist enthusiasm fails to see that precisely the *hubris of assumed problem-solving ability* has in itself become one of the biggest problems of our time.¹⁷⁵

iv) Conclusions

Novelty emerges as a concept with an enigmatic nature: It is an abstract construct that cannot be reified or ‘substantiated’. It carries no substance in itself but merely describes a fleeting and passing state of something else. It can only arise due to its recognition (which is its substantiating act), subsequent to which it is also nullified: Once recognized it is not ‘new’ anymore.

Understood as a relational quality, novelty arises in a certain context and, more importantly, *by virtue of a specific context*. This kind of novelty may be framed as an emergent, ecological or a systemic quality or feature. It relies on a congruence of conditions on and from which it thrives. As a rule, its characteristic of ‘being novel’ will be less pronounced than that of ‘being viable’ (related, rooted, logical, sensible, etc.), even to the extent that the ‘novelty’ (such as, for example, that of the originality of the congruity) may be overlooked. This kind of novelty will only be recognized from a complexity perspective and, conversely, only a complexity view will make such a quality appear new (i.e. proffer sufficient appreciation, insight or sense of marvel to acknowledge novelty without sensationalist attributes). Perceiving novelty as contextual quality is therefore intrinsically linked to a complexity view.

Unfortunately, this view of novelty constitutes the exception. More commonly novelty is linked to the notion of progress. This assumes an understanding of the novel as reified, i.e. tangible, achievable goal, substantiated by the hope attached to it that it will improve conditions, ameliorate circumstances, environments or contexts.¹⁷⁶ It is evident that this view results from a modernist perception, and that this concept of ‘novelty as absolute quality’ has significantly contributed to the emergence of modernist thinking. The latter arises as method in response to the paradigm of the former: innovation and modernization derive their purpose from a reference to the absolute new; progress maps the on-going approximation of that goal.

This concept of novelty is best described as entrepreneurial, visionary, individual, self-initiated, goal-orientated. It has been the inspiration (i.e. the self-referential motivation to modernize) that has led to modernism’s undeniable successes, both as *liberating movement* (annihilating cultural, religious, societal and juridical restrictions) and as *rational movement* (analysing, calculating, organizing and hence allowing for interventions and strategic planning).

Even though perhaps no other epoch has so been preoccupied with ‘the idea of the new’, it must be conceded that, ironically, modernism no longer has a firm grasp on its core idea but by now instead fosters but a conspicuously anachronistic, superficial and dangerously short-sighted understanding of its own driving force. In order to make a case for its long overdue supersession an investigation into prevailing modernist perceptions of novelty in music, as well as their emanations in current forms of musical practice is necessary.

¹⁷³ E.g. those of exploitation and waste production *without* counteractive measures of regeneration and recycling.

¹⁷⁴ I refer here to the category of crises, which – due to their inestimable dimensions – emanate as global predicaments, such as climate change, carbon fuel emissions, or species extinction.

¹⁷⁵ This statement once again refers to the Allenby & Sarewitz’s *category mistake* explained in Chapter 1, pg 34.

¹⁷⁶ As was explicated in footnote 165 on pg. 75 a ‘reification’ of novelty refers to its understanding as absolute, isolable quality and does not intend to evoke Marxist connotations.

b) THE CONTROVERSY OF NOVELTY IN MUSIC

My argument rests on the proposition that the modernist idea of ‘novelty’ – both through its enthusiastic embrace as well as its determined rejection – has caused major upheavals in the musical practice of the twentieth century, the reverberations of which continue to determine current conventions and practices. In my view, modernist perceptions of novelty as ‘absolute quality’ lie at the base of at least two rigorously entrenched divisions within the musical discipline. As I wish to show, seemingly unrelated symptoms of an ailing musical profession may be referred back to irreconcilable understandings of tradition and innovation / conservation and progress / the canonic and the contingently current.

One symptom of this division is the musical discipline’s current overemphasis on the historical canon of European musical masterworks, much to the detriment of the performance of contemporary music, which is thereby severely marginalizing. Closely related is the unshakable (and unavailing) separation of musical performance from musical creation (composition), to the degree that these two domains are currently considered fully independent, specialist disciplines that are studied and practiced in isolation by specialist practitioners who have very little to say to each other, as they generally subscribe to contradictory aesthetics. This difference may then even further be related to another facet of the divide, which emanates in a rigorously upheld separation between practical and theoretical aspects of music making in western educational systems. Incredulous as it might appear, firmly entrenched institutional segregation along so-called practical and theoretical departments often effectively prevent the integration and synergy of ‘knowing’ and ‘doing’.

Even though these rifts have historically grown into generally accepted ‘solutions’ accommodating seemingly insurmountable disciplinary differences, I consider them as principally damaging to the musical profession and therefore wish to challenge their wide-spread acceptance. For this purpose I briefly recapitulate and interpret the historical developments leading to their respective entrenchments, hoping to lay bare the underlying perceptions that would need to be addressed to overcome them. Preempting the goal of argument, I believe that a complex comprehension of novelty (instead of the prevailing modernist understanding) would eliminate most of the reasons currently still enforcing and corroborating the separation.

i) First symptomatic conflict: *Historical* conservation versus *contemporary* expression

Broadly speaking, activities within the professional musical domain are determined by two main concerns: the *historical conservation* of existing performance traditions and the *current translation* of lived experiences into novel forms of musical expressions.

The former, ‘conservational’ approach is principally concerned with the curation of an extant archive. It may be understood as a response to the compelling bequest of a monumental heritage of musical documents, artefacts and traditions. From the possibility to re-enact music (the propensity of transferring it from a dormant to a momentarily actualized state) repeatable opportunities arise of emulating the act of *originally creating* music by *interpreting preconceived blueprints* of earlier creations.

The latter, ‘translational’ approach is the domain of immediate, individual and – most importantly – contemporary activity, thus concerned with localized, current, social and political affairs and, on another level, with questions of a creative, artistic or philosophical nature. By definition this domain is open, undetermined, inventive, always provisional and as a result inevitably messy.

The conservative, curative, re-creative process has several notable ‘advantages’ over the original act of composing (creating, or effectively ‘making’) new music, the most obvious being that it avoids the complex of invention – and the formal decisions, experimentations, trials and errors, etc. that invariably accompany any inventive process. Instead it can focus solely on the realization and meticulous execution of pre-existing designs. This specialization on performance and interpretation can, in turn, be conceived as a quantifiable proficiency and further commoditised into a prestigious and coveted social attribute. What makes this kind of recognition especially sought-after is that it appears intrinsically ‘cultured’, exemplifying not only cultural engagement but,

just as much, cultural production. Its *pretext* is the ‘conservation’ of a cultural inheritance by displaying loyalty and fidelity to a canonized form of expression. But its *precondition* is that of a closed canon of completed works, the composers being dead and no longer interfering, the messiness of all open processes tidied up.

The re-creative, curative domain is dominated by the nineteenth-century construct of the ‘musical work’¹⁷⁷ and thereby cites ‘novelty’ merely as historical quality – highly revered, but kept at a safe distance. The notion of (erstwhile) ‘novelty’ is crucial to the concept of the musical ‘work’. It serves to ‘imbue historically specific musical emanations with a quality of structural and artistic integrity that is intended to survive intact in spite of the vagaries of specific performances.’¹⁷⁸ By virtue of this construction and interpreting musical ‘works’ as ‘historical novelties distilled into perfect expressions’ a vast collection of historical artefacts has become available for musico-archaeological studies, as it were. Today the majority of classically trained musicians is spellbound by this material and hardly ever escapes from the ‘spell’ cast by this archaeological haul, even though it amounts to a canon of extremely deterministic, semantically foreign, obscure and anachronistic instructions.

Through my training as a cellist I am thoroughly familiar with this archaeological ‘repository’. Compelling and overwhelming as its scope and content might be, this alone seems insufficient reason to explain the near exclusive preoccupation with its material. Over and apart from an estimation of the qualities of early music (which I can fully appreciate), I read this preoccupation as *an implicit avoidance of contemporary music*. It seems undeniable that a certain aspect of contemporary music scares away a large majority of musicians, who instead take refuge to early music.

Since in all other realms of life it is precisely the contemporary that is privileged and the modern that is most attractive and receives most attention, the question arises: Why this conspicuous *avoidance* of contemporary expressions in classical concert music? Whereas contemporary design, fashion, architecture and technology are held in high esteem – both in terms of prestigious as well as economical currency – why is ‘serious’ contemporary music so undervalued?¹⁷⁹ Before proposing an answer to this question a brief reflection on what I perceive to be the historical precedent for the strict segregation between ancient and contemporary music is offered.

PARENTHESIS VI: WITHDRAWING NEW MUSIC: A TEMPORARY INTERVENTION PERMANENTLY INSTITUTIONALIZED

I wish to argue that the disciplinary schism between fraternities engaging with new music, as opposed to those dealing with historical music, can be traced back to the early twentieth century. More specifically I perceive it to have manifested first in Schönberg’s *Verein für musikalische Privataufführungen*,¹⁸⁰ founded in Vienna in 1918. The purpose of this society was that of offering a protected space for peaceful presentations of new musical works. Setting up such a forum had become necessary as local audience’s initial contempt for the atonal compositions emanating from the Second Viennese school had over the years turned to openly displayed

¹⁷⁷ This thesis is convincingly explicated in Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works: An Essay in the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1994).

¹⁷⁸ This formulation may serve as cursory summary of Goehr’s theory of the imaginary museum.

¹⁷⁹ It should be stressed that this discussion deals with contemporary concert music (‘art music’, as it is called in South Africa). Obviously the problem does not apply to contemporary forms of *popular* music, which enjoy unequivocal esteem on about the same level as contemporary fashion or technology. Needless to say, the usual sociological explanations – referring to the easy accessibility and consumption – are not helpful here, for these merely refer back to the genre, whose idiom is purposefully designed to entertain. (This it does most successfully by means of dolling-up hackneyed material, i.e. presenting ever-same, rudimentary harmonic progressions and musical structures rendered in fashionable arrangements.) The question posed here aims at unravelling a structural relationship: Why is it that music based on innovative structural principles – comparable to current technology – does not ‘get home’ as it were?

¹⁸⁰ Society for Private Musical Performances.

outrage culminating in several riotously disrupted concerts.¹⁸¹ Schönberg's consequence was that of withdrawing new works from public performances, public assault and 'corrupting public influence'.¹⁸²

Concerts were presented weekly and programmes were kept short, but were often repeated to familiarize listeners with new works. Access was restricted to members of the society – by implication a discerning and genuinely interested audience. Critics were barred from attendance. Applause, just as much as any enunciation of disapproval, was strictly prohibited.

It should be noted that Schönberg resorted to this strategy so that an interested audience could actually perceive new music peaceably, not to bar new musical works from being heard publicly.¹⁸³ He saw his intervention as a necessary but provisional measure, an interim educational initiative aimed at elevating a select audience's faculty of musical judgement, 'until such time that the general audience would be "ready" for the new works and these could be presented in "normal" concerts'.¹⁸⁴

However, in spite of these explicitly stated intentions, the model proved to be pragmatically viable and thereby set a clear precedent for fractioning progressive music from predominantly traditionalist forms, soon to be followed widely.¹⁸⁵ Its most notable consequence was the establishment of the *International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM)* in Salzburg in 1922, which soon opened national sections throughout the world. Today the ISCM sees itself as 'premier forum for the advancement, dissemination and interchange of new music from around the world',¹⁸⁶ operating in a standardized manner in over 50 countries.

Due to its high esteem for its international promotion of new music, the organization's ghettoizing impact on new music has hardly been discerned. For just as much as it elevates and promotes exclusively new musical works, so it also disconnects and separates (by privileging and isolating) the performance of such works from broader contexts. Thus, contrary to Schönberg's intentions, his intervention initiated a 'polarization of public concerts'¹⁸⁷ leading to the institutionalized separation of 'new' from 'familiar' music. Today this division is a globally entrenched characteristic of the classical music industry, in which 'canonic' and 'new' music are two fully different and seemingly incompatible product categories, addressing distinct and mutually exclusive market segments.

Viewed historically such a categorical division (into fully separate musical, aesthetic and ideological fields) is very unusual, although not fully unprecedented.¹⁸⁸ It is all the more remarkable, as up and until the early twentieth century – in fact until the pivotal point of Schönberg's radical decision in 1918 – only contemporaneous music (current music of the day, indicating an inclusive and complementary practice of creation, performance and reception) existed. By implication music was always 'new', not necessarily in a visionary, unprecedented sense, but rather as in 'newly produced' ('continuously created' and thereby contemporaneously intelligible. In the same vein its expressive value would very soon 'expire', so that music of earlier periods was principally considered to be out-dated. (Even after the watershed event of Mendelssohn's Bach revival in 1829, which rekindled a renewed interest in ancient forms of musical expression, performances

¹⁸¹ The most notorious incident was the so-called 'Watschenkonzert' of 31.3.1913, in which the performance of Schönberg's *Kammersymphonie Nr. 1*, Webern's *Sechs Stücke für Orchester*, op. 6 and Berg's *Altenberg-Lieder*, op. 4 elicited a veritable scuffle in the audience, with even fisticuffs being reported. (Doris Lanz, *Neue Musik in alten Mauern. Die 'Gattiker-Hausabende für zeitgenössische Musik' - Eine Berner Konzertgeschichte, 1940-1967* (Peter Lang, Bern 2006), 16, 17.

¹⁸² Excerpt from the society's Statement of Aims (formulated by Alban Berg) quoted in Lanz, 17.

¹⁸³ Erwin Stein quoted in Thomas Brezinka, *Erwin Stein: ein Musiker in Wien und London* (Böhlau Verlag, Vienna 2005), 75: 'Denn es geht hier nicht so sehr darum, ein oder das andere Werk, das sonst vorläufig nicht gespielt würde, zu Gehör zu bringen, als im allgemeinen um die Schärfung der Aufmerksamkeit, des Ohres, des Urteils. Kurz ... solche Aufführungen sollen nicht der Werke wegen, die es nicht nötig haben, sondern des Publikums wegen, das es nötig hat, stattfinden. Ist dieses erst weit genug, dann gehören jene in die normalen Konzerte.'

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, translation of the last sentence of aforementioned citation.

¹⁸⁵ Parallel to an offshoot of the Vienna society in Prague, a *Czech Society for New Music* is founded. Other similar initiatives are the *Melos Gemeinschaft* (Berlin, 1920), the *Pro Arte Concerts* (Brussels) and the *Donaueschinger Musiktage* (both founded in 1921). (Lanz, *Neue Musik in alten Mauern*, 18).

¹⁸⁶ See www.iscm.org/about%20&%20contact/international-society-contemporary-music-iscm [accessed on 3.7.14].

¹⁸⁷ Lanz, *Neue Musik in alten Mauern*, 18.

¹⁸⁸ The seventeenth century's distinction between *prima* and *seconda prattica* shows certain analogies.

of earlier music were the exception, facilitated merely for the sake of historical curiosity.¹⁸⁹) In the light of these circumstances the rejection and subsequent withdrawal of newly created music from public stages constitutes a most significant breach of a century-old tradition. Tellingly, it is accompanied by a change of musical nomenclature: instead of contemporary music ('affiliated' to its period of origin) there is now talk of 'new' music.

Thus, following the modernist obsession with novelty, 'innovation' – as abstracted (reified, absolutised) feature – is now also introduced into music. But ironically the supreme elevation of 'novelty' (granting it the privilege to principally disregard all other musical considerations) tends to baffle and alienate audiences by overriding the intelligibility of its designs. Moreover, it effectively destroys the possibility of creating 'contemporaneous music', which by definition would always contain traditionally established features, kept up to date by gradual innovations. Contrary to this approach, the introduction of the 'novel' as absolute quality does not tolerate gradual shifts. The modernist pursuit of novelty is radical; by definition its quest is that of uprooting traditional conventions.

In hindsight it seems plausible that the invention of the term 'new music' might have been a strategy of coming to terms with the rejection of newly composed works by contemporary audiences. Convinced of the structural quality of their works composers would justify their creations by referring them to a future canon of music yet to emanate from the appreciation of an audience *in spe*. In many cases this visionary hope has in fact materialized – proven by the fact that numerous erstwhile undecipherable works now comfortably belong to mainstream repertoire.

In the same vein it should be stressed, that these reflections are not intended to categorically depreciate the notion of musical innovation nor to principally question the legitimacy of radically new musical approaches. They do, however, wish to highlight the historical fact of significant shifts in musical relations due to the introduction of the concept of 'novel musical material', or the privileged treatment of 'musical novelties'. For in a double sense the fateful events of 1918 have jeopardized the very possibility of contemporary music.

Subjected to the radicalized notion of musical innovation the 'middle ground' or centre stage of conventional, cultural music production first became a viciously contested battlefield of baffled audiences and rejected composers. But then it became a void, as both parties subsequently withdrew from the skirmishes, reciprocally insulted and hurt.¹⁹⁰ Subsequently the proponents of new music would rationalize an existence without audience, thereby diminishing their operational space to minuscule pockets of externally subsidized, artificial and isolated events. Concurrently audiences would rationalize an existence without composers which, however, proved much more fortuitous as ample compensation could be found in the works of dead composers. It has since manifested that these are much preferred to living ones.

Without having to reach a final conclusion about the reasons for the crisis (whether the reactionary audience is to be blamed¹⁹¹ or rather the composer's haughty 'neo-Hegelian aesthetics', which only valued the autonomous history of art¹⁹²), the fact of a break-up with devastating consequences cannot be overlooked. For whatever complex reasons the elevation of novelty to privileged musical feature led to the historical precedence of detaching the act of creating new music from its musical reception, thereby severing two previously mutually constitutive domains – much to the detriment of all parties involved.

¹⁸⁹ See Chapter 5 for a further discussion of the topic of non-contemporary *old* music.

¹⁹⁰ As a thought yet to be expounded I posit that, thus deserted, the void of contemporary musical production was gradually filled up with light, popular, un-conflicting and ever more commoditized forms of generic entertainment and for that reason has since become unavailable for serious art.

¹⁹¹ Arguably Adorno sets the tone for this kind of reasoning, arguing that 'uncompromising music' (i.e. music that resists reification and commoditization) represents 'the social truth against society'. ('Die unerbittliche Musik [vertritt] die gesellschaftliche Wahrheit gegen die Gesellschaft.' Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik* (Mohr, Tübingen 1949), 116.

¹⁹² Richard Taruskin, *Music from the Early 20th Century* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005), 353.

I posit that the separation of current from canonical repertoire, rigorously prevailing to this very day, is a direct consequence of the Viennese events almost a century ago. The mishap of Schönberg's temporary intervention turned into a permanently institutionalized division thus provides a partial answer to the question why contemporary music is absent and new music eschewed so conspicuously: Due to universally adopted organizational structures 'contemporary music' has become the domain of the entertainment industry and 'new music' – considered to be a specialist field of very limited impact and appeal – is categorically excluded from the main forums of public performance and reception of music.

Obviously there are pragmatic reasons justifying this organizational and ideological exclusion. Foremost amongst these will be the perceived (and / or real) incompatibility between 'progressive' (unconventional, radical, experimental) compositions on the one hand and the expected fulfilment of generic musical conventions on the other. Formulated with regard to the overall topic of novelty, it may be stated that the organizational segregation is a way of dealing with a principal incongruence of a compositional preoccupation with *musical novelties* as opposed to the (average music lover's) concern for an affirmation of *musical identities*.

This juxtaposition should not be read as essentialist, binary opposition, as this would reduce a multitude of compositional approaches as well as numerous facets of highly individual audience behaviour to principally polarized positions. It is merely proposed here as a model further to investigate the nature of underlying reasons for the divide, based on a differentiated understanding of *identity* and *novelty* and building on the preliminary reflections presented at the opening of this section.¹⁹³

Both identity and novelty were described there as '*dynamic and relational qualities*',¹⁹⁴ the first growing, the second receding over time. I therefore propose to refer to musical designs that foster the development of identities as '*relational music*'.¹⁹⁵ This throws a new light on the concept of '*autonomous music*' – its exact opposite – representing the good riddance of external, contextual conditions. By comparing these two concepts, an unbiased, structural assessment of pre-modernist and modernist musical designs becomes possible.¹⁹⁶

ii) Second symptomatic conflict: re-creating musical *identities* versus creating musical *novelties*
(i.e. performing *canonic* music versus composing *new* music)

The purpose of the art of composition up and until the late-nineteenth century could be described as the creation of '*relational music*'. Implying a slightly different emphasis than the conventional term '*functional music*', relationality does not only refer to external (sociological, contextual or historical) aspects, but just as much to intra-musical relations. Hence it encompasses the *identity* of the musical design, whereby '*identity*' (as defined previously)¹⁹⁷ is understood as a relational, negotiable quality, emerging from both the composition and its reception within a given historical and cultural context.

Conversely, from within a Modernist approach the notion of '*musical identity*' was discarded in favour of the notion of '*musical novelty*'. This follows from one of the principal Modernist motivations: that of *changing* rather than *servicing* existing conventions. Two tacit assumptions underlie this approach: the belief that radical changes will bring about '*progress*' and that music can exist autonomously.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ See Chapter 3, section 4.a.i), pg. 76 ff.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pg 77.

¹⁹⁵ With the introduction of these structural categories I hope to avoid the usual (political) value judgements, which are readily made in this context. 'Traditional' approaches or attitudes are all too easily perceived (and repudiated) as 'reactionary and, conversely simplistically, 'modernism' equated (and hence embraced) as 'enlightened liberalism'. Such stratifications make it virtually impossible to arrive at an unbiased assessment of deeper-layered structural relations, which the alternative categories hopefully permit.

¹⁹⁶ In this model 'pre-modernist' denotes music before 1918, preceding the severance of musical creation and musical perception.

¹⁹⁷ See reflections on '*identity*' in section 2 of this chapter, pg. 59 ff.

¹⁹⁸ Both assumptions have proven to be untenable, as I will argue duly.

It should be noted that ‘relational music’, even though not concerned with musical novelties primarily, was nevertheless subject to continuous change throughout history, naturally accommodating novel means of musical expression. Such ‘novelties’ would emerge ‘organically’ *in response* to changing relations, not *by deliberately upsetting* these. Musical innovations would thus be a historical by-product resulting from overall shifts, not a primary compositional or musical aim. This relationality – an intrinsic embedment into a network of cultural (historical, geographical, economic, etc.) conditions – might explain the relatively long periods of considerable stability and stylistic consistency, only occasionally marked by more radical changes linked to general delineations of historical epochs.¹⁹⁹

In turn, the contrasting, characteristic diversity and extreme overall stylistic incoherence of music after 1900 may be explained by the nineteenth century shift of perceiving music as primarily relational towards recognizing it as autonomous. Freed from the bulk of contextual relations, autonomously conceived musical designs could assume many more different guises, they could be experimental, discard inner and outer conventions and – being determined solely axiomatically – could be changed instantaneously simply by applying new axioms. Arguably the emergence of the idea of autonomous music and the privileged endorsement of ‘progressive innovation’ (permitting and driving idiosyncratic approaches, experimentation and fast-changing stylistic fashions) were two aspects of a concurrent, complex development. While the pursuit of musical autonomy would privilege musical novelties, the introduction of musical novelties would in turn drive the development of musical autonomy. A complex link exists between both concepts both, each, to some extent, being each other’s cause and consequence.²⁰⁰

The concept of musical autonomy not only privileges musical novelties over musical relations, it will deliberately invoke novelty-driven expressions as a means of corroborating the autonomy of the individual artist. To the degree that such expressions successfully communicate the independence of their artistic endeavour they lose their integrative, relational qualities. Musical novelty, employed as means to proclaim autonomy, can only *rely on its immediate impact* – the surprising unpredictability of its appearance and the instantaneous proclamation of its unconventionality and ‘new’-ness. Unless an identity-negotiating process is begun again after the initial impact (which would gradually transform the autonomous state into a relational one), little can be said about such music other than acknowledging its autonomy-cum-novelty.

A musical practice based on these two features is caught up in its own set of circumstantial conditions: As by definition novelty expires quickly ‘new novelties’ have to be invented (different rules, individual idiomatic syntax, particular algorithms, etc.) for each new work. Implicitly an ambition to uphold novelty drives itself into an ever-accelerating, frenzied development, without ever being able to reach its goal of the final, ultimate, pinnacled, unsurpassable novel: Inevitably, by tomorrow, today’s novelty will have become yesterday’s news.

By contrast the ‘relational’ approach works much slower, aiming at creating intelligible musical identities. To this end it might refer to existing musical forms, genres and functions employed as familiar frames in formulating and formalizing specific and individual expressions. In this way the characteristic ‘hybridity’ of identity²⁰¹ – *partly* familiar, *partly* new – plays out and allows for the mediation between the generic and the particular. This is a crucial element constituting the intelligibility of artistic expression. From this principle *identifiable musical* units, gestures or components (functionally speaking: semantically associable and decipherable utterances) gain their capacity for meaning and the communication thereof: *Exploring and negotiating relations* between degrees of similar and different, old and new, traditional and innovative, familiar and novel, own and foreign, etc.

In retrospect, the development of new music during the period immediately following WWI seems relatively tempered, as pockets of conservative traditions persisted alongside modernist pursuits. However, after WWII

¹⁹⁹ The fact that musical emanations of respective periods appear as a remarkably accurate ‘seismic record’ of contemporaneous historical developments reaffirms their far-reaching relationality.

²⁰⁰ See Morin’s metaphor of the fruit, footnote 16, pg. 38.

²⁰¹ See discussion in section 2 of this chapter, pg. 63.

when European traditions and cultural values seemed shattered, the 'new' in 'new music' implicitly acquired the imperative of being 'radically new'. A tellingly named *avant-garde* became its advocate, assuming the role of a radically progressive spearhead, operating at the perceived forefront of developments, relentlessly driving progress. In its 'intentional rejection of classical precedents'²⁰² it embodied modernism in all respects, calling for a complete liberation from traditions, past conventions, contexts, etc.

The idea of the *avant-garde* is perhaps the most salient manifestation of modernism's obsession with the radically novel in brave (or blind) defiance of the fact that *there can be no such thing as an absolute forefront*. If it is accepted that novelty only emerges in relation to a specific context, an *avant-garde* could only ever be defined as cutting a specific edge, *with respect to a very specific history, culture and world-view*. There is no grounding for the assumption of a position of universal hegemony, notwithstanding vocal claims to this effect.²⁰³

Today, after the momentum of ideologically driven musical developments has somewhat subsided, artists who still choose to work under such 'boundary conditions' are perhaps best described by means of Lyotard's concept of 'inventors'.²⁰⁴ They find themselves operating at *one particular of a multitude of frontiers* in a culturally and historically diverse world, comprised of multiple narratives and hence containing multiple modernities,²⁰⁵ subject to particular and relative perspectives of progress and determined by significantly varying value- and belief systems. And so the heirs of the erstwhile radical *avant-gardists* have in recent times rediscovered the charm of relational identities. Today poetically expressive and hence hauntingly beautiful compositions once again originate from this position of recalibrated coordinates: not those of a proclaimed absolute forefront but rather of specific, localized and individually interpreted frontiers of subjective expression.

The breach between composing and performing music running through the musical discipline as a veritable dividing line, separates the vast majority of classically trained instrumentalists (whose technical skills and aesthetics are predominantly honed by classical and romantic repertoire) from composers, musicologists, theoreticians and a minority of performers who have made the deliberate choice of specializing in the performance of new music. It is, in fact, euphemistic to speak merely of a *division*, when in fact the state of affairs rather points to a hostile *opposition*.

Perhaps because of such hard-line positions the divide has been accepted as an irrefutable disciplinary given. So deeply has it become entrenched in modern culture that all relevant institutional structures (e.g. those of universities, publishing houses, orchestras, broadcasting corporations, etc.) not only accommodate it, but in fact have been devised around it, thereby representing the divided domains in effect as separate and largely unrelated entities. It is never even considered that this apparently 'pragmatic solution' in reality amounts to a *ruinous segregation of mutually constitutive aspects of music making*.

From the vantage point of indigenous (non-western) musical cultures it seems schizophrenic to consider musical creation and performance to be separate domains. In such cultural constellations there exists but a single, indivisible musical domain for the typical musician, who concurrently acts as composer/inventor, performer/interpreter *and* social participator. A division of labour in industrial manner is unthinkable, just as breaking up music into separate parameters or components is usually unimaginable. This is not to say that there is no room for specialization in specific fields, but it is implied that any specializations must at some point be balanced by complementary collaborations. Without wishing to evoke a naïvely conceived musical 'arcadia' the question should be permitted, whether conventional practice in the Western world has not been splicing up music as *object* into separate compartments of specialisation for far too long, thereby losing an appreciation for music as *complex yet unified act* of 'lived' interactions.

²⁰² Harrison, *Modernism*.

²⁰³ The most influential proclamations to this effect with regard to 'classical music' were arguably those made by Schönberg, Adorno and Boulez. Other musical genres have also claimed *avant-garde* positions, notably Free Jazz, Noise, Avant Pop etc.

²⁰⁴ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (University Of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN 1984), xxv. Framing the notion of 'postmodern knowledge' Lyotard defines its principle as no longer 'the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy.'

²⁰⁵ Shmuel Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities* (Transaction Publisher, Rutgers University, Piscataway 2002).

iii) Synopsis

Modernism embodies the imperative to *innovate*, to question the old and come up with new results. Modernist thinking principally privileges investigative, provocative *signs of novelty* over corroborative, communicative *signs of identity*. Musical Modernism principally transforms the role of the composer from *producer* (or replicator) of current, contemporary music to *creator* (inventor) of new music. It legitimizes the realm of experimental music and even elevates its status to that of decisively important, path-breaking, future-determining activity.

Modernist considerations principally privilege the role of the composer over that of the performer, as composition potentially guarantees the continued provision of musical novelties. (If the 'newness' of music is its most interesting aspect, it follows that composing will be the most important musical discipline, principally taking the lead of all the others.) By the same token Modernism alienates the conservative musician, whose conservatism arises from a responsibility towards a craft, (i.e. the craftsmanship of an instrumental technique, which might represent a centuries old tradition), as well as from the canon of masterworks, whose continued emanation implicitly relies on the perpetuation of pertinent performance techniques.

Hence the modernist imperative clearly reveals two characteristic types of musicians, the *experts* and the *inventors*. Borrowing this distinction from Lyotard,²⁰⁶ the divide opens up between those who *must embrace* novelty (as it substantiates what they do and constitutes their musical identity) and those that *must shun* novelty (as it questions what they do and, vice versa, because what they do questions the imperative of novelty).²⁰⁷

Persuaded into the pursuit of novelty *per se* (the postulate of absolute novelty without contextual or communicative negotiation), composers subscribing to Modernism forsake the traditional role of providing functional, contemporary musical scripts in favour of experimental, futuristic designs, thereby often baffling and effectively alienating audiences. The idea of novelty applied in this manner causes a deep discrepancy between disciplinary integrity and its effective functionality: In this case the commitment to an ideological obligation on one side results in its societal (communicative, relational) failure on the other. Music rejected by its audience proves dysfunctional in respect to its cultural and societal role (regardless of the reasons for such an incongruence). Unmediated musical novelty therefore effectively jeopardises the modernist musical project.

This failure directly plays into the hands of the conservative coterie, which eagerly panders to forsaken audiences, consoling them with overtly commoditized musical offerings. Concurrently this faction usually proclaims its assumed cultural obligation (or responsibility towards the 'values of Western civilization') rather vocally, implying that the misguided producers of new music have seemingly betrayed the cause. Thus an anachronistic musical practice is firmly established, glamorously legitimized with reference to its wide-spread popularity, social functionality and 'cultural integrity', purportedly safeguarding 'timeless' traditional values. In effect both sides – the advocates of novelty and the defenders of tradition – are locked into reactionary positions, to which their self-obliging disciplinary integrity keeps them chained.

This (somewhat pointed) summary attempts to describe the (somewhat convoluted) disciplinary *status quo*, which plays a huge role in preventing the flourishing of a contemporary musical practice. It amounts to the *institutionalized deadlock of opposites*, where a responsive, living practice would instead require *the reconciliation of the legitimate claims from both sides*. Ironically, the opposite viewpoints (petrified in their institutionalized disciplinary positions), both rest on the flawed modernist perception of novelty: its champions cling to an empty

²⁰⁶ Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxv.

²⁰⁷ Convention holds that the problem of the *disciplinary divide* is a mere case of *different personality types*, whose respective preferences and activities are unrelated to any specific understanding of novelty. Objecting to this argument, it should be noted that individual preferences are not under discussion here and that – even given such inevitably differences – it should still be possible to reflect on the wellbeing and functionality of the discipline as a whole. Only from the old misunderstanding of 'difference as opposition' will a distinction become a reason for a divide, whereas in the best case, even pronounced differences will contribute to the diversity and productivity of the discipline. As it stands now, institutional structures seem to protect idiosyncratic individual positions, rather than privilege conciliatory collaborations, thereby cementing divisions and forbidding their bridging.

myth of progress and liberation, its detractors cling to simulacra of past forms as purportedly sufficient compensation for a living musical practice.

Moreover, and arguably most detrimentally, the formal academe continues adamantly to defend and uphold this constellation, failing to recognize that its institutionalized structures effectively prevent the *necessary integration* of what it keeps *divided*: creation *and* curation, conceptualizing skills *and* performance skills, inventiveness *and* expertise. From the vantage point of a living (contemporary, relevant, responsive and responsible) musical practice, these are not opposites but complementary aspects. From such a perspective *the academic musical discipline appears as a vivisection table* on which music can only be studied as a neatly compartmentalized, dissected, dead object.

Probably the disconcerting disciplinary deadlocks are not intentional, but must be viewed as outcomes of unpredictable and complex historical developments. However, I do not believe that they must be accepted as inevitable and unchangeable but that it would be in the discipline's best interest *to direct its institutional powers towards a principal reconsideration of its synergetic forces, rather than towards an increased enforcement of the existing segregation of structures*. Such a reappraisal would essentially have to include a reassessment of the concept of novelty.

C) NOVELTY RECONSIDERED: EMERGENCE

The phenomenon of emergence has been touched on briefly in Chapter 2 in connection with the characterizations of complex systems.²⁰⁸ Arguably, emergence is the most enigmatic and possibly also the most decisive systemic 'force', considering its 'constitutive' role within the whole contributing towards the systemic organization and thereby to a system's novel qualities, i.e. its 'newness'.²⁰⁹ It is with regard to this last-mentioned quality that emergence is of interest here.

In systemic terms, 'newness' refers to the unpredictable and even inexplicable *change in quality* that imbues the systemic whole by virtue of the interaction of its elements, *'in respect to the anterior qualities of the elements'*.²¹⁰ In other words, by virtue of being tied into a system, its elements (parts, components) 'obtain' new (systemic) qualities which they did not possess prior to being subsumed into the systemic whole and which differ significantly (qualitatively) from their original (anterior) properties. 'New' is hence defined as *qualitative difference between an anterior* (previous and isolated) and a systemic (subsequent and integrated) state. The new qualities, 'inherent to the parts within a given system are absent or virtual when these parts are in an isolated state.'²¹¹ The parts on their own do not 'have access' to their new states, as these 'can only be acquired and developed by *and in the whole*'.²¹² They are 'not native virtues but virtues of synthesis'.²¹³

I posit that all these systemic considerations hold with regard to novelty in the arts as well: New qualities do not originate from inherent component states; novelty cannot 'be fabricated' materially, *from* within. At best it can be 'composed' in the sense of being 'put together'. While it requires (material) 'building blocks', it never emanates on the level of the blocks, but rather from what they have built. Novelty seems to 'attach' itself to component from nowhere: not from within the system (for that does not exist prior to its components constituting it), and not from within the component (which has no capacity of containing any more in itself than what determines it as such and such a component, i.e. limited part). Hence 'emergence' has been coined as term to cover or bridge this semantic void and at least name the inexplicable phenomenon of 'sudden emanation', 'newness manifesting' or 'novelty arising'.

²⁰⁸ See Chapter 2.3., pg. 38 ff.

²⁰⁹ Morin, *Method*, 105.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*, my emphasis.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 108.

The term at most offers a 'description', not an 'explanation'. Thus 'emergence' carries a tension that depends upon not yielding to the temptation of reducing or flattening the notion to a mechanistically causal stratagem. Emergent ('new') qualities do not result from summation, from accumulation or linear combination. They involve something more, a 'retroaction' of their organization on themselves, a self-modification, a self-development 'where the ultimate product retroacts by transforming that which produces it.'²¹⁴

Incomprehensible as such a self-producing retroaction may appear, it is common to everyday experiences: Liquid water emerges unpredictably from gaseous hydrogen and oxygen atoms bonds.²¹⁵ Organisms emerge from the systemic organization and constellation of living cells and organs. Societies and cultures emerge from the communal interactions of a large number of individuals. Consciousness emerges from a neural network, etc. In fact, 'the apparently elementary notions that are matter, life, meaning, humanity correspond to the emergent qualities of systems.'²¹⁶ Emergence abounds everywhere, so much so that the universe may be described as 'emergence of emergences of emergences.'²¹⁷ In this sense emergence is/lies/exists at the base of all reality.

This conclusion leads to an irreducible link between what is 'real' and what is 'novel'. In a certain sense these two adjectives may well be understood as synonyms: True novelty has to emerge 'for real', as it were, not to be artificial or merely imagined. And reality has to manifest in every moment; as existence is dynamic it must constantly re-emerge, be renewed and continuously defy its decay.

If what emerges as a new quality from a system is 'logically undeducible'²¹⁸ and physically irreducible', it becomes 'the sign and the indication of a reality exterior to our understanding.'²¹⁹ Rephrasing this sentence, it states that physical irreducibility 'produces' *reality* and logical un-deducibility guarantees its *exteriority*: '[T]he real is not what allows itself to be absorbed by logical discourse, but what resists it.'²²⁰ Following 'critical realism', the consequence of this is not a *relativization* of the 'exterior reality' but, much more plausibly, its *confirmation*.

The irreducibility of the 'real' and the 'new' make both these concepts fugitive from our logical grasp, from any straightforward understanding and, moreover, from the possibility of their deterministic management or effectual control. This statement could be underwritten from both a postmodern and a complexity perspective. But contrary to (postmodern) *relativism*, leading to resignation or the fatalist deduction that in the view of these restrictions any model, invention or narrative may legitimately be advanced *in lieu* of the unreachable meta-narrative, *complexity*²²¹ develops quite a different 'attitude' under the circumstances: The ultimate intangibility of the real (and by implication that of the new, external, other, different) implements and compels *subjectivity* (subjective assessments, interpretations, responses, etc.), not *relativism* (and, by implication, random readings, arbitrary deliberations, or even indifference and carelessness).

The difference between a *subjective* and a *relativist* approach may not be immediately apparent, as both can be perceived as individualized, non-normative strategies. Yet on closer scrutiny the difference is striking: Subjectivity centrally instates an ethical dimension into the relationship of observer and the observed, being the ultimate condition for such a relatedness from which the subject cannot escape. Conversely, relativist indeterminism effectively undermines any ethical considerations, as it principally questions the very possibility of constitutive relations between subject and object.

Following from these characteristics it becomes clear, why *postmodernism* (as essentially expressing a relativist position) was not able to develop a sufficiently viable alternative to modernism. However, after this

²¹⁴ Morin, *Method*, 107.

²¹⁵ Not only unpredictably, but moreover improbable: The combination of two explosively flammable, toxic gases 'suddenly' transforms into a life-sustaining liquid.

²¹⁶ Morin, *Method*, 104.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

²¹⁸ Read 'not derivable'.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Used here in the sense of 'school of thought'.

lengthy exploration of the notion of complexity I am convinced that this perspective – if developed into a comprehensive paradigm – holds the potential of viable successor to Modernism.

From a complexity perspective the limits of the modernist grasp of ‘reality’ are clearly becoming visible. Modernism comprehends but a sole aspect of the complex world – its determinist branch – and even here it is loosing its hold. Its supersession is thus imminent. While it cannot be supplanted overnight it can and must be transformed gradually. If these elaborations have any value it is that which they might gain from effectively contributing to such a transformational process.

Within the scope of this dissertation the phenomenon of ‘the new’ has now been introduced from a complexity perspective. The next step – considering the consequences of such an understanding with respect to the ‘composition of musical novelty’ in the double sense of its *phenomenology*, as well as its *creation* – will be one of the topics of Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 4

MUSICAL CONSEQUENCES
ARISING FROM A COMPLEXITY PERSPECTIVE

The introduction to complexity thinking offered in Chapters 1 to 3 is intended to extend beyond a mere presentation of a little-known and arguably obscure field. It is an attempt at offering a compelling alternative to modernist thinking. I hold this to be important in the widest possible sense, for all realms of life, obviously *including* music, but – more importantly – concerning music *inclusively*, i.e. as an intrinsic part of human living, history and culture. While such musings potentially fall outside the immediate scope of this study, they are important in considering music as integrated human activity rather than as isolated research object. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to make a strong case for such alternative, integrated ways of thinking about music and musical constellations. In doing so, it concurrently facilitates the transition from initial philosophical to subsequent musical considerations informing the thesis.

In order to clarify the alternatives afforded by complexity thinking, I provide a summary of the complexity tenets worked out in Chapter 3, presented in concise tabular form and juxtaposed against corresponding modernist assumptions. I do so in full awareness of the risk that categorical juxtapositions tend to depict exaggerated polarizations that – by definition – exclude appropriately nuanced descriptions of the respective positions. It therefore goes without saying that the tables presented here should be read as points of departure, challenging a debate and serving as basis for more differentiated elaborations elsewhere.

Viewed from a *complexity perspective*Viewed from a *modernist perspective*

Difference

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exists ontologically (and hence begs recognition) • establishes relations • creates identity • is interesting • is appreciated and welcomed as resource, richness, diversity • is seen as cause of creative tension • is required for systemic interactions • invites, instigates, inaugurates interdisciplinary research. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is considered constructed (and as such is often contested) • easily causes hostilities • is believed to threaten identity • is problematic • is scrutinized vigilantly, calling up watchful and controlling responses • is perceived as cause of disorder • is often discarded to safeguard order • is held at bay by strictly segregated research limited to intra-disciplinary approaches. |
|---|---|

Identity

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is understood as relational and negotiable quality • is gauged by relational differences (whence contradiction and opposition are constitutive) • must be considered to be partial attribute • is considered as hybrid, fuzzy, nuanced, processual, changing, immaterial and solely subjectively estimable • for all its provisionality and susceptibility is, nevertheless esteemed as meaningful. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is understood as essential quality • is derived from comparable sameness (whence contradiction and opposition are threatening) • is assumed to be an absolute (inherent) quality • is considered as pure, clear-cut, unambiguous, finite, rigid, materially constituted and objectively determinable • is strangely disregarded as irrelevant or merely nominal, in spite of rigid identifying categories. |
|---|--|

Viewed from a *complexity perspective*

Viewed from a *modernist perspective*

Context

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is considered as constitutive eco-system for systems that it contains, entails, incorporates, (the 'survival unit' includes the environment) • is acknowledged at the base of all autonomy (no absolute autonomy is possible, but structural coupling to an environment affords, allows, supports, enables degrees of effective autonomy) • calls for congruence between activities and circumstances (relates, embeds, links activities to specific opportunities) • inspires universalism, openness, collaboration • requires, necessitates, encourages adaptation • establishes balanced give-and-take constellation • affords expansive and inclusive systemic view (any component may be a system itself; a certain context will invariably be a component of a bigger system; facilitates integrative upward and downward compatibility). | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is considered to be an external, unrelated, irrelevant, negligible factor, (the 'survival unit' excludes the environment) • is readily disregarded as it is believed to hamper, limit or effectively oppose any state of autonomy (context and component are considered to be principally and structurally separated) • is blinded out to allow for 'liberated' (read: unrelated, isolated) activity • is readily ignored to justify narrow focus, self-actualization and specialization • is purposefully overruled by standardized, generic, normative procedures • is played down so that any desired internal hegemony (of components) may be installed • is generally subordinated to what it entails (an eco-system will easily be played down to mere component, effectively prohibiting contextual interaction and/or integration). |
|---|---|

Novelty

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can be no more than the astute observer's transitional insight • is context-dependent • emerges from the congruent ('real') thereby indicates (and is indicated by) congruence • serves but to announce the first appearance of what will eventually be better defined as organic, related, recognizable identity • is only interesting and relevant when related and real • appears as superficial attribute, when unrelated • is deemed less important than the familiar, related, known, embedded • is acknowledged as transitory state, gradually growing (i.e. receding) into familiar 'identity'. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is postulated and esteemed as absolute, external, material quality • trumps context as end in itself • is fabricated to override and replace the congruent ('real') • is preoccupied by instating and celebrating itself, thereby overshadowing more lasting and sustaining qualities • is employed to create and uphold interest artificially • readily latches on to the superficial, pretentious, preposterous, advanced, experimental • is celebrated (fetishized) as far more fascinating than the familiar, traditional, known, embedded • instigates a rush for its incessant reiteration in defiance of its fleeting state. |
|--|--|

Rearranging these dualities and specifically applying them to musical approaches yield a new set of juxtapositions between what may be termed *complex music* and *modernist music*. In favour of a broad overview the table once again merely contains keywords delineating principal distinctions. As more nuanced reflections are offered throughout the thesis they will momentarily be omitted here:

Music

perceived, approached, understood, practiced

from a *complexity perspective*:

- is an emergent phenomenon
- results indeterminably from human interaction
- is an individual, personal, conditional, fully subjective experience
- places emphasis on localized, particular, individual practice
- allows the individual interpreter to set qualitative (musical) standards
- foregrounds acts (performance-orientated)
- privileges individual, particular, provisional rendition (acknowledges the inevitability of conjecture as part of musical processes)
- values authenticity of individual performance (*in lieu* of the impossibility of achieving textual authenticity)
- offers numerous starting points to bridge the divide between professional and lay practice
- prefers open work of art (therefore privileges contemporary, local music)
- seeks differences
- cherishes diversity (thereby subverts the very idea of a hegemonic mainstream)
- places emphasis on localized, particular, individual practice
- thrives on collaboration rather than through competition
- employs competition to diversify strategies and approaches
- reveals the absurdity of quantifiable adjudicatory methods
- allocates the highest musical merit to the individual, subjective human being
- would eliminate the need for current disciplinary divisions via integral collaborations.

from a *modernist perspective*:

- is a reified object and potential commodity
- can be made, managed and executed
- has become objectified, professionalized, institutionalized, canonized
- places emphasis on generic, global, standardized naturalized practice
- sets quantifiable musical standards by way of technical conventions and canonical works
- foregrounds texts (work-orientated)
- privileges text fidelity over individual rendition (assumes that musical conjecture can be held at bay)
- values textual authenticity (believing that this can be achieved through quantifiable procedures)
- centrally installs the professional practitioner to guard over all of the above
- prefers closed artworks (therefore privileges historical, canonical, 'naturalized' music)
- eliminates idiosyncrasies
- readily sacrifices diversity in favour of a dominating mainstream
- places emphasis on generic, global, standardized naturalized practice
- overrules collaboration by competition
- instils competition to determine (what is assumed to be) a single winning strategy
- upholds institutionalized quantifiable adjudicatory methods and standards
- holds the generic virtuoso / star performer in highest esteem
- requires rigid disciplinary divisions to uphold isolated fields of specialization.

Once again it must be stressed that I am aware that the summarized distinctions presented in this table contain richly contentious material that will require further and more specific elaboration. Such a critical investigation needs indeed to be undertaken but exceeds the scope of the current investigation. For the task at hand I must confine myself to establishing basic distinctions along the lines of compelling criteria that result from musical premises outside of modernist conventions but are grounded in complexity thinking instead.

While I thus refrain from elaborating on further implications of the distinctions made here, I will return to them in Chapter 8, where they provide the basis for a more detailed explication of my compositional approach. Moreover, certain aspects listed here will be discussed in more detail in relation to specific musical circumstances in Chapters 9 - 12.

A COMPLEXITY THEORY OF MUSIC

Distilling the essence of all of the above I wish to propose the following comprehensive, complex ‘theory of music’. Since it will always require the *concurrent* recognition of *different* aspects and interactions, its specific formulation may vary, depending on respective emphases. From an intrinsically musical perspective it contains nothing ‘new’. However, grounded in complexity theory, developed with scholarly rigour, expressed in an academic language and, most importantly, proposed from within the epistemology of the academe, I posit that it principally offers the means of thoroughly reassessing conventional modernist understandings of music.

I further posit that this theory should be universally applicable and thereby serve as a versatile tool in assessing and designing musical scenarios, projects and situations. However, as it models a complex system, it will not be complete, nor can it be closed, but should instead allow for an infinite number of adaptations to specific circumstances.

In its most concise form it may read:

Music is a complex phenomenon emerging from the interaction of composer, performer and listener.

Formulated more generally it translates as follows:

Music is a complex phenomenon emerging from reciprocal actions of variously constituted subjectivities.

Expanded somewhat, a more explicitly specified version may read:

Music is a complex phenomenon emerging in highly diverse manners from the interaction of composers (designers), performers (activists, senders) and listeners (receivers, decoders). It is autonomous by virtue of being structurally coupled to cultural (that is historical, social and geographical) contexts.

Thereby it is stated that

- music must be perceived as *action*, even more appropriately as *interaction*, rather than as reified object or ‘objectifiable’ commodity;
- music constitutively requires the active and communicative *collaboration* of at least two functionally differentiated participants,¹ i.e. it does not reside with any single role-player;
- musical qualities emerge from an *organizational*, rather than a *material* level;
- musical emanations are intrinsically *autonomous* (self-referential, axiomatic),
- BUT their autonomy and integrity result from their *structural coupling* to very specific environmental conditions (comparable to ‘ecological niches’), such as cultural contexts, traditions, occasions, places and rituals.

Emphasizing the human cognitive aspect, yet another formulation may be proposed:

A musical experience results from complexly organized acoustical interactions between distinct subjectivities, defined by the emergence of sonic and psychological resonances affecting and involving all such subjectivities to varying degrees.

¹ In a singular evolution overlapping with the propagation of notational communication and ‘originally’ limited to central Europe from the 16th to the 19th century, the role of musical originator and performer had temporarily been segregated into that of creative composer and ‘re-creative’ executer, thus resulting in three functionally differentiated participants. As infamous colonial legacy this segregation has unfortunately today become a global practice. Considering the near-absolute institutionalized schism between compositional practice and performance practise, this is highly problematic. Considering the status of unperformed compositions (the prevailing *status quo* of contemporary composition) on one side and irrelevant, communicatively void and contextually unrelated performances of canonical works on the other, it seems justified to come to the conclusion that this segregation is principally flawed.

A flow-chart modelled on Morin’s loops (Fig. 5) may illustrate this as follows: Composer, performer and listener make different contributions to the process of creating music. The composer’s input is the musical design, the performer’s role is the realization of this design (i.e. sounding the music). The listener’s contribution is his or her presence, response or feedback. Most of this immediate feedback will reach the performer,² but crucial to closing the circle of interactions is the feedback (or resonance in the widest sense) reaching the composer, even if only indirectly.

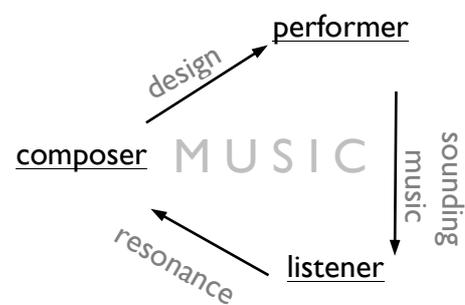


Fig. 5: Britten’s ‘holy triangle’ illustrated by means of a Morinian triadic loop

A second flow-diagram (Fig. 6), replacing concepts (nouns) with actions (verbs) further clarifies the nature and function of the interactions: Apart from the primary, clock-wise flow of added contributions, there exists another, arguably equally important anti-clockwise feedback flow, which causes numerous recursive interactions. Ideally the collaboration between composer and performer allows for multiple reciprocations, ranging from the ideal sphere (commissions and dedicated works) to the organizational (programming, rehearsals) to the practical (collaborative compositions, amendments or corrections). Similarly, a huge variety of interactions exist between performers and their audiences, again ranging from the symbolic (e.g. the mutualism of celebrity and fan), to the organizational (invitations to and attendance of concerts) and practical (economic exchange). On the surface it may seem that these interactions often completely exclude the composer, especially when works of dead composers are performed. Yet it should be remembered that a composer’s initial contribution remains constitutive for any subsequent interaction to take place at all. Hence in this diagram ‘composer’ is replaced with ‘work’, fulfilling the same systemic function.

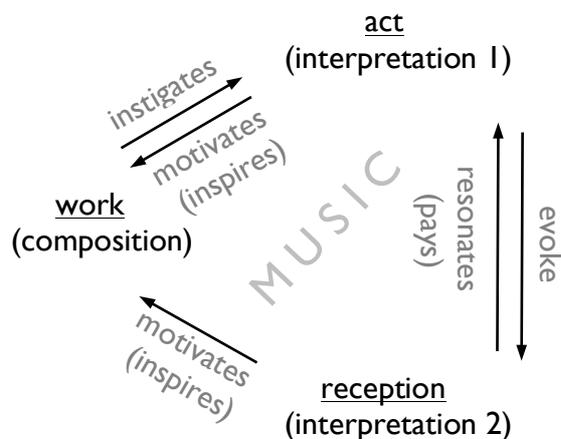


Fig. 6: The ‘holy triangle’ exemplified by its triadic activities and interactions

Finally it should be acknowledged that each of the three agents (components) in this model are complex systems in their own right. This means that interactions between the three can, in principle, occur on infinitely many different levels. Put differently, ‘interactive congruence’ may (and will) arise between various subsets of each component. In ‘reality’ not only simplistic, linear relations exist between the three main agents, but an intricate network of cross-related, mutually interfering connections, connotations and associations. Figure 7 explodes the individual components into a possible range of subsystems, thereby indicating the scope of connections that may potentially arise between them. Even so it should be noted that the multitude of connections does not exempt the system from the necessity that connections between all three agents must exist for a musical experience to emerge. Also, viewed on this level – beyond the immediate and narrowly

² The immediate audience response to a performance may be considered as intrinsically part of the performance and is thus not of ‘structural’ concern here.

defined compositional interaction – the relationship between composer and audience may indeed be reciprocal in various ways.

This model or theory is not new with regard to the interactions that it makes explicit. All relations, as well as all components are well known and can be observed at any time during musical events. What is new, however, is the emphasis on the fact that all relations always contribute to the musical system *concurrently*, i.e. they co-exist in what may be called a ‘constitutive concurrency’. Nothing belonging to the ‘musical system’ may be omitted or ignored without jeopardizing its emergent whole. Or, put differently, if all aspects that potentially contribute to such a system are integrated and allowed to interact the musical experience will be all the more diverse and rich.

Obviously not all aspects of musical interactions can be observed and/or controlled at all times. Accordingly, the theory is not intended as a ‘musical manual’ according to which music needs to be ‘put together’. All that it attempts to provide is a clarification of functional relations underlying and providing the interactive structures on which the emergence of all music relies. In the context of prevalingly modernist musical practices, such a theory may be useful to guard against disproportionate emphases (or negligence) of particular musical aspects.

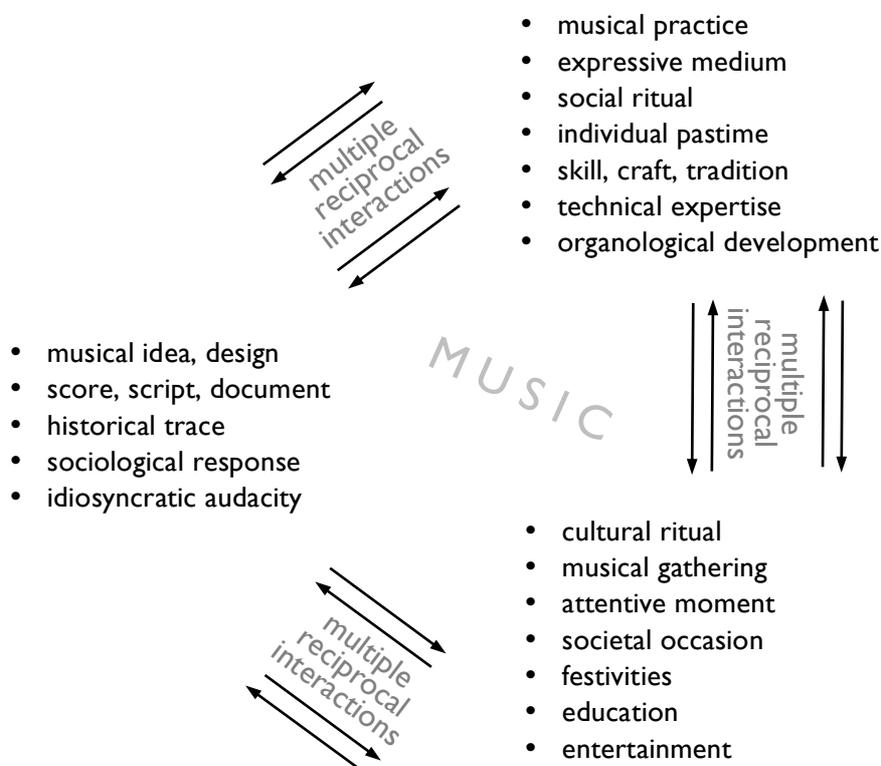


Fig. 7: The components of the triangle displayed as multiply related complexes

SECTION 2

Acknowledging Complexity: Complex Circumstances, Contexts and Methods

CHAPTER 5

HISTORICALLY INFORMED PERFORMANCE: A COMPLEX MUSICAL METHOD

INTRODUCTION

Why should a chapter devoted to (historically) informed performance practice be included in a dissertation on composition, new music and complexity? I posit that HIP¹ – the scholarly practice of perceiving and performing music in a historically informed manner – by now amounts to nothing less than a full-fledged *method of reading music complexly*. ‘Historically informed’ may be translated here as ‘with astute awareness of a given musical work’s original circumstantiality and historical context.’

While the terms ‘complexity’ or ‘systems’ hardly appear in the performance practice discourse, I hold that the HIP pioneers must be credited for having recognized crucial aspects of musical performance pointing precisely towards these phenomena: By emphasizing the necessity of understanding a historically specific cultural background in order to appreciate the inherent logic of any music emanating from it, these practitioners were in effect advocating the recognition of music as an *open system*. As Morin has shown, the relationship of such a system with its environment must be considered as *constitutive for its intelligibility*.²

Arguably this is no altogether new insight. What is surprising, however, is that the pertinence of this understanding to the performance and reception of music has only been recognized and reflected very recently. Even so – in spite of currently fashionable commonplaces that ostensibly proclaim cultural practices of music to be linked to specific belief systems, determined by circumstantial practicalities effected by performance conventions and, conversely, affecting reception conventions – ‘music’ is still more often than not conceptualized and taught as abstract and autonomous subject (or even ‘object’), in a manner that overrides any contextual considerations. If, however, such contextual considerations (i.e. the openness of a system towards its environment) are taken seriously, the awareness of the intrinsic conditionality of music will inevitably lead to a perception that recognizes epoch- and location-specific ‘markers’ (characteristic, stylistic, idiomatic traits) and to interpretations that acknowledge and correspondingly strive to reveal such characteristic markers.

The discovery of music’s historicity must be considered as a significant case in point. What this means is that the notion of ‘historical context’ is recognized as a decisive set of musical markers, a multitude of external factors leaving specific and tangible intra-musical imprints. This discovery initially gave rise to designations such as ‘historical interpretations’, ‘authentic’ or ‘period’ performances. Currently trading under the somewhat less categorical term of ‘historically informed performances’, the approach deliberately and creatively engages with any music’s intrinsic historical conditionality. Seen from a broader, trans-disciplinary perspective, the recognition of this specific dimension of musical embedment clearly amounts to an instance of contextual consideration or, put differently, to complexity thinking in music.

¹ Acronym for Historically Informed Performance, also sometimes referred to as period performance practice.

² Edgar Morin, *On Complexity* (Hampton Press, Cresskill 2008), 11; see Chapter I, pg 29, footnote 274.

Another such instance (implicitly referring to complexity, if not explicitly mentioning the term) may be recognized in the acknowledgement of subjectivity and agency in ethnomusicological studies. Perhaps it is not surprising that this insight should first have dawned in a field where the inherent focus on differences of cultural practices necessitated an interaction between ‘self’ and ‘other’ (‘own’ and ‘foreign’, ‘inside’ and ‘outside’). The assumption of early ethnomusicological practitioners, namely that it should be possible to conduct fieldwork scientifically and gather data objectively has, following the example of anthropology, made way for the notion of qualitative research. This approach privileges the study of subjective decisions (why, how, in which context) over empirically observable events (what, where, when). It acknowledges that a principle distinction must be made between participant and observer and that any research findings can merely be offered as provisional interpretations, not final postulations. It is assumed that integrating the subjectivity of the researcher into the scientific process does not diminish the value of the research, but may instead increase it.

The emergence of what has been termed ‘new musicology’³ may – cautiously – be mentioned as a further example of complex musical thinking. In this instance complexity thinking is exemplified by a general shift away from a perception of music as reified phenomenon (of which randomly isolable aspects can be studied independently), towards an understanding of music as a complex cultural (i.e. anthropological, social, political, historical) practice. Qualifying this statement somewhat, it should be added that in some cases the ‘complex’ quality of this approach is compromised by a reactionist tendency against positivist (analytical) musicology: If music is reduced to *nothing but* a social phenomenon, discarding any considerations of axiomatic musical qualities, the complexity of interactions always involving social *and* musical aspects is lost. In this case a one-sided approach is simply replaced by its opposite, equally slanted and preferential.

UNMASKING A MUSICAL DUALISM

In each of the aforementioned cases, what I will call *developments towards a recognition of musical complexity* have caused notable tensions in the musical fraternity. While ethnomusicologists and scholars sympathetic to the advances made by new musicology have discovered much common ground (in some cases allowing them to drop the distinction altogether),⁴ more conservative or ‘analytical’ musicologists seem to consider this as a digression and even betrayal of core principles. Regarding the question of performance practice, two fully isolated schools of thought have come to exist, resulting as it were in ‘in parallel performance universes’ and a rigidly divided musical landscape occupied by hostile camps. In the professional jargon this distinction is upheld by referring to ‘modern’ or ‘early music’ players. Strictly speaking both designations are misnomers in several respects. Sadly, the rift they indicate is real.

PARENTHESIS VII:

‘MODERN’ & MAINSTREAM *VERSUS* ‘EARLY’ & HIP – FUZZY TERMS FOR A DISTINCT DELINEATION

The convention of referring to ‘modern players’ results from their choice of playing on so-called ‘modern’ orchestra instruments’. In most cases these are actually ‘romantic’ (nineteenth century) instruments, or even Baroque (seventeenth century) instruments, preserved in the state of development they had reached in these respective periods with all on-going experimentation and structural development suddenly stopped dead at a given point. Only very few ‘modern players’ actually play modern music. Exceptions confirming the rule, they tend to engage almost exclusively with the canon of established classical, romantic and early-twentieth century repertoire. While most works of this canonical repertoire are by now older than a century – and could

³ Generic term indicating a diverse field of musicological approaches questioning conventional musical knowledge. It is strongly linked to the social sciences and other non-musical disciplines, focussing on cultural-, gender- and postcolonial studies, aesthetics, and criticism of music.

⁴ In South Africa the erstwhile separate professional societies representing the two disciplines respectively were amalgamated a few years ago.

therefore justifiably be called early music, they are, by virtue of belonging to the canon, not considered historical or 'dated', but 'timeless' and universal. This understanding tacitly exempts 'modern players' from an engagement with historical or circumstantial questions, as the quest is not to communicate music as a historically (geographically, stylistically, culturally) contingent form of human expression, but to recreate it as a reified commodity. Music deemed deserving and worthwhile to be reiterated in this manner is compiled from a selection of 'absolute' masterpieces of assumedly generic, international and 'naturalized'⁵ quality, hence considered to be isolable from contingent historical circumstances, which the works are believed to transcend.

Conversely, 'early music players' mostly focus on the performance of Renaissance (sixteenth century), Baroque (seventeenth century) and early Classical (eighteenth century) music. Most respected practitioners do so on period instruments with a fair knowledge of historical contexts, conventions, and playing techniques. Initial claims of 'historical authenticity' made with enthusiastic zest in HIP's heyday have justifiably been criticised and amended. Today it is generally assumed that the performance style of 'early music specialists', freed from romantic conventions and canonical rules, is likely to be much more 'modern' than that of the so-called 'modern players'.

The two sketched paradigms hardly converse, resulting in corresponding distinctions pertaining to the way in which the respective approaches are expressed:

- Generally speaking modern players find their occupation in what may be called the 'classical music mainstream'. In contrast, many early music specialists begin by carving out an individual niche, thereby often discovering new sources. These eventually become tributaries to a far more particular, individual, even idiosyncratic HIP-landscape.

- Professional musical tenures only exist in the mainstream (in established institutions such as orchestras, music schools, universities, concert agencies, broadcasting corporations), making this a coveted and accordingly competitive terrain. Hardly any established (institutionalized) positions exist for HIP practitioners who, if they decide to specialize in early music, usually have to opt for a freelance career. Conversely, this situation again attracts musicians who place a greater emphasis on the individual, inventive and creative aspects of music making.

- The compliance with established generic structures implies a fairly rigid adherence to ruling conventions, often leading to the 'execution' of music according to the book (and rehearsed within the time permitted by a union), rather than promoting individual 'interpretations' (and taking the time necessary to arrive at these). In order to uphold the implicit and explicit 'rules', a system of assumedly quantitative measurements of musical proficiency and aptitude is in place, serving to define 'professional' (read: mainstream) standards. Unsurprisingly, these criteria are not highly valued in the HIP paradigm.⁶

- Wittingly or unwittingly, most formal music educational institutions strongly privilege the 'mainstream'. Arguably this follows from an ingrained institutional disposition principally to endorse established, rather than revolutionary, schools of thought. (The very concept of the *Conservatoire* seems to forbid any approaches that would advocate changes to the musical *status quo*, even though everybody knows that *conservation* should not imply *stagnation*.) Until very recently, HIP skills could only be learnt informally, with musicians gaining experience on the side by joining practicing circles. While most European music colleges by now host early music departments within their faculties, South Africa educational institutions have to date not only omitted to introduce HIP into their curricula, but hardly even exposed students to this influential school of thought.

⁵ I have come across this unspecified term for the first time in an anonymous online document, webhosted by the Conservatory of the University of Stellenbosch at <http://academic.sun.ac.za/music/centre-for-music.html> [retrieved 14.10.13].

⁶ To mention just one example for the fundamentally different approach: Admittance into early music circles can very rarely be won by means of formal auditions, but is instead granted by informal assessment of attitude, interest, morale and stylistic comprehension, as well as (matter-of-factly) technical proficiency. Players are integrated into musical projects considering a broad array of general musical and human qualities, rather than by means of a quantitatively measured professionalism.

In the remainder of this chapter, I wish to interpret this paradigmatic schism from a new perspective. While I see the ‘mainstream’ approach as broadly corresponding to modernist tenets, I believe HIP to relate to complexity thinking (and – if one follows Cilliers in making this link – to post-modernism). Following this interpretation, the musical divide under discussion can be understood to have much deeper paradigmatic roots than merely different musical tastes or styles. Therefore I will henceforth delineate the notions of ‘mainstream’ and ‘HIP’ along the (already established) fault-line separating modernist from complex thinking.

The modernist approach focuses almost exclusively on the musical canon of Western masterworks – those works ‘that have stood the test of time’, that guarantee full houses, that permit the comparison between frequent performances and that are sufficiently well-known to repeatedly reaffirm a cultural identity that has been projected onto them. From the modernist perspective the canonically sanctioned (canonized) repertoire is a-historic; its origination is of peripheral concern. What is far more interesting is its supposedly ‘transcendental quality’ – transcending the narrow originating contingencies of period, place and worldview, transcending other comparable works in assertiveness and, above all, transcending historical developments and changes that would have rendered lesser works obsolete.

Of course it remains forever unclear what exactly constitutes this transcendence. While most musicians will argue that it rests in the supreme and inherent compositional, structural, sonic quality of the signature works, it must be noted that without popular consensus no work can become part of the canon. As popularity is clearly no inherent musical quality, it must thus be accepted that the notion of the canon is a complex construct, resting to a large extent on the contingencies of an ever-changing reception history.⁷ Therefore it is clear that the canon is a *post-hoc* construct: sanctioning, condoning and vindicating a select repertoire according to contemporary tastes and preferences.

Conversely, HIP may be characterized as privileging the historical over the canonical. By implication HIP becomes an investigative, deconstructive probing into the canon with respect to the question of a work’s meaningful transmission in contexts that differ so vastly from its original functionality or intentionality that an immediate ‘understanding’ cannot be granted. HIP does not assume ‘absolute’ transcendental qualities, but instead views every work as completely contextual and historically contingent. Only if a work is perceived as immediately embedded in the strivings and travails of its creator can its *immediacy* be appreciated, its initial energy and originating motivation comprehended as arising from a certain impulse and thus responding directly to a specific situation or challenge. The point is not to conjure up the past, nor to assume that historical authenticity will facilitate better understanding. The point is rather that it is impossible to conjure up the past (only the scripts have been saved, not the codes to decipher them), that a ‘translation’ is necessary but at the same time quite impossible and that only an informed and, more importantly, a creatively engaging performance can save the situation. This means that the brunt of the task is transferred to the performer as mediator (messenger, intercessor, interpreter) between old works and new audiences, acknowledging the historical distance between these two equally important musical ‘constituents’, instead of assuming some transcendental, timeless universal, naturalized understanding.

It warrants repeating: HIP does not assume ‘absolute’ transcendental qualities, but – true to systemic thinking – relies instead on the marvel of emergence to ‘occur’ once the required systemic components are in place to enable congruent relations and interactions. Facilitating and catalysing such a congruence – putting into place what is required to recreate conditions to enable an *informed* (i.e. meaningful, speaking, communicative, moving) and self-responsible (personally authentic) performance – hence becomes the methodological task of HIP.

I posit that the analysis provided above has far-reaching implications that are not sufficiently reflected and understood within the musical discipline. The fact that these consequences should have been de-emphasized

⁷ Ironically even this historical dimension is overlooked; presumable dealing ‘timeless’ material, canonists ignore the temporal aspects of both the creation and the reception of certain styles of musical expression.

for so long perhaps results from a specific kind of professionally specialized focus that barely recognizes the discipline's manifold innate connections to the outside world. In many cases conflicts carried into the discipline originate outside the musical domain and pertain to the perceived role and function of music in specific and/or changing environments. To recognize the nature of such challenges requires a trans-disciplinary perspective. It seems obvious that they cannot effectively be addressed by means of intra-musical or even intra-disciplinary measures only, but require an evaluation of internal practices gauged against a contextual reassessment.

It is against this background that I wish to show that HIP is more than an intra-musical method and certainly much more than a sectarian preference for gut strings, mean-tone temperament and endless discussions whether (or not) a trill should start from the top note (or not). HIP reaches far beyond such minor contentions, which ultimately hinge on subjective musical tastes and preferences.⁸ I posit that its significance rests on the fact that it emanates from an understanding of music as a complex system. Conversely, HIP will therefore also convey an understanding of music (and not only of early music) as a complex phenomenon.⁹ Finally, because of the method's dynamic, historical development spanning at least 60 years,¹⁰ HIP has become a highly refined and complex strategy and epistemology in itself. In this sense it represents a mature methodology that far exceeds the immediate implications of informed decisions regarding particular stylistic, performance-related musical questions. Instead, in many respects, it amounts to a paradigmatically different, even revolutionary musical approach.

It is therefore not surprising that, firstly, HIP has been met with considerable resistance but, secondly, that it has nevertheless thoroughly revived the reception of Western music (again, not only in the realm of early music), leading to significant changes in its perception, comprehension and interpretation. HIP communicates a spirited and self-responsible manner of 'musicking', as it greatly empowers the individual performer by challenging him or her to contextualize and relate all musical activities – not in conventionally (canonically, 'professionally') prescribed ways, but in individually and contextually meaningful ways.

Interestingly, HIP seems to be the one instance of complex musical thinking that has, in a remarkably short period of time, resulted not only in a viable practice with far-reaching consequences within the musical discipline, but just as much causing extensive repercussions outside the discipline. As is aptly captured in the term 'early music revival',¹¹ HIP indeed bears the traits of a musical and social movement, distinctly perceptible in the flourishing of an entire industry surrounding the pursuit of period performances.¹² Once again I read this as a systemic 'symptom' in the sense that the entity (HIP as approach and practice) and its environment (its audience and reception) mutually and complementary constitute each other.

It warrants noting that this crucial and highly influential musical development has occurred outside of and largely independent from established musical institutions. A handful of dedicated and pioneering individuals at various historical moments and in various centres must be credited as instigators of the movement.¹³ Much as

⁸ HIP can occasionally resolve open questions by means of clear historical references, but it can just as much complicate matters by providing conflicting evidence, or evidence that goes against a performers grain. It does certainly *not* provide 'recipes' or generic 'solutions'.

⁹ Arguably this is one of the reasons for the reservations, with which many traditionally trained musicians view HIP: it complexifies the relation between music and musician, complexifies the understanding of music, posing many more questions than offering straightforward answers.

¹⁰ It is impossible to determine an exact date for the advent of HIP. Here I choose to refer to Hindemith's 1954 performance of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, which marks a turning point in the understanding of implications resulting from the use of period instruments. See pg. 99.

¹¹ Harry Haskell, *The Early Music Revival: A History* (Thames & Hudson, London 1988).

¹² This may be perceived in the infrastructure that has grown around the specialized HIP approach in Europe and other musical centres, sporting festivals, concert series, competitions, educational initiatives, summer courses and master classes, instrument restorations, musicological research, editorial and publishing activities, CD releases, etc. dedicated solely to early music.

¹³ Just as the emergence of the movement cannot be pinpointed to an exact date, it does not hinge on the contribution of a single individual, but must be considered to have grown from the initiatives of various protagonists at different times and in widely different capacities. A list of significant selected contributors may contain the following names: Friedrich Chrysander, Philip Spitta, John Stafford Smith, Moritz Hauptmann as historical musicologists and editors, Anton Thibaut, Felix

it must be welcomed that established musical institutions now finally begin to embrace or accommodate the impulse, it must sadly be noted that in institutional contexts HIP is often treated as but a newly won commodity: Perceived as ready-made asset, rather than an open-ended strategy it all too easily becomes just another layer of the canon, practiced as another – now officially endorsed – convention. Obviously it thereby loses its inquisitive, probing, questioning and potentially rejuvenating quality. From my experience it seems evident that HIP cannot be institutionalized, lest it be corrupted. I posit that a meaningful integration will only be achieved once the implications and scope of HIP and its methodology will have been recognized to their full extent, and accordingly be permitted and mandated to transform institutionalized practices and conventions.¹⁴

THE PROBLEM OF 'TEXT AND ACT' REVISITED

Accepting HIP as a sophisticated methodology of approaching, reading and realizing music and understanding music as a complex phenomenon facilitates a number of advances in thinking about music and complexity. In presenting a specifically framed interpretation of the advent of the early music revival, eventually leading to the emergence of an epistemology, method and practice of historically informed performances, I aim to show how this approach addresses the duality between musical texts and musical practice; how HIP may be defined as an intervention attending to a grave discrepancy between musical texts and musical practice.

By highlighting the notions of *Text and Act*¹⁵ in the title of a seminal collection of essays published in 1995, Richard Taruskin coined a phrase (since ubiquitously quoted) that points concisely at a structurally ingrained and potentially problematic constellation inherent to all notated music. The tension between writing/reading and performing/acting is inaugurated by the invention of musical notation in 'Western' music. As only European music from the Middle Ages onwards was 'subjected' to this practice on a significant scale, the 'problem' in question only assumes significant proportions in Western music. (The majority of global musical cultures and practices get by without musical texts (notating and documenting music), rely solely on the momentary act of performing music and thereby evade the tensions and incongruences that may arise between the two aspects.)

The tension between systems of musical notation and practices of enacting music from such scripts is minimal, provided it concerns performances of contemporary texts (i.e. if a score and its realization are synchronous and hence obey the same musical conventions). This was the normal situation up and until the middle of the nineteenth century when, as a rule, only contemporary compositions (contributing current musical expressions) were being performed. With the advent of an interest in historical (earlier) forms of musical expression (i.e. a curiosity into out-dated and obsolete traditions, which could only be accessed and revived through extant scores, not by means of living performance traditions) the situation gradually changed.

Ruling performance conventions, subtly changing over time, inevitably depart ever further from those valid at the time of the respective earlier compositions, creating an ever widening gap between (unchanging earlier) *texts* and (prevailing, current) *acts*. Ironically, the vast majority of music formally studied and practiced today is based on ancient texts where the gap is historically at its widest, presenting a default discrepancy between musical texts and acts. The situation is further compounded by the fact that many musicians fail to acknowledge the discrepancy, assuming a musical (canonical, universal, unchanging) continuum, where none exists. This has led to an established practice fraught with inconsistencies, self-contradictions, mismatches

Mendelssohn, Charles Bordes, Vincent d'Indy, Paul Hindemith as prominent early music advocates, Arnold Dolmetsch, August Wenzinger, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Gustav Leonardt, etc. as pioneering period performers.

¹⁴ HIP may be seen as an excellent example of practice-based research. Therefore the argument made in the Preface, that PBR should be changing the academe, not bowing over to academic conventions, holds here as well.

¹⁵ Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (Oxford University Press, Oxford 1995).

and stylistic violations: in short, a set of highly problematic conventions. To further aggravate matters, officially established institutions tend to guard over such conventions with modernist rigour. Commercial entrepreneurs further entrench such practices by bargaining on their popularity and accordingly market and reiterate them excessively. As a result the current incompatibility between texts and acts (texts and contexts; performances and their relevance) manifests as symptoms of a full-blown musical crisis.

It is important to realize that many musicians do not believe (or perceive) an incompatibility or discrepancy to exist. Hence from their vantage point (which arguably reflects the position of the majority of classically trained musicians) no crisis exists and no intervention is needed. It therefore warrants sketching the historical emergence of this realization shortly. Concurrently such a sketch will offer a chronicle of the decisive steps in the historical development of HIP.

BERLIN, 1829

The landmark event usually mentioned with respect to the rediscovery of early music is Felix Mendelssohn's overwhelmingly successful performance of J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829.¹⁶ For the first time in Western music history, the performance of a work that had fallen into complete obscurity elicited so much enthusiasm and public acclaim that repeat performances (lasting to this day) had to be scheduled immediately. The immediate positive response was all the more remarkable as the work was deemed incomprehensibly archaic and difficult, so much so that substantial changes and 'revisions' were considered inevitable. In fact, from a 'historically informed' perspective, Mendelssohn's version had rather little to do with Bach's original text and even less with any Baroque performance practice. But this was of no concern to Mendelssohn and his contemporaries for whom, naturally, only a single manner of performance was conceivable: that of their own time, in other words (what we might now would call) a romanticist interpretation.

This observation suggests that the 1829 Berlin performance presents a landmark only with regard to the acceptance of earlier repertoire, not yet with regard to the acceptance (or awareness) of earlier performance styles. In fact, I posit that at this stage no one could fathom to which extent performance conventions hinge on very specific cultural and historical conditions as well as on rapidly changing styles, fashions and momentary preferences.

The Bach revival was soon followed by an even more rampant Händel revival, eventually leading to the gradual reappearance of many more Baroque composers' names on nineteenth-century concert programmes. Increasingly frequent performances gradually reintroduced Baroque works into the active repertoire. Even though contemporary compositions constituted the predominantly performed music – serving as obvious, period-specific musical expression – they had to start sharing the stage with the musical utterances of earlier epochs.

At first the staging of antiquated works was motivated by mere historical curiosity. The early compositions were revered – as one reveres museum pieces – with a clear sense of their exoticism in relation to the own period's tastes and preferences, who's hegemonic 'paradigm' of musical perception and associated performance conventions continued to prevail.¹⁷ Reigning performance conventions were applied uniformly, without differentiating stylistically between new works or older repertoire.

Arguably the discrepancies between prevailing performance conventions and those underlying the earlier compositions only began to emerge as the out-dated repertoire became better known and its increasing familiarity allowed for more nuanced stylistic assessments. The fact that early recordings of ancient music,

¹⁶ Haskell, *The Early Music Revival*. Haskell opens his book with a detailed account of this event.

¹⁷ It should immediately be added that this sentence only makes sense in hindsight, written from a position where it has become the norm to be exposed to a plurality of concurrently competing approaches and interpretations. This would have been unheard of until the early twentieth century, as the generally accepted notion of collective 'progress' would automatically grant hegemony to creative impulses spearheading incumbent developments. Arguably nobody at the time would have imagined the possibility of coeval but different or even opposing conventions.

such as those extant from the first half of the twentieth century up and until the 1960s generally sound inappropriately romanticist¹⁸ to our ears, must be attributed to our additional experience of having been exposed to alternative stylistic assessments of such works. What today amounts to a principally unacceptable stylistic disregard, seems not to have been perceived as problematic at first.

It is interesting to note how long it has remained ‘unproblematic’, until the realization dawned that early repertoire (and by implication any repertoire) is presumably best served (understood, interpreted, conveyed) by means of a congruent performance style, as practiced during the period of its conception. Occasional initiatives – advocating performances with period instruments¹⁹ and thereby at least suggesting an alternative sound world for older works, if not yet an alternative style – remained rather inconsequential at first. Arguably a thorough understanding of the intricate relation and stylistic congruence between repertoire and its respective period’s performance conventions only gained a notable foothold a good 125 years after Mendelssohn’s famous Bach performance. I perceive this moment, the emergence of HIP proper, as a second crucial landmark in the development of the performance methodology under discussion.

VIENNA, 1954

I proffer 1954 as the decisive year in this regard, and more specifically Paul Hindemith’s attempt to perform Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* on period instruments.²⁰ Though it may be assumed that this performance with members of the Vienna Philharmonic²¹ orchestra was still fraught with compromise, the event must be considered truly historic, as it marks the birth of the Viennese early music ensemble *Concentus Musicus*,²² a group whose work has contributed enormously to the development of HIP as a method, discipline and profession.²³

Greatly inspired by the attempt of accessing Monteverdi’s music and even more motivated by its initial failure,²⁴ Nikolaus Harnoncourt and a circle of like-minded musicians set out on a quest thoroughly to investigate the relationship between historical repertoire and historical performance practice. Their main strategy was vested in the use of period instruments, which were finally recognized as obvious and apposite tools to probe the relationship between compositional idea (concept, structure, texture), and that of its expression (manifesting in a specific instrumentation and originally envisaged sound).

In this case the method of employing period instruments was one of studying and acknowledging their specific characteristics (resulting from propensities as well as constraints) and using these as practical and physical guides that would practically guide one towards musical and stylistic priorities. The approach amounts to a principle decision for a ‘restricted’ (particular, contextual, local, historical, contingent) musical reading: Instead of compensating for something that cannot be performed on a characteristically restricted instrument,

¹⁸ Generally employing measured, even very slow and stodgy tempi, numerous rubati, resulting in broad and grave, full-sounding but inarticulate phrasing, etc.

¹⁹ The contributions of protagonists such as Arnold Dolmetsch, Oskar Walcker, Christian Döbereiner, Wanda Landowska fall into this category.

²⁰ Wilhelm Guschlbauer, *Programme Der Wiener Philharmoniker*, <http://www.guschlbauer.com/Progr/vol07b.pdf> [accessed on 2.6.2014], 51: The archive of programmes of the 1954 season of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra contains the details of this performance: Wiener Festwochen 1954, VI. Internationales Musikfest, GROSSER KONZERTHAUSSAAL, Donnerstag, den 3. Juni 1954, 20h, Freitag, den 4. Juni 1954, 19h30; Claudio Monteverdi, Orfeo (In der Einrichtung der Urfassung durch Paul Hindemith).

²¹ The programme does not mention the instrumentalists by name, but cursorily refers to ‘An orchestra of private dilettanti’ (‘Ein Orchester privater Liebhaber’).

²² Monika Mertl, *Nikolaus Harnoncourt: Vom Denken des Herzens* (Residenz Verlag, Salzburg 1999), 109.

²³ By now in its 60th year of existence, the group is obviously made up of a third generation of younger members. Yet it arguably owes its remarkable reputation and unique performance quality to its continuously compelling performances, which Harnoncourt as doyen of inquisitive, investigative and probing musical interpretations continues to facilitate.

²⁴ Mertl, 110. Mertl quotes Harnoncourt in his account of the first rehearsal with Hindemith. Even though two oboists had invested a whole year trying to learn to play on cornetti (they had retrieved two historical specimen from a museum), Hindemith decided to rather revert to English horn, after hearing them play just a single phrase. (‘Meine Herren, wir nehmen doch lieber Englisch Horn...’) The anecdote was confirmed in personal communication with Eduard Hruza, the violone player in that performance.

its limitations were ‘read’ (translated, interpreted) as given (even intentional) stylistic features. Conversely, instead of ‘forcing’ historical instruments to comply with the demands of modern performance standards, the quest was instead to take advantage of their very idiosyncrasies and limitations and explore these with regard to the musical expressivity that might emanate as a result of them. Employed in this manner, musical instruments become true research instruments: By virtue of their characteristic constraints, they would force their players to search for musical, rather than technical solutions.

In a certain sense, this method amounts to the exact opposite of the ‘mainstream’ approach which, as a rule, would try to ‘solve the problem’ (develop a better instrument, add a gadget like a valve, key, fine tuning screw, etc.) and thereby arrive at generic (technical) ‘solutions’, rather than particular (artistic) strategies.²⁵ Arguably such ‘progressive’ mainstream solutions have made modern instruments more robust, reliable and sometimes easier to play, but at the cost of ‘dissolving’ the artistic and expressive stringency arising from the opposite approach.

I posit that the significance of the early work of the *Concentus Musicus* derives from this specific strategy. As I am arguing in this chapter, it is a method that amounts to a complex understanding of the relationship between a musical work and the components and means required for its optimally congruent realization. It marks the birth of HIP proper and concurrently signifies the introduction of complexity thinking into the field of music.

THE IMMEDIATE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIP – EARLY MUSIC REVIVED

Perceived from the outside, HIP presents itself as socio-musico-political movement that arose from rediscovered and re-evaluated early music, observable in a variety of alternative musical perceptions and interpretations. The HIP approach has been responsible for a demonstrable invigoration of the global music industry in the past three or four decades. Whether one likes the approach or not, whether one assumes the revival to be historic, authentic, mistaken, modernist or simply opportunistic – it certainly was a revival and as such has been instrumental in a diversification and surge of musical activities with enormous artistic and economic gain for the profession. In its wake the understanding and performance of early music has been revolutionized thoroughly, the active repertoire has been enlarged significantly, new performance techniques and conventions have been introduced, debated, refined, disseminated and more articulate performance styles have evolved as a result of the availability of period instruments or copies thereof. New ensembles, new festivals, new concert series, a new recording market, new audiences, new professional opportunities and new editions have been created, a new dimension of collaboration between scholars and performers as well as new musicological debates have been stimulated. This ‘newness’ was proclaimed not in the sense of an avant-garde or modernist novelty, but rather of contextual renewal of historical origination and present response.

Even so HIP still contains untapped revolutionary potential, the scope of which has not nearly been exhausted by the overt and clear-cut mission statement to perform early music adequately or stylishly. HIP has – perhaps unintentionally at first – also significantly challenged and already changed ‘modern’ or ‘romantic’ interpretive approaches. HIP provides benchmark methodologies for the reading of any ‘earlier repertoire’. As the notion of ‘period performance’ principally applies to all periods, it arguably applies to all music. In this sense HIP has become a universal approach, from which no music is exempt.

WIDER IMPLICATIONS OF HIP – BEYOND THE REALM OF EARLY MUSIC

The use of period instruments as a means of doing justice to historical conditions led to the realization (arguably for the first time in such depth), that nuances in instrumental colour, articulation and relative

²⁵ An example of this approach can be detected in early 20th century attempts by companies such as Pleyel or Sperrhake to ‘modernize’ harpsichords by ‘improving’ them according to modern standards. This would result in a-historic, anachronistic but also artistically ‘useless’ instruments: there would literally be no musical use for solely technically motivated ‘upgrades’.

balance, previously merely considered to be musical epiphenomena with little impact on the compositional substance, in fact contribute crucially to the intelligibility of a composition and must henceforth be considered integral to its structural conception.²⁶

In this way HIP highlighted the intrinsically close interrelationship of all musical parameters. Replacing romantic instruments with Baroque instruments would not only change the musical colour, but by implication also the density or transparency of the musical texture. This in turn would open up new options with respect to tempi and phrasing. From here on implications for the articulation and the placing of emphases would follow, with consequences for the communication of affects and emotional expressions. In short, changing 'just' one aspect eventually leads to a completely new reading and understanding of musical texts, if not to a potential change of paradigm beyond the modernist perception of music.²⁷

Perhaps most significantly, the recognition of the structural function of period instruments refutes an assessment of such instruments as 'inferior' to modern ones. While early instruments certainly have technical limitations (compared to those of later developmental stages), this concurrently implies specific characteristics that speak to specific musical and stylistic requirements. Hence period instruments are intrinsically well suited for the performance of music of their time, in spite of – and sometimes precisely because of – their limitations. This insight thoroughly questions the notion of 'progress' as linear 'advancement' or 'betterment'.

Finally, HIP throws new light on the 'inherently binary' nature of 'composed' music. Whereas traditionally the distinction between *composing* and *performing* (realizing, interpreting, 'sounding' a composition) would often be associated with a *creative* and a *re-creative* act, HIP – by emphasizing the integrity and congruence of the performance as constitutive for the effective conveyance of a composition – makes a strong case for performance as a potentially equally creative task. Put differently, from a HIP perspective, the strict distinction between composition and performance becomes slightly less distinct; in fact, it becomes quite blurred.

With regards to the majority of global musical cultures, in which the concept of composition (as a fully separate task from making live music) is unknown, this suggestion is nothing new. However, in the museum of Western music's canonical masterpieces, it amounts to a challenge. Contemplating the relationship between composing as act of pinning down and fixing a musical process on the one hand and performing, as the act of picking up and unleashing a musical process on the other, we arrive at a systemic constellation, i.e. a set of components which, by interacting, concurrently constitute and contradict each other.²⁸ This does not only refer to a replenishing, supplementary relationship, but in fact to a recursively constitutive one: A composition does not only fare 'somewhat better' when accompanied by performance; it does not exist without performance. Conversely the art and artistry of performance only attains a historico-cultural dimension through the conceptual, structural and stylistic benchmarks provided by compositions.

It is precisely this tension between composition and performance that potentially makes this relationship so rich, unpredictable and fruitfully 'unresolvable'. Standing for the resistance against simple and generic interpretative solutions, HIP upholds a creative tension between text and act / composition and performance that is ultimately constitutive to both.

²⁶ Again one is strongly reminded about the reflections on the notion of the open system, its dynamic interaction with its environment and hence the constitutive systemic role of the environment.

²⁷ In this context it is most interesting to note that the intrinsic *parametrical integration*, which the HIP approach has demonstrated time and again, stands diametrically opposed against the *parametric segregation* as propagated and practiced in musical serialism. From a HIP perspective the principle of serialism (firstly the perception of musical parameters as isolatable entities and secondly the random, individual manipulation of parameters, without consideration of their relatedness) must be considered a flawed approach, as it fully disregards the coalescence that a musical (systemic) whole exerts on its constitutive components. In music-historical retrospective the relative short-lived interest in serialist pursuits seems to support this stance.

²⁸ Viz. Morin's phrase of 'concurrently antagonistic and complementary', e.g. Chapter 2, pg 38.

CHAPTER 6

ASSESSING THE SCOPE AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF COMPOSITIONAL ACTIVITY IN SOUTH AFRICA ANALYSIS OF A SURVEY

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE OF SURVEY

The rationale to investigate the circumstances of local compositional activity was, first, to assess the *status quo* of the ‘field’ of composition. Following Bourdieu, ‘field’ is understood here in a sociological sense, ‘as a social arena within which struggles or manoeuvres take place over specific resources or stakes and access to them,¹ the stake in this case being the cultural good (tradition, means and opportunities for the creation) of new music.

Second, the findings from such an assessment would be a prerequisite to relating my experiences of working as a composer in South Africa to that of colleagues in the same geographical and professional sphere. The notion of ‘composing in contemporary South Africa’ in the title of this dissertation is in this way extended beyond the realm of only my own immediate experience. In a sense this short excursion into an empirical study should serve as a reminder that I am in fact working in and speaking from a particularly determined ‘space’, which – for all its inconsistencies and disparateness – must nevertheless be acknowledged as a ‘field of activity’.

Third (and exceeding the immediate scope of this dissertation) it was (and is) my hope that the data obtained in the survey might be used constructively in other contexts to advocate a more discerning regard for the local sphere of new music production, as well as insight into the challenges with which it is confronted.

The immediate purpose of the enquiry was set out in a cover letter inviting potential informants (composers) to participate in the survey. The pertaining sections were formulated as follows:

‘The questionnaire is aimed at representatively mapping recent and current activities in the field of art music composition (ca. 2000-2013) in South Africa and at gaining insights into the contexts in which South African composers’ work is produced, performed and received.’² Even though I am not comfortable with the term ‘art music composition’, it was used here in the conventionally accepted sense that it has acquired in South Africa in order to distinguish primarily artistic, academic or discursive endeavours in the fields of ‘classical’ or ‘serious’ music from primarily commercial activities in the field of popular music. For the purpose of the survey the term was delineated as ‘musical production following the European tradition of conceptualizing and notating music, deliberately referencing historical and current stylistic developments as a primarily autonomous artistic activity, not commercially or otherwise functionalized.’³ However, composers were encouraged to participate in the survey or applicable parts thereof, even if they felt that their compositional practice did not conform to this definition at all times.

With respect to the specific focus of the investigation I communicated that ‘the investigation was primarily aimed at *assessing working practices*, as well as *contextual and infrastructural aspects*’ and that its objective was ‘an up-to-date insider representation of [the] professional field [of composition], focusing on issues of importance and concern to all composers in South Africa.’⁴

¹ Richard Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu* ed. Peter Hamilton, (Routledge, New York 2002), 84.

² Huyssen, cover letter sent out with the invitation to take the survey. (See pg. 260 for the complete letter.)

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Huyssen, cover letter sent out with the invitation to take the survey.

TECHNICALITIES

The enquiry was conducted by means of an online survey, taking advantage of its wide and easy dissemination and the benefit of participation at each informant's own convenience. In this case the application *Checkbox*,⁵ as provided by the IT-department of Stellenbosch University, was used.

Ethical clearance to conduct the survey according to the stipulations⁶ of the university's Division for Research Development was obtained on 26 November 2012.⁷ In addition to ca. 55 invitations emailed to personal contacts with the request to further disseminate the call, at least 60 invitations to participate were circulated to the member database of NMSA⁸ by the organization's secretary. The survey was conducted from April to June 2013. A total of 21 responses were received between 23 April 2012 and 19 June 2013.

DESIGN AND CONTEXT OF SURVEY

STRUCTURE OF QUESTIONNAIRE

The survey's format was that of an open invitation to all 'art music composers'⁹ working in South Africa. This invitation was communicated by means of a cover letter containing a link to the on-line questionnaire. The questionnaire (which is attached as an appendix to Volume I of this dissertation to be viewed in full) contained the following six sections:

1. *Personal Information*: aimed at gathering background on composers' education, affiliations, positions and/or current professional activities;
2. *General information about compositional approach*, subdivided into *artistic concerns* and *circumstantial impacts on compositional approach*: seeking insight into personal and musical preferences and further into the extent to which these preferences are effectively realizable;
3. *Performances of compositions*, subdivided into *artistic concerns* and *technical*: requesting information on individual priorities with regard to *intended realizations* and *de facto conditions* determining *performances* of new works;
4. *The reception of compositional work*, subdivided into *artistic concerns* (i.e. ideal circumstances) and *technical concerns* (i.e. *factual circumstances*): gathering information on individual priorities concerning the *intended communication* and *de facto reception* of new works;
5. *Information on recent work and specific related experiences*: enquiring about actual compositions and positive and negative experiences with regard to their performance and reception;
6. *Questions regarding the profession*: probing composers' attitudes towards their profession as a mutually shared and 'suffered' field, as well as assessing perceptions of conditions, structures, challenges arising from local circumstances.

The questionnaire was structured in this specific manner following a decision to conduct its enquiry pertinently from a composer's perspective. It was important to me that participants would be assured of a genuine and shared interest in the profession and a thorough understanding of pertaining issues and that the survey should not convey an attitude of interrogation or critical inspection from the outside.

By establishing the respondents' educational and professional background, section I would mainly serve to correlate responses with the degree of professional experience to which they would relate.

⁵ See www.checkbox.com.

⁶ POLICY FOR RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH CONDUCT AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY, http://www0.sun.ac.za/research/assets/files/Policy_Documents/POLICY%20FOR%20RESPONSIBLE%20RESEARCH%20CONDUCT%20AT%20STELLENBOSCH%20UNIVERSITY.pdf [accessed on 3.9.14].

⁷ Filed under the protocol number DESC_Huyssen2012.

⁸ New Music South Africa.

⁹ See aforementioned qualification of this term.

Section 2 posed a set of personal questions with regard to individual compositional approaches. The idiosyncratic nature of these questions (and the equally individualist answers to be expected) reveals the investigation's qualitative approach. This follows from a principal acknowledgment of the subjectivity of its topic, taking into account that in any case no quantitative data could be derived from predominantly subjective findings. Instead it was hoped to obtain a close view of the immediate motivations, preferences, considerations, hopes, intentions and concerns at the core of the individual compositional impulse. Inviting such a degree of subjectivity into an empirical enquiry might seem problematic from a positivist perspective. However, with respect to the central position of subjectivity in complexity thinking, I posit that an insight into the respondents' subjective considerations must in fact be considered especially important for a meaningful evaluation of the overall findings.

Complementing the questions on compositional approaches in section 2, the next two sections dealt with performance (section 3) and reception (section 4) respectively. The inclusion of these aspects follows from my conviction that both are constitutive to the 'completion' of the compositional act and therefore intrinsically concern the composer, even though his or her influence is limited in this respect. As the internal and external aspects of the compositional processes interface in the spheres of performance and reception (where 'imagined music' enters the public domain as a 'manifest composition'), the composer's environment plays a crucial role in this regard. Accordingly, composers' relationships with performers, audiences, as well as other agents in the music industry were the topic of enquiry here. Furthermore, information on individual priorities and expectations concerning performances and their reception would grant the opportunity to gauge these against actual experiences made in the South African environment.

Section 5 focussed on actual compositional work, asking composers to report on achievements (works satisfactorily completed) as well highlights and disappointments with regard to performance and reception. This section hoped to move beyond the usual self-appraising, marketing-like descriptions in which no personal successes or failures are admitted but only events and facts contributing to the 'symbolic capital'¹⁰ and esteem are mentioned. The purpose here was to probe deeper than these discourses normally allow.

Section 6 was aimed at mapping an inside view of the profession by its practitioners. Questions here pertained to the degree of experienced professional well-being or satisfaction within the field, as well as – *vice versa* – the degree to which the individual practitioners were interested in or concerned about the well-being of the profession as a whole and what criteria were determining their estimations in this respect. It was hoped that responses to this section would allow for a representative assessment of the nature, substance and quality of the local compositional field.

¹⁰ Bourdieu's term for indicators of standing, success or power on the border between the first and second fields.

CONTEXT OF ENQUIRY

A similar survey with partially overlapping concerns was conducted by Christine Lucia in 1995.¹¹ This enquiry was commissioned by the NRF¹² to assess the ‘equivalence of creative outputs’ by composers and performers respectively, with the aim of developing guidelines for the peer evaluation of such outputs. Lucia thus engages mainly with fundamental questions concerning the nature of the ‘intellectual work’ contributed by composers and performers to academe in general with a specific focus on their role in Higher Education in South Africa.

Some of the core questions on which her survey hinged were the following:

- ‘What parts of the process of composition and performance are systematically and rigorously pursued?
- What is the intellectual work of practitioners?
- What constitutes the product of performance and composition?
- How does it go beyond reliance on previous work and become original?
- How does recognition (reception) of performance or composition differ from recognition of conventional research?’¹³

As this selection of questions clearly shows, her enquiry was directed at issues of scientific rigour, artistic originality, the degree to which artistic endeavours manifest as tangible ‘products’ or in which they could be assessed and rated by conventional academic review methods. Her concern (and that of the NRF) was mainly to find practical solutions to questions of a philosophical nature: finding ways to gauge, measure, describe and appreciate creative work done. It therefore differs significantly from my approach, which was concerned with *the assessment of circumstances* under which such creative work is done.

Another significant difference arises from the fact that all Lucia’s informants were ‘musicians connected to the academy,’ in fact representing only four different tertiary institutions.¹⁴ In view of the immediate purpose of her study to concretize or quantify the value of creative processes within such institutions, this restriction was legitimate. However, it also means that Lucia’s study can hardly claim to ‘map the field’ representatively for the country as a whole.

Interestingly, the situation is factually reversed in the case of my survey. While the call to participate went out indiscriminately to all ‘art-music’ composers working in South Africa, only very few of those officially affiliated to tertiary institutions took part,¹⁵ while some deliberately refused.¹⁶ This therefore also limits the representativeness of my study.

In spite of many differences overlapping areas worth noting emerge from both studies. Lucia’s application of Bourdieu’s theory of the limited field to the musical field and employing it, as she states, as an ‘architectural framework’ for her investigation ‘in order to reflect how [a] field works,’¹⁷ she expands her view beyond the philosophical core questions to those concerning power relations ‘in the space of positions and the space of position-takings.’¹⁸ In opening her analysis to include questions of ‘milieu’ and ‘agency’ (Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’) she is, in fact, in the midst of investigating ‘circumstances of compositional activity.’¹⁹

¹¹ Christine Lucia, ‘Mapping the Field: A Preliminary Survey of South African Composition and Performance as Research’, *SAMUS: South African Journal of Musicology* vol. 25, (2005).

¹² National Research Foundation, the South African government’s central research administration and funding institution.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁵ Only two of 21 respondents are university lecturers.

¹⁶ Two well-known colleagues mailed me to inform me that they had good reasons not to participate in a survey of this nature.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁸ Bourdieu quoted in Lucia, 90.

¹⁹ Phrase from the title of my survey.

It is useful briefly to show how Bourdieu's field theory may be helpful in obtaining a better understanding of what may be called the South African 'compositional field'. According to the theory 'a field is not a homogenous single entity but three interlocked universes co-existing in tension with each other, their borders porous and all three collectively giving meaning to the production of symbolic capital.'²⁰

The inner field is called the 'limited field of production'.²¹ This is the immediate sphere of activity and influence in which composers work – 'sphere' implying both a place (studio, university, city, region) as well as a network of immediate collaborators (peers, students, performers, concert organizers, agents, etc.).

The second 'universe' is a 'larger field of power ... with which the limited field interacts and by which it is to some extent controlled'.²² This field is made up of crucially important, yet somewhat more distant collaborative agents, such as commissioning bodies, sponsors, audiences, recording studios, publishers, etc.

The third layer 'is a very much larger field comprising nothing less than the economic, race, and class imperatives of society as a whole.'²³ Applied to the topic under discussion this would be the country as a whole. All three fields not only interact and interfere with each other but are themselves subject to processes of constant change.

A field can therefore be defined as

a structured system of social positions ... the nature of which defines the situation of their occupants. It is also a system of forces which exist between these positions; a field is structured internally in terms of power relations. Positions stand in relationships of domination, subordination or equivalence ... to each other by virtue of the access they afford to the goods or resources (capital) which are at stake in the field. These goods can be principally differentiated into four categories: economic capital, social capital (... valued relations with significant others), cultural capital (... legitimate knowledge of one kind or another) and symbolic capital (prestige and social honour) ... The existence of a field presupposes and in its functioning creates a belief on the part of its participants in the legitimacy and value of the capital which is at stake in the field. This legitimate interest in the field is produced by the same historical processes which produce the field itself.²⁴

One advantage of applying this (multiple) field theory to a seemingly amorphous and disparate phenomenon, such as the compositional scene of a whole country, is that it can be broken down 'into a series of interrelated structures and shifting relationships'²⁵ – an approach that resonates well with complexity thinking. Moreover, it shifts the gaze from individual achievements (e.g. psychological-biographic or hagiographic approaches), or from historical-political perspectives (e.g. musical works analysed within their historical context) and even from socio-political perspectives (emphasising the reception, rather than the production of art) to one of '*objective relations*, which – taking all three spheres into account – constitute the *field of cultural production* from which works emerge.'²⁶

Due to its 'long' (or 'deep') view, the method flowing from the field theory allows for a critical reading and analysis of a situation or constellation as a whole, rather than examining contributions or achievements of individual role-players. I wish to stress this point with regard to the critical analysis that will emerge from my observations.

Bourdieu 'does not see the production of a work of art as an individual act, but as a manifestation of the relations between the actors that are involved in the field.'²⁷ Accordingly 'the task of the analyst is to critique

²⁰ Lucia, *Mapping the Field*, 90.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Jenkins, *Pierre Bourdieu*, 85.

²⁵ Lucia, *Mapping the Field*, 91.

²⁶ Ibid., 89.

²⁷ Sigrid Røyseng, 'Pierre Bourdieu, the Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature', *International Journal of Cultural Policy* vol. 16(1), no. 1, (2010), 69.

the constantly changing relations...’ and not only investigate backgrounds, influences and biographies. Much rather Bourdieu’s field allows for a ‘far more complex kind of analysis of preconditions ... of that which enables or disables the production, reception and critique of artistic work.’²⁸

RESPONSES TO THE SURVEY

It is not possible to present a comprehensive analysis of the findings of the survey in this chapter. Such a task will have to be undertaken elsewhere. The following review should thus only be read as a selective cross-section of findings immediately pertaining to the current study. Instead of presenting the subsequent data in systematically sequential order, it is instead summarized in a reflexive narrative.

The first remarkable ‘response’ was the discomfort with which the invitation to participate in the survey was met. Though not surprising it was nevertheless disconcerting, given my hope that an inquiry of this nature could be perceived as an endeavour ‘on behalf of the profession’ and should therefore be endorsed and supported by those with vested interests. However, it emerged that the request to share and debate professional experiences caused deep divisions to resurface. Clearly the profession is haunted by an entrenched air of suspicion that any information granted might be misappropriated or give potential competitor’s an advantage.

That two well-esteemed colleagues could not be persuaded to participate in the survey reveals a high level of distrust amongst professional peers. My suggestion that such an inquiry might in fact be a safe forum to air existing grievances and potentially contribute to their resolution was unfortunately not accepted. In the absence of any mediatory forums it is an unfortunate characteristic of the local compositional field that disciplinary disagreements often turn into eternally perpetuated personal grudges.

With respect to the deliberate refusals there was at least amiable communication and clarity. But the fact that numerous composers did not respond to the survey at all is, in a sense, far more disconcerting. While obviously no one was under any obligation to partake, I am convinced that latent disagreements and perhaps a general cynicism with regard to the merit of comprehensive inquiries of this nature must have played a role in the reluctance to take the survey – especially amongst institutionally affiliated composers. Regardless of the reasons for not participating, the low response rate speaks to a widespread apathy and lack of interest in matters that do not concern individual careers, but the profession as a whole. A response rate of at most 20% emanates as first significant empirical finding that does not bode well for the compositional field.

RESPONSES TO SECTION 1

At the very outset of the questionnaire, respondents very given the choice whether their names could be mentioned ‘with due professional discretion’²⁹ or whether the information provided should be kept anonymous. Remarkably, 85% of respondents agreed to the former option. I read this as a sign of trust (within the small group of participants) and as an indication that inputs were meant to be recognized as individual contributions beyond the mere collection of statistical data.

The group of respondents was constituted as follows: Only two out of 21 were female. Of 19 male respondents only three were Africans. Ages varied between 25 and 76 averaging at 45 years. Only the two youngest participants still were formally enrolled students at the time of the survey, while three others were reading for a Ph.D. All had absolved formal composition studies, however 75% indicated being self-taught in addition, 25% mostly so. Typically participants would indicate two or even three distinct periods of studies, often some years apart and occasionally at a fairly advanced age. Duration of studies would range from 4 to 17 years, averaging at 8,5 years (excluding intervals between periods of study).

²⁸ Lucia, *Mapping the Field*, 91.

²⁹ Questionnaire 1.3.

Six of the respondents were university lecturers and seven others worked as music teachers. Partly overlapping with these two groups, twelve indicated to be active performers. Four were pursuing professions unrelated to music. All respondent's music would mostly be performed in South Africa and only to a lesser extent abroad. However, asked to highlight especially rewarding musical experiences these would often be prestigious and qualitatively high-ranking performances overseas. Regarding the regions of participant's activity all South African provinces except Mpumalanga, Limpopo and the Free State were represented, the Western Cape yielding a third of all responses.

RESPONSES TO SECTION 2

With respect to compositional approaches the following data emerged: 57% of respondents write for a general (concert going) public, while only 23% claim that they are not concerned about who they are writing for (2.3).³⁰ Again, 57% see themselves as educators and musical messengers (rather than entertainers or activists) (2.2). In compliance with this apparent trend to communicate and relate to their audiences, 75% want to give their listeners 'aesthetic/sensuous pleasure' and connect with them emotionally (2.5). This probably explains why 45% of the respondents indicate that they write in a moderately modern style; 45% relate to cross-over styles, whereas only 25% consider their style to be radically modern and 10% even subscribe to serialism (1.7).³¹ Slightly contradicting the aforementioned conclusion, only 40% wish to 'render society a service' by composing; the majority (85%) does it 'for the sake of composing' – without too many extra-musical considerations – simply to 'create new music' (2.1).

The fact that 80% of composers working in South Africa report 'inspiration' as the most important motive for composing reveals a prevailing romanticist approach to composition – or perhaps corroborates the country's reputation as remarkably interesting and stimulating place. Moreover it could be argued that inspiration must be a compensatory necessity for otherwise dire working conditions: Only 60% of compositional work is remunerated by paid commissions (2.4).

South African composers hold stylistic plurality in high esteem: 80% report that they 'actively engage with other (non-classical) styles of music' (2.8). As may be surmised, 'traditional/indigenous South African' styles feature predominantly in this regard (75%), followed by world- and pop music (56%) before Jazz (50%) and film music (37,5%) (2.9).

Trans-disciplinary thinking also ranks remarkably high with 76% of respondents reporting to 'actively engage with other artistic or academic disciplines' (2.10). Here the visual arts rank highest (80%) followed by dance and theatre; 53% interact with the humanities, 46% with natural sciences (2.11).

The following response was surprising: Asked whether they considered it 'obligatory or necessary for South African composers to engage with indigenous African music in their work',³² 65% of respondents answered in the negative. Another 15% were undecided on the matter and only the remaining 20% proffered a clear yes (2.12). Perhaps the word 'obligatory' prompted the predominantly negative response, backed by the argument that this could not be enforced, but could only be pursued on the basis of a personal decision. However, assuming composing to be an autonomous activity as default position, I would argue that a defence of this position misses the point. The question rather concerns the purposeful acknowledgement of a pertinent context in which South African compositions originate. In this regard it is remarkable that so few composers find it necessary to acknowledge and reference – in whatever subjective manner they might wish to do so – what I consider to be an immediate and most important local and cultural basis.

Also surprising is the high degree of satisfaction expressed with regard to fulfilling individually envisaged roles and current working conditions. 52% of respondents were satisfied with their situation, apparently perceiving individual shortcomings as minor issues. 42% were unhappy, with 6% undecided. I ascribe this

³⁰ Figures in brackets refer to the numbering of the questionnaire.

³¹ Composers were allowed to relate to multiple styles.

³² Huyssen, survey questionnaire, 2.12.

largely positive perception to the fact that many of the respondents are young composers, still finding their way and unable to compare their situations with those of colleagues elsewhere. Taking into account that they had not yet established themselves they would accept their circumstances as appropriate (2.13).

However, when pertinently asked to name favourable or unfavourable aspects of the 'South African (political, societal, artistic, cultural) environment', unfavourable reports prevail. 47% lament a wide-range of issues (such as 'lack of support', 'lack of school education', 'political discouragement', 'difficulties for composers', 'politieke inmengery'),³³ 35% hold a balanced view (the environment being equally interesting and difficult), while only 9% perceive conditions as preponderantly favourable (2.14). The comment 'a great place to be FREE and independent'³⁴ succinctly sums up the positive sentiment, which is perhaps somewhat wryly based on the repudiation of any expectations.

RESPONSES TO SECTION 3

A synopsis of the responses with regard to the performance aspect of new works reveals the following:

Amongst the criteria considered important for performers' successful engagement with new works, composers rate 'technical proficiency' highest (90%), followed closely by an 'understanding of [the composer's] idiom' (85%) and performers' 'own creative artistic contribution in the interpretive process' (80%) (3.1). The predominance of quantitative thinking conveyed in the supreme rating of technical proficiency is striking, although slightly qualified by the near equal importance attached to an idiomatic comprehension.

The appreciation of performers' creative artistic contributions in performing new works is corroborated by further responses, which generally convey a perception of composition as very closely linked to performance: Only 10% of composers do *not* write for specific performers in mind (3.3), 85% receive commissions from performers (3.5) and 95% find the collaboration with musicians performing their music satisfactory (3.7).

While 75% claim that 'capturing [their] style' is a highly important performance criterion, this information is relativized slightly by 65% considering that 'owning and transforming musical ideas beyond [the composer's] initial imagination' is what is required by performers for a performance to be successful (3.2). Once again the tendency to allocate a remarkably large degree of responsibility to performers is conspicuous, further underlined by additional comments, in which most composers approve of fair degrees of departure from their scores in favour of an interpretative freedom.³⁵

However, in most cases the actual interaction between composers and performers seems rather limited. The majority (58%) reports to 'only supply the music' or 'attend one or two rehearsals'. Only 47% 'rehearse or workshop' their pieces with performers and only 26% 'co-compose' it together with a performer (3.6).

It is surprising to see not that 95% are satisfied with their performers' collaboration (3.7), when comparing this to the comments made under 3.9. Pertinently asked to name areas in which 'performances fail to do justice to the compositions', previously unacknowledged concerns suddenly appear: 'severe lack of rehearsal time', 'orchestral players who do not practice', 'lack of attention to detail', 'usually the stumbling block is performers' [lack of] understanding and technical proficiency', 'this experience taught me to be wary of collaborations', etc.³⁶

The responses to 3.7 acquire a subtext through this additional information: Beyond reporting satisfactory collaborations it seems clear that these responses must be read as 'diplomatic' answer, following from a deeply ingrained attitude of South Africans not to raise disconcerting issues. Perhaps they also reveal a degree

³³ Afrikaans: 'political interference'.

³⁴ Comment made by an informant in response to question 2.15.

³⁵ Comments added to question 3.2 contain the following phrases: 'I am not particularly fussy over details...'; 'The performers should feel comfortable...'; 'I have a baroque approach to notation and try not to over-specify.' A comment to question 3.6 even reads: 'I allow the performer to alter the score if necessary.'

³⁶ Excerpts from comments received in addition to responses to question 3.9.

of complacency (having become used to accepting low standards) and a lack of compositional vision and assertiveness. This critical interpretation is further corroborated by detailed probes into performers' attitudes, degree of preparation, imagination and advocacy in respect of new compositions (3.10). Here the majority of responses fluctuate fairly evenly between 'insufficient', 'satisfactory' and 'good', while the allocation of 'excellence' never exceeds 26%. Extending the performance realm to include infrastructure and management (e.g. concert organizers and agents) the assessment shifts decidedly towards the lower end of the scale averaging between 'unacceptable' and 'satisfactory' (3.17).

Looking at organizational aspects of performances, 85% of respondents report that their works are mainly performed in South Africa, as opposed to 61% who indicated 'outside South Africa' as 'usual context' in which their works are performed.³⁷ Most compositions are performed at concerts (76%) in dedicated concert halls (90%) or university venues (71%), whereas occasional music constitutes only 19% of new works and correspondingly performance in theatres, schools or the open air account for 19% or less (3.11 / 3.12).

On an even more practical level 85% of composers attest to being involved in the logistical aspects of performances: 88% write programme notes, 67% rehearse and book musicians, 61% act as performer, fundraiser, artistic director or impresario (3.14). The next most important agencies for organizing concerts with new music (after the composers themselves) are individual performers and university music departments (both 68%). Interestingly orchestras play a minor role in this sector (12%) and professional concert agencies are fully negligible in this regard (6%) (3.16).

RESPONSES TO SECTION 4

Section 4 investigates issues of reception and feedback; in short the interface between musical and public sphere. 85% of composers admit that receiving feedback on their work is of concern to them (4.1). Comments from friends and colleagues are perceived as most 'important / necessary / constructive' feedback (84%), while many (78% of respondents) appreciate the mere fact that a work was heard, taken into the public space and debated as sufficient response to their input. More formal responses, like journalistic critique or scholarly reviews – rated at 68% and 58% respectively – seem to be of less importance (4.2). This finding is supported by a comment stating that 'an "ordinary" member of the audience [giving feedback] means more to me than an "expert"'.³⁸ These responses may, however, also simply reflect an adaptation to an environment that hardly offers any formal feedback. After all, 95% of feedback is received from friends and colleagues, 76% comes in the form of spontaneous audience reactions and only 33% is received from journalists or musicologists (4.8).

Probing the existence of an underlying link between perception and production I asked whether 'feedback / response / resonance on previous work' was perceived as 'influential on current musical conceptions.' 62% affirmed this, commenting that 'constructive criticism, whether positive or negative ... should be seen as contribution to one's development', 'feedback is part of the learning process' or that 'indifference is about the worst thing that can happen'.³⁹ Confirming the importance of feedback and a receptive and responsive environment there is large consent (68%) that listeners locally are not sufficiently aware of their indirect yet co-facilitating of compositional realizations (4.5) and that there are 'insufficient conducive opportunities or forums to express and circulate feedback' (4.9). Even so the overwhelming majority of respondents (90%) believe that their work is 'appropriately perceived for its intent and purposes' (4.7).

Gauging the level of interest in new music from various sectors of the cultural network by measuring the amount of feedback received from the general public, music schools, traditional and social media, as well as musical institutions respectively, paints a rather bleak picture. Only 5%-10% of composers acknowledge 'a lot'

³⁷ The absurdity of 146% when adding up both groups is perhaps accounted for by the fact that most composers will have had performances at home and abroad and couldn't decide which of these two contexts would be the 'usual' one.

³⁸ Comment to question 4.2.

³⁹ Comments to question 4.4.

of interest coming from any of these sectors; 35% report 'some' interest from the public and university music departments; 40% have received 'a little' feedback from professional organizations (such as orchestras or choirs); but 40% also claim to have received 'hardly any' response from traditional media. The music departments of universities fare worst with 35% stating that 'no feedback at all' has been received from these institutions (4.12).

Further questions in this section were probing suggestions for remedial interventions to specific challenges and are therefore omitted from this discussion. Similarly, responses to section 5, concerning mostly individual works, are not of immediate relevance here and therefore omitted in this discussion.

RESPONSES TO SECTION 6

Regarding the relation of individual composers to the profession as a whole, 90% of respondents claim to be 'in professional contact with other composers' (6.2). The question 'Do you take much interest in the activities and developments in the profession as a whole?' is affirmed by every single participant for 'South Africa', still by 90% for 'globally', only 66% for 'Europe' and a mere 42% for 'other African countries' (6.3). On a musical atlas mapping South Africa's 'compositional field', the terrain would still be located much closer to Europe than to the rest of Africa.

85% consider a 'healthy (robust, active, creative) compositional scene to be of national interest' (6.4), foremost by way of 'building (listening) communities' (94%), followed by the propensity to 'educate, edify' (83%), to 'express shared emotions' (66%) and to 'facilitate social change' (61%) (6.5). In one of the comments the opinion was expressed that 'music has stronger nation-building qualities than sport.'⁴⁰

However, 71% frankly attest that 'the "new music scene" / composer's profession in South Africa' is not in a healthy state. (The remaining 29% did not claim it was healthy, but rather indicated that they were 'not sure' about this.) Predominant problem areas 'insufficient funding' and 'insufficient performance opportunities' rank highest (89%), followed by 'lack of public recognition, interest and acknowledgement' (84%), 'inadequate tuition' (63%) and 'insufficient (practical) training opportunities' (52%) (6.7).

Suggestions with regard to potential remedial actions, such as the formation of an adequately representative professional body are omitted here, but two more responses are of interest: Asked about 'occurrences related to the profession' that were perceived as 'threatening', 70% of respondents ticked the options 'if impresarios and critics patronizingly protect their audiences from new music' and 'if musicians generally prefer to play existing standard repertoire.' These were followed closely (65%) by 'if hype takes the place of honest response', 'if networking counts more than artistic merit' and 'if I see power games rather than musical skills at work' (6.11). To the complementary question about 'inspiring' occurrences related to the profession, the most frequent responses were 'if quality is recognized and acknowledged' (85%) and 'if new music of merit is created' (80%) (6.12).

INTERPRETATIVE REFLECTIONS ON THE SURVEY'S FINDINGS

While it is undeniable that the response rate was very low, this does not necessarily amount to a methodological weakness, nor does it render the results worthless. Considering that the survey was designed to elicit highly subjective and even idiosyncratic responses, its value arguably lies in a qualitative assessment, rather than in findings of the kind that could only be substantiated by quantitatively larger statistical samples. Meant to be inclusive, the survey was distributed through representative databases so that it can reasonably be assumed that every local composer would have received an invitation to partake. Hence the low response rate may be considered a first telling empirical result, open to various interpretations. However, regardless of

⁴⁰ Comment to question 6.5.

individual reasons not to participate, on the whole it reflects an attitude of apathy and indifference within the profession. Allowing for an innate and understandable reluctance to engage with uncomfortable issues and possibly a feeling of resignation in the face of seemingly overwhelming challenges, I would still posit that the demonstrable lack of interest in the own profession as a whole is worrying and clearly speaks of a negative self-image.

On the other hand it can be argued that those who did chose to speak up effectively became representatives – simply by virtue of responding, showing interest and contributing to a debate, albeit in a small way. Arguably this very involvement has inaugurated a measure of concerted reflection from which certain features of an otherwise incoherent and undefined South African ‘compositional field’ begin to emerge. While my conclusions admittedly only reflect the voices that were actually raised, they do speak for and on behalf of a tangible cell that has emanated from a largely unknown and rather intangible field.

SECTION 1

The quantitatively low response rate of ca. 20% was balanced to a certain extent by the qualitative factor that the composition of the responding group was sufficiently diverse to correspond with characteristics of a larger sample of South African composers. Even though it consisted mostly of male practitioners of European descent, representing a conservative, ‘moderately modern’ artistic approach, irrespective of being institutionally affiliated or working as freelance composers, it did encompass a wide range of ages and a fairly large variety of stylistic preferences. If not representative by overall numbers the survey’s findings nevertheless seem to reflect inputs from a good cross-section of compositional positions.

SECTION 2

The tenor of responses to section 2 implies an understanding of composing as a meaningful task in itself, moreover one that is entirely congruous with roles such as educator, visionary, entertainer, etc. and which thereby unquestionably ‘happens’ in a given receptive context. Nowhere is the compositional process interrogated *per se*, not even reassessed in relation to the specific geographic and historic context in which it is practiced in South Africa. Behind the wish to connect emotionally and share aesthetic pleasure (2.5) the assumption of an intrinsic musical propensity to facilitate this stands unquestioned. Hence it follows logically that personal and musical topics rank much higher (55% - 61%) than political, cultural or even inter-cultural (21% - 27%) concerns (2.6).

The pre-occupation with music as an autonomous, solely self-referenced art form is strongly underlined by the predominance of instrumental compositions (90%) and chamber music (85%), which both rank highest amongst the preferred genres indicated by respondents (2.7), but which are far removed from indigenous African cultural traditions, both stylistically and functionally. Arguably the format of a ‘concert’ in the dedicated venue of a ‘concert hall’ (both delineations rank highest in 3.11) continues closely to simulate the idea of the European salon – including the adoption of the Horatian catchphrase of ‘pleasing and educating’⁴¹ on which early Italian salon gatherings were modelled and which resurfaces *verbatim* in responses to 2.5.

The high percentage (67%) of engagement with other artistic or academic disciplines (2.10) stands in strange contrast with the lack of engagement on a social, cultural or political level (only 30% according to 2.5, only 22% - 27% according to 2.6). Even more pronounced is the discrepancy between 80% of respondents (2.8) claiming to engage with other styles of music – of which 75% (2.9) admit being susceptible to ‘traditional/indigenous South African styles’ – against only 33% (2.6) declaring to work on ‘subject matters related to South Africa’. It is possible that this discrepancy could be interpreted as indicative of an engagement

⁴¹ Phrase derived from two lines from verse 333 of Horace’s *Ars Poetica*: *Aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae / aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae.* – ‘Poets wish to either please or edify or to simultaneously say something pleasant and useful about life.’

with difference solely ‘*confined to music*’. Given the understanding of musical composition as isolated, autonomous, and indeed, closed activity such an engagement will accordingly remain equally isolated and – even if only for aesthetic reasons – will not be permitted to extend beyond the intra-musical realm. In the final analysis then, the purported richly contextualized and inter-disciplinary engagement appears as but an alibi for a continuingly self-contained and self-referenced art.⁴²

The majority of responses to the following question seem to corroborate this conclusion. Asked whether it was considered ‘obligatory or necessary for South African composers to engage with indigenous African music in their work’⁴³ 65% answered in the negative. Another 15% were undecided on the issue and only the remaining 20% proffered a clear affirmation (2.12).

Perhaps the word ‘obligatory’ prompted the predominantly negative response, backed by the argument that such an approach should not be enforced but could only follow from a personal decision. However, assuming it to be a given that composing is an individual and autonomous activity by default position, I would argue that the defence of such a position in this context misses the point. The question rather concerns the purposeful acknowledgement of a pertinent context in which South African compositions originate. In this regard it is remarkable that so few composers find it necessary to acknowledge and reference (in whatever subjective manner they might wish to do so) what must be considered part and parcel of the immediate local environment. I wish to stress the point that I do not perceive this acknowledgement to be a political obligation, but rather that compelling arguments for such acknowledgments arise from geographical, historical, cultural and broadly social (communal, participatory) perspectives.

SECTION 3

Even though performances are understood as integral to the realization of a composition and the relationship between performers and composers is viewed predominantly positively, the responses given in this section once again confirm a perception of the practice of composition as limited to the activity of conceiving and notating music. This emerges from the high degree of autonomy granted to performers (3.2, 3.3) and the predominantly distant and distinct manners of collaboration reported in 3.6. Despite viewing their relationship with performers as fundamental to what they do, most composers do not extend their activities significantly into the performance realm. Their work thereby implicitly endorses the notion of composing and performing as separate realms of production.

The reports seem to indicate a remarkably open and trusting relationship between composers and performers, as well as a healthy distance from notions of all too literal score fidelity. However, ‘stepping back from rigidly fixed ideas’ and ‘leaving the sole responsibility for the realization of a work to the performers’ are two very different things, and I sense a shortcoming with regard to the extension of the *compositional task* into the rehearsal process. By accommodating performers all too eagerly, composers seem to exercise too little agency with regard to the realization of their work. Their reliance on performers’ contributions – while in principle necessary and beneficial – seems to be disproportionately large. It reveals the composer’s dependence on performers, rather than performer’s reliance on composers to create new works for them. Arguably it shows the *compositional field* to be but an extension of the *performance field* and not existing as an autonomous realm.⁴⁴

In terms of Bourdieu’s field theory the situation might be sketched as follows: South African *composer’s* ‘limited field of cultural production’ appears to be but a subset of local *performer’s* ‘limited field of cultural production.’ The first is hardly more than a minor enclave within the latter, to which it contributes the occasional air of contemporaneity. Even so the performance field remains solidly based in temporarily and spatially far-removed (i.e. anachronistic and alien) repertoire. With respect to the ‘compositional field’ the

⁴² I should like to thank Stephanus Muller for sharing this perspective with me, email communication, 15.6.14.

⁴³ Huyssen, survey questionnaire, 2.12.

⁴⁴ See further elaborations on this comment in the conclusion of this chapter.

performance field becomes the ‘larger field of power ... with which the limited field interacts and by which it is to some extent controlled...’.⁴⁵ It seems that currently local performers mainly constitute what Bourdieu calls the ‘space of possibilities’, within which the composers – as practitioners possessing only a degree of autonomy in the ‘limited first field’ – must operate.

Even though the majority of composers is seemingly comfortable with conventional performance conditions (i.e. concerts for middle class audiences in established concert halls) and their compositional work rarely challenges the circumstances offered or prescribed by such conventions and venues, they do not receive the kind of support one might expect of conventional establishments. The fact that composers often are required to supervise the logistics of performances themselves (3.13) ‘indicates a real lack of infrastructural support from the very places where the music “lives”’⁴⁶ and emerges as one of the more sorely felt constraints by composers working in South Africa.

SECTION 4

Two conspicuous discrepancies arise from a close reading of the responses to section 4, concerning the issue of public resonance.

The high percentage (76%) of purported active engagement ‘with other artistic or academic disciplines’ reported under 2.10 is somewhat qualified by the fact that only little importance is assigned to scholarly reviews (57%) indicated under 4.2. In the same vein the disengagement between composers and the academy (musicologists provide composers with minimal feedback of only 33%) stand in stark contrast with the fact that for 73% of composers universities are most important performances spaces.

The first discrepancy decidedly questions the value of the inter-disciplinary work on which composers have claimed to embark. If it is not deemed important (or if the risk is not taken) to expose this work to peer review or at least peer perception it will in effect remain insignificant and locked in a private domain. The second discrepancy reveals a most ambiguous role played by the academy in respect of nurturing the creation of new music. If the reported experiences may be trusted and all that the academy has to offer composers are its venues, then these institutions – once conceived to house critical enquiry, visionary research and humanist education – have in this regard become hollow shells, persisting only by virtue of venerable buildings with acoustically suitable spaces. Taking into account the lack of any other significant forums to express and circulate feedback (4.9), even a less harsh verdict cannot ignore the fact that the relation between the spheres of academe and cultural production is in many ways dysfunctional.

SECTION 6

Perhaps the most important finding of section 6 emerges from a gaping disparity in responses. More than 85% of respondents believe that a healthy compositional scene would be of national interest, yet at least 71% do not consider the scene to be in a healthy state. Read in conjunction these two responses thus state that – at least on a certain level – the nation is not in a healthy state. Yet 90% of respondents believe that their work is appropriately perceived (4.7), in other words seem to be convinced that the problem has nothing to do with their output, but rather with the kind of ‘technical’ problem areas identified at 6.7. (e.g. lack of public recognition, collaboration and communication insufficient funding & performance opportunities inadequate tuition).

However, the question begs to be asked whether the sum of all perceived problems can only be blamed on external factors, such as the public’s lack of awareness, the funder’s stinginess or the average performer’s pre-occupation with main-stream canonical repertoire? Has it not become time for some introspection, including in the reflections the composers’ accountability for the state of their profession?

⁴⁵ Lucia, 90.

⁴⁶ Muller, email communication, 15.6.14.

SUMMARY

The survey reveals that the local 'field of composition' is grappling with a number of serious challenges. Yet, by virtue of its 'interstitial habitat' – drawing from the conceptual, but manifesting in concrete realizations; rooting in the private and subjective, but coming to fruition in the public and collective – these problems are not confined to single areas and accordingly cannot be 'solved' by isolated, linear, modernist strategies (e.g. 'more funds', 'better infrastructure', 'better education'). Instead they have to be recognized as aspects of a multidimensional crisis, which permeates not only all three nested realms of the complex compositional field, but in fact extends far beyond that, involving the history of the country as well as the very fabric of its current constitution. Bourdieu's theory of fields offers a helpful construct to perceive the crisis and its concentric causes and effects.

Beginning with the outer ring, South Africa's 'society as a whole': This part of the field has changed dramatically in the past two decades, effectively reversing previously existing hierarchies. While the newly adopted constitution principally foresees a proportional representation of interests and cultures, it is to be observed that the currently ruling coterie is preoccupied with more or less undisguised power games in which cultural questions hardly feature beyond demagogic rhetoric; more complex issues such as, for example, inter-cultural negotiations even less so.⁴⁷

Because of the radical transformations of institutional structures, the second 'larger field of power'⁴⁸ has also changed dramatically. From a musical perspective it can be argued that severe structural ruptures, ideological disorientation as well as professional anxiety have in fact marred this field. Institutional adaptations to the changes of external circumstances in this field have been determined by economic conditions (changing markets, cuts of subsidies, etc.), motivated by threats (for example that of enforced transformation), exploitative opportunism (of individuals employing) and rigidly reactionary attitudes (attempts to conserve the *status quo*, even if only superficially). As developments are still very much in flux this field currently resembles a competitive scramble, rather than a collaborative network. Hence it is impossible to discern clear positions nor afford consensual negotiations.

Arguably, the upheavals in this second field – as the 'space of possibles'⁴⁹ with which practitioners in the first field have to negotiate – are the ones that affect the compositional field most. One example is the (already mentioned) subjugation of the *compositional field* to the logic and economy of the *performance field*. With the elimination of historically embedded Western cultural institutions, the performance of Western music has implicitly become the arena of substitutional guerrilla battles (e.g. the unperturbed maintenance of the canonical concert circuit registered and hailed as a postponement of the final expulsion of European culture from the African continent). Simultaneously an economic battle is raging, with performers desperately wooing remaining audiences by limiting their repertoire to popular items. From this vantage point it is not surprising that no time, space or money remains for new (unfamiliar, risky, non-commoditized) music. Being dependant on performances, composers almost have no other choice but to 'resign' to the circumstances.

As another example the changing nature of universities can be mentioned. There is reason for concern that these institutions are losing their thrust as prime educational establishments due to enforced political transformations on one hand and an unfortunate coercion to corporate and commercial principles on the other. Within an educational framework there are obvious ways mutualistically to connect the creation of new musical to broader artistic, theoretical, critical as well as performative questions. Within the latter it has become difficult to justify the value of such interwoven processes in terms of either quantifiable or demographically representative results. Once again it appears as though the encompassing task and process of

⁴⁷ The fact that new, centrally positioned arts administration and funding institutions such as the NAC or the National Lottery, which could very well serve a new cultural elite, fail to do so and are effectively dysfunctional, substantiates this finding.

⁴⁸ Lucia, 90. As mentioned on pg. 111 of this chapter this realm is made up by the presence and activities of commissioning bodies, sponsors, audiences, recording studios, publishers, etc.

⁴⁹ Bourdieu quoted in Lucia, 90.

composition is principally jeopardized and disqualified by short-sighted (linear) economic and political considerations. Tragically these external influences have hereby reached one of the last resorts in which composition – as edifying practice – could have flourished.

Finally and with regard to the first limited field, another set of problems emerges. In this respect the survey reveals that composers are disengaged from the structures that promote their music, that they suffer from a severe lack of critical input and that most still work under the auspices of principally romantic ideas of inspiration and individualism attempting to create autonomous, closed and self-sufficient musical works. In strange defiance (or ignorance of the outer turmoil) this inner field of compositional production is predominantly inhabited naïvely, optimistically and idealistically.

Many practitioners are reluctant to change their professional *habitus*⁵⁰ (behaviour, procedures, methods, preferences) arguing that their ‘old values’ are far more credible, sustainable and ‘valuable’ than the opportunistic, politically motivated changes on the outside – failing, however, to see that even if external developments are destructive and chaotic this *does* effect the inner workings of the professions, whether one likes it or not.

Until a more comprehensive analysis of this survey can be presented my current conclusion is the following: The scope of compositional activity in South Africa is restricted to an insignificant, self-referencing first-field-activity (the typical insider ‘new music scene’), impeded by dire circumstances to such a degree and on so many levels that it cannot in effect emanate, nor be recognized as an autonomous compositional field.

⁵⁰ Bourdieu’s term for an embodied, pre-reflexive praxis, (comparable to Anthony Giddens’s notion of ‘practical consciousness’).

CHAPTER 7

READING SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXTS

I have argued that from a complexity perspective a system's context is constitutive to its functioning and integral to its intelligibility.¹ I have further posited that cognition of and interaction with complex systems is inevitably subjective and that determining a context relies on a subjective act of 'framing'.² Finally I have included a contextual reference in the title of this thesis, not only deliberately positioning my work as taking place in South Africa but – as indicted with the parenthesised '(in)' – as being co-constitutive of identifying, defining and to a certain extent even 'creating' the category 'South Africa'. The perception of such a deep systemic connection follows from an understanding of complex relationships as amounting to mutualistic (reciprocally constitutive) interactions, rather than merely arbitrary and inconsequential encounters.

Given these three interrelated tenets – first, that context cannot be ignored, second, that it is a subjective category and third, that this study proposes a deliberate contextualization – the question arises as to what exactly the notion of 'South African context' implies. This then is the question that this chapter attempts to address. It does so by touching dialectically on three experientially framed realms, thereby delineating and extracting from a 'slippery and recalcitrant'³ term that potentially allows an infinite number of interpretations, a subjective reading of context pertaining to the compositional work under discussion.

The first 'frame' results from Leon de Kock's gaze on an 'unresolved heterogeneity'⁴ of identity constructions, the second is Ashraf Jamal's reading of South Africa's 'cultural predicament'.⁵ The third is a biographical account of experiences that have resulted from my musical approach of deliberately and assertively responding to South African contexts perceived as potential musical environments. Due to its personal nature it is offered in the form of a letter to my children.

While such a 'subjectively framed' context cannot claim comprehensive validity and will always be provisional, it is nevertheless also more than a mere contingent, relativist perception. As argued in the reflections on 'critical realism',⁶ the conjunction of 'subject' and 'perception' inextricably binds the internal agent to an external 'reality'. While the subject cannot speak authoritatively for other subjects, the expression of such perceptions (for example works of art) invariably become part of the external reality, thereby in turn concerning all other perceiving subjects. To acknowledge the mutualistic nature of relationships implies acknowledging that all South African subjects and their subjective perceptions are not only *part* of South African contexts but, in fact, *constitutive* to them. Maturana's tenet of 'bringing forth the world'⁷ applies: 'realizing' the country's contexts is *making them real by perceiving them*.⁸ Both, perceptions of contexts and responses to (perceived) context, are 'structurally coupled'⁹ to such contexts, thereby ultimately blurring a clear distinction between cause and effect. Hence composing (or writing) *in* South Africa is at once the composing (or writing) *of* South Africa.

If the act of 'framing' implies (a degree of) subjective freedom and choice, this freedom is somewhat qualified by the double dimension entailed in the act of 'realization': The subject's act of 'bringing forth' comes at the price of 'buying into' a certain reality, by 'enduring' a structural coupling, by 'begging' or 'permitting' the

¹ See Chapter 1, pg. 29, footnote 274; Chapter 3.3, pg. 67 ff.

² See Avant Scène, pg. 2 as well as Chapter 2, sections 6, 8, 12.

³ Leon De Kock, *South Africa in the global imaginary*, 9.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa* (Co-publication of UNISA Press and Brill, Pretoria 2006).

⁶ See Parenthesis III, pg. 42 ff.

⁷ See Chapter 2, 12.

⁸ Jamal, *Predicaments* pg. 49.

⁹ See Chapter 3.3, pg. 69.

intransitive (external) domain to penetrate into the transitive (subjective) domain.¹⁰ Thereby 'context' attains a quality of 'fate'. Once chosen (or determined) it becomes an inescapable condition of existence, influencing and determining tangible and real ways of living. It is from living in specific contexts that biographies emerge (i.e. context 'writing lives'). In deliberate opposition to modernist views of context as a negligible attribute, an understanding of context as expanding into this ultimate, existential dimension is implied in this discussion.

1. SOUTH AFRICA AS 'SCENE OF UNRESOLVED DIFFERENCE'¹¹

In a reflection on what constitutes South African literature, i.e. on 'writing ... understood as efforts to establish an identity within the determinate sociocultural habitus of 'South Africa',¹² Leon De Kock observes a dilemma facing authors who wish to do justice to what he calls 'the region's intractable realities'. In order for them to decipher and describe such realities, two opposite strategies have been employed: The first has been to revert to existing tropes of the exotic, thereby using an established and thus widely intelligible concept. However, with respect to specific local circumstances, this method would at most provide an 'ill-fitting template'.¹³ Alternatively, if authors wanted to express the 'integrity of the land and its people',¹⁴ they had to invent their own means of doing so without having the option of calling up universal references, such as those of a 'common ... nation, a common language, or a common culture'.¹⁵ While the first option can hardly claim to achieve meaningful degrees of authenticity, the second often struggles to reach an audience beyond immediate cultural or linguistic confines. To summarize this point very bluntly: Confronted with the choice of looking at South Africa from the outside or the inside, its literature is situated between a rock and a hard place; being understandable but false, or being true (to itself) but at the price of being incomprehensible to most.

According to de Kock the problem is aggravated by the country's history of violent 'conjunctions', leading to 'various acts of provisional synthesis'. The different ensuing 'constructions of the "nation" [colony/union/republic] have tended to compromise all identities'. Rather than being positively constituted as 'something', to be South African instead always implies a reduction of identity – of 'no longer fully to be something else'.¹⁶ (Whether the latest construct of an African democracy, seeking 'ambitiously to recognize the full extent of the region's diversity'¹⁷ will succeed in lifting the curse of principally impeded South African identities, still remains to be seen.)

Arguably it is this pathological impeding, thwarting and slighting of individual identities that leads de Kock to propound for the country a state of 'unresolved heterogeneity'.¹⁸ It is 'unresolved' because it has defeated 'various statist models of social organisation attempted so far',¹⁹ but also because it continues to disallow any South African to make a 'shift from the first person singular to the first person plural'.²⁰ For any voice to be able to speak not only for an individual position or identity, but for that of a collective, this would of course be a prerequisite. Due to the impossibility to speak for South Africa as a whole the production of literature and art was forced to resort to acts of 'self-inscription and othering'. In an ironic twist the textual production

¹⁰ See footnote 40, pg. 41.

¹¹ De Kock, *South Africa in the global imaginary*, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

deliberately concerned with ‘making South Africa itself’ (arguably one of the strongest motivations of local artistic production) has thereby simultaneously contributed to making it ‘different from itself.’²¹

Despite de Kock’s nuanced and insightful analysis, the question begs to be asked as to how heterogeneity could possibly be ‘resolved’. Is he assuming that in principle a ‘solution’ to the ‘problem’ of unresolved heterogeneity can be found? But how can heterogeneity be ‘resolved’ without becoming homogenous, in other words, by being eliminated? (Surely its distinction into clear-cut, discrete, ‘complete’ identities cannot be contemplated as a ‘solution’ anymore – not after the catastrophic failure of the modernist and essentialist experiment of apartheid, which tried to implement just that.)

I posit then that de Kock’s analysis requires a different reading in order to take us beyond its postulation of an insurmountable pathology or problem. From a complexity perspective such an alternative interpretation immediately springs to mind, succinctly captured in Cilliers’s *bon mot*: ‘Diversity [read: heterogeneity] is not a problem to be solved, but the precondition for the existence of any interesting behaviour’.²² From a complexity perspective the ‘irresolvable problem’ of unresolved heterogeneity clearly appears as a ‘constituent’ – better not to be ‘solved’ (i.e. reduced, impoverished, destroyed).

A complexity view shows up even more significant shifts. For one, it becomes possible to speak, if not *for* the whole, then *on behalf* or at least *as integral part of* the whole; not with the help of construed hegemonies, institutional mandates or conceited preposterousness, but simply by virtue of every and any South African’s voice being constitutive to the integrity of the emergent systemic whole. Further, what appeared to be ‘compromised identities’ might now be perceived as ‘complex identities’. Very few regions of the earth offer comparable opportunities of overtly experiencing the notion of ‘identity’ as being a relational and dynamic (as well as hybrid, fuzzy, nuanced and processual) quality.²³ Considering the presence of seemingly incongruent differences as impediment for the development of ‘complete’ identities reveals an unacknowledged subscription to an essentialist understanding of identity.

Finally the perception of a ruptured, segregated whole, apparently denying its inhabitants a genuinely shared collective space, now emerges as a ‘complex whole’. Its wholeness results from a fundamental systemic complexity, which paradoxically encompasses the mutually exclusive ideas of unity *and* diversity. From such a vantage point South Africa appears as example *par excellence* of a complex system that prohibits the reduction of its multiplicity to its union, as well as that of its union to its multiplicity. Instead the notion of whole and parts must be conceived together as – once again to quote Morin’s formula – ‘simultaneously complementary and antagonistic’²⁴ yet irreducibly, mutually constitutive.

In such a system no ‘shared spaces’ will exist by default, but there is no reason why it should not be possible to negotiate them, albeit provisionally and contingently. Arguably, this point may be elucidated by comparing the notion of a shared, habitable space with that of an ecological niche. Any ecological habitat rarely presents itself as uncontested comfort zone, but as a rule only emerges from multiple interactive synergies, mutualism, feedback loops and a sustained balance of giving and taking.

Concluding this reflection, I posit that de Kock’s reading of the South African cultural context clearly bespeaks a modernist approach. As such it represents ‘conventional wisdom’ or rather ‘wit’s end’. While it succinctly sums up the South African cultural predicament, it is at once caught up in the very same predicament, implicitly confessing its own subjugation to the very quandary it describes.

²¹ De Kock, *South Africa in the global imaginary*, 9.

²² Paul Cilliers, ‘Difference, Identity and Complexity’, *Philosophy Today* (2010), 55.

²³ See Chapter 4, pg. 91.

²⁴ Edgar Morin, *Method. Towards a Study of Humankind* trans. Roland B elanger (Peter Lang, New York 1992), 102; see also Chapter 2.3., pg. 38.

2. PREDICAMENTS OF CULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA²⁵

The very predicament described by de Kock serves as point of departure for Ashraf Jamal's investigation of South African culture. Jamal's declared purpose is that of seeking a position 'of cultural inquiry and expression'²⁶ that is, first, truly liberated from South Africa's burdens of the past, second, surpasses the current impasse of indifference and, third and perhaps most importantly, proffers tangible hope for a prospect of a liveable future – 'freed from the spectre of colonisation'.²⁷ He is seeking an 'epistemic *possibility* of thinking (dreaming, feeling) ... [imagining] South Africa ... beyond the pathological dualism of despair and hope that defines a country still caught in absolute contests.'²⁸ In the process he provides a meticulous analysis of cultural constellations in South Africa, similar to that of de Kock. However, while Jamal is clear on the point that there can be *no simple* solutions, he just as much resists the fatalist attitude that there can be *no* solution at all.

Jamal claims that the much acclaimed changes in South Africa since 1994 have 'remained largely cosmetic, that the psychic disfigurement [of the country] ... has by no means been vaulted.'²⁹ He considers what *appears* to be change but 'as a mockery ... because that which has been deemed to be change has been achieved *in spite* of a constitutive psychic perversion that continues to hold the country in its thrall.'³⁰

He defines the 'psychic perversions' as follows:

In repressing the heterogeneous complexity of life, colonialism instituted a culture of guilt and shame, fear and denial, anger and suspicion. Today these pathological traits continue to mark and mar all attempts to create a celebratory cultural and social imaginary. The mockery that is the substance of transformation in South Africa is the direct result of an inability and a perverse refusal to forego a burden of pain that, for most, remains the defining crux of human existence.³¹

For Jamal a very specific kind of 'fear' and resulting 'denial' lie at the root of the South African 'pathology'. He quotes J.M. Coetzee, who has suggested that the denial is that 'of an unacknowledged desire to embrace Africa' and the fear that 'of being embraced in return by Africa.'³² If this is the pathology of the colonisers, settlers or modern African citizens, the illness of the indigenous inhabitants is that of 'bitterness, anger and suspicion' resulting from the experience of a 'continent abused, exploited and patronised by foreigners.'³³ As a rule, cultural responses from both sides are therefore 'inherently compromised and conditional', invested in the 'psychic link' between fear and denial on the one hand, bitterness, anger and suspicion on the other. Even critical and enlightened authors, who clearly see these pathologies, cannot escape from them. As examples of such enthrallments Jamal mentions J.M. Coetzee's 'all-too conscious fatalism' and Njabulo Ndebele's recurring topic of 'apodictic hope' or 'protracted longing.'³⁴ Jamal claims that as a result of such expressions – pinned down to their ever-same positions by their authors' respective reading of history – a gaping void has emerged. Continuously overwhelmed and overshadowed by a 'legacy of oppression and freedom' respectively, these forms of representation deny the occupation of any alternative positions.

The point made here is that as long as critique remains subject to the pathology it addresses, it prolongs the disease and – ironically and counter-intentionally – prevents true alternative imaginations successfully to

²⁵ Ashraf Jamal, *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.* original emphasis

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Coetzee quoted in Jamal, 37.

³³ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

emerge. According to Jamal this not only causes a structural deadlock but – far worse – contributes to an attitude of indifference. As a final state following disillusion on all fronts, this is perhaps the worst part of the current predicament: ‘the malaise of the present moment, which sustains and cancels the binary which defines it, and, in so doing, produces yet another prison-house: indifference.’³⁵

If Jamal appears to be painting an exceptionally bleak picture of South Africa as cultural environment (claiming no less than that ‘the “ghetto” remains the defining characteristic of South Africa’s cultural imaginary’,³⁶ that the ‘decolonisation of the imagination’³⁷ has not yet taken place, that in spite of the ‘miracle’ of its democratization and the much acclaimed rise of the ‘rainbow nation’ the country has hardly moved beyond its colonial psychosis, beyond a thinking in ‘closed epistemological structures of oppression’),³⁸ his intention is in fact squarely to face and name a failure. And he conducts this courageously honest and harsh analysis not yielding to any superficial consolation, precisely because he has not yet become cynical, not yet given up hope, not yet lost interest in the country.

His concern is a rigorous cultural inquiry. His conviction is that such an inquiry will only be meaningful if it fully acknowledges the country’s ‘continued bondage’ and ‘psychic disfigurement’³⁹ but then nevertheless succeeds in reading it ‘against the grain’ of fatalist conclusions, thereby engendering an ‘epistemic shift away from fatalism’ towards ‘unlock[ing] the hidden and secret life, albeit deformed and stunted.’⁴⁰ For Jamal ‘access’ to this hidden and obscured realm where life persists is granted by what Bhabha terms the ‘hybrid moment [that is] part dream, part analysis’,⁴¹ the liminal, interstitial space ‘on the borderline of the “present”, for which there seems to be no proper name’,⁴² but which appears as the only possible ‘location of culture’.⁴³ According to Jamal ‘the birth of the imagination occurs in those hybrid moments when the increasingly blurred edicts of oppression *and* freedom that distort inquiry and expression are bypassed and overwhelmed.’⁴⁴

In further describing / delineating / characterizing this intangible but crucially transformative place / event / moment, Jamal invokes a ‘non-positionality’,⁴⁵ a ‘de-territorialisation ... of the signifying economy of cultural production’⁴⁶ and a ‘dramatization of the poetics of the seam.’⁴⁷ He concedes that imagining and moving into this ill-defined, but purportedly liveable and lovable realm – a world ‘beyond’ – is an almost impossible task, but therefore an all the more compelling one (venturing in the same vein that the notion of ‘inquiry would mean little, if nothing, if it were not forged by this maddening and seemingly impossible ideal.)⁴⁸ His hope is that ‘within the logic of entrapment lies a counter-logic,⁴⁹ which, having passed through the fraud contingencies that mar and mark critical thought and cultural expression in South Africa, could make possible entry to *the complex world that lies beyond.*’⁵⁰

³⁵ Jamal, *Predicaments*, 36.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 6. Elsewhere Jamal quotes Albi Sachs’s rhetoric question: ‘Can we say that we have begun to grasp the full dimensions of the new country... or are we still trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imaginations?’ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁸ Ndebele quoted in Jamal 34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴² Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, London 1994), 1.

⁴³ To paraphrase Bhabha’s title.

⁴⁴ Jamal, *Predicaments*, 41.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁴⁹ Jamal’s argument may be strengthened by reflections on the issue of ‘constraints’ from a complexity perspective: Under certain conditions ‘apparent’ constraints should not to be perceived ‘in the first instance’ as barriers, but in a second instance as ultimate incentives to overcome (what appeared in the first instance to be) barriers, thereby strengthening or enhancing a previously barred strategy. Through a complex set of interactions the constraint (restriction, impediment, handicap) may thus potentially become an especially enabling factor.

⁵⁰ Jamal, 39.

Countering the predictable criticism that such ‘*a complex world beyond*’ is but another term for a utopian projection, Jamal reminds his critics of the fact that he is not referring to a reified, implementable state of affairs that might miraculously manifest, but to a different kind of *collective imagination*. Just as the concepts of colonialism or apartheid are no tangible ‘objects’, but are constituted through ‘embattled processes, ceaseless actions’⁵¹ (and, as shown with reference to the works of Coetzee and Ndebele, even through ‘critique’ as activity that is ‘over-determined’ by the very concept it refutes), so the idea of a complex human world is not one to be debated, organized and ‘implemented’, but one first and foremost to be conceived by being ‘imagined’.⁵² However, with Adorno and Bhabha, he concedes that ‘the condition of cross cultural initiation’ in principle implies an ‘unhomeliness’,⁵³ an ‘exilic and restless’⁵⁴ way of thinking, a forever provisional, interstitial existence on the ‘troubled seam’.⁵⁵

While I fully underwrite Jamal’s analysis of the cultural predicament, I differ on the point of how it can be overcome. I am convinced that a creative imagination surpassing conventional structures of entrapment could potentially manifest in a completely different ‘reality’; this is certainly no utopian project. But in my view the oft-evoked interstices are ‘utopian’; literally ‘no places’ and thereby no viable habitats. Even though it might appear to be a truism, an elementary conditionality for the ‘act of living’ must be reiterated: Living requires a physical place to ‘take place’; ‘to live’ necessarily means ‘to live somewhere’. Even the notion of bare existence is not possible without the minimum of some kind of sheltered and nourishing environment.

Therefore the interstitial, non-positional border / seam / un-homely nowhere without a name, is no option. It appears to me as final resignation and withdrawal from the one and only world we have. In order to live – live to the full, live out a culture – there must be a place to ‘stay’ and return to, a place to put one’s foot down, potentially even to grow roots.⁵⁶ I hence reiterate my preference for the image of the ‘ecological niche’ (instead of the undefined ‘interstice’): A space carved out against some odds, but with sufficient space and resources not only to survive or make a living, but potentially ‘to thrive’, i.e. give expression to the state of being alive. Characteristic of the ecological habitat is the fact that it is a synergetically shared space, never isolated, but interdependent, relational, interactive, dependant on a well-balanced congruence between internal requirements and external propensities, contextual in the fullest sense.

Instead of forgoing the notion of home altogether I posit that is necessary to redefine the concept of ‘home’ and ‘well-being’ in heterogeneous societies or, for that matter, for the global village at large. Arguably the ‘walled compound’, the inaccessible ‘private property’, the exclusive (non-political, unconcerned) ‘comfort zone’ are not suitable. Even though being traded as highly sought-after life-style assets equated (or perhaps confused) with homeliness, these very assets are beginning to show as huge liabilities, contributing considerably to the increasingly inhospitable state of our planet, not only for those currently denied the ‘luxury’ of a home but, in the long run, for all living species on this planet.

The alternative concept of home (as habitat or niche) will arguably best be modelled on what in nature is recognized as ‘biosphere’ – literally a ‘space for living’. In proposing this basic ecological, organizational structure as cultural model I do not intend ‘reducing humans to nature’⁵⁷ (although I would see nothing wrong with puncturing the conceitedness of humans assuming some kind of super-naturality about themselves). Instead I wish to follow Morin in his ‘double movement’ of bridging the schism between ‘human

⁵¹ Jamal, 40.

⁵² Albi Sachs’s term to which Jamal frequently refers, e.g. Jamal, pg. 6, 9.

⁵³ Bhabha quoted in Jamal, 53.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 157.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ For a set of profound reflections on the topic of human rootedness see Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots: Prelude to a Declaration of Duties Towards Mankind* (Routledge, London 2001)

⁵⁷ Morin, *On Complexity*, 8.

phenomena' and the 'natural universe': 'We must reintegrate humans with nature *and* we must be able to distinguish humans from nature.'⁵⁸

In this sense I view South Africa's physically and culturally segregated landscapes as urgent challenges and calls to conceive and imagine the notion of home (and homeliness) not as a withdrawal from the world (finding refuge behind locks and walls) but one of stepping into and being in the world perceived as 'oikos'⁵⁹ – a communal living and working space; a cultural and 'eco'-nomic community, a shared space of safe and common ground. Just as in natural ecologies, where the phenomenon of biodiversity has finally been recognized as crucial prerequisite for the sustainable habitability of any given biosphere, so cultural economies will duly have to acknowledge that diversity needs to be fostered and treasured – not resolved, not unified, not segregated.

Clearly a prerequisite for such a move 'into' the world would be the social environment's respect for the individual, a consensus on the sacrosanctity of each other's life, health, well-being and personal space, as well as the prioritization of accommodating rather than threatening encounters. Unfortunately – tragically, distressingly – the country's current socio-political development is firmly caught in the opposite trajectory. The spiral of violence and counter-violence has long since compromised the notion of (safely accessible) public space, let alone that of any safe private domain. At this moment most South Africans would seriously doubt the viability or even the mere possibility of safe and shared cultural and living spheres. Very few will be able to muster imagining what amounts to the exact opposite of the daily reality – a 'world beyond' ignorantly and violently contested and intruded spaces.

A strong argument can be made that highly divergent cultures and societies in principle possess proportionally high resources of synergetic, mutualistic, enriching ways of living. Endowed with a unique set of circumstances that would certainly give it access to such resources, South Africa's terrifying cultural predicament is its continued failure to see and tap into this richness and instead to remain mired in persistently imagined oppositions and conflicts.

3. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXTS AS MUSICAL / UNMUSICAL ENVIRONMENTS

I do not wish to add to these two analyses of the current South African cultural context any further assessments of general validity. Even restricting such an investigation to the musical realm would be a daunting, if not impossible task. And – as the survey of the still smaller field of 'local, classical composition' in Chapter 6 has shown – even a narrowly delimited investigation will hardly deliver anything closed comprehensive findings.

Yet I do not wish to resign from saying anything at all, just because nothing final can be said. Moreover, having made the argument for the value and inevitability of subjective assessments and perceptions,⁶⁰ I am encouraged to speak for myself, recounting personal and immediate experiences, which were made while and through working as composer and performing musician in South Africa and which directly pertain to specific aspects of the country's cultural environment.

As a counterpoint then to the two analytical interpretations outlined above, I offer a third (experiential, auto-ethnographic) reading. For this 'report' I choose the most intimate literary format, that of the personal letter. While I am fully aware that I cannot claim to speak representatively I purposefully resort to speak personally – deliberately dropping scientific and academic conventions and shields to convey the vulnerability of what I believe to be my authentically 'own' position.

⁵⁸ Morin, *On Complexity*, 8, see also Chapter 1, pg. 27 ff.

⁵⁹ *Oikos*, Greek: house, community, line (of ancestry).

⁶⁰ See Chapter 2.12, pg. 52 ff.

LETTER TO MY CHILDREN

Dear L and M,

I owe you an explanation for being absent from your life for such a long time. The reason is I have been on a battlefield – sometime without really realizing this – for a long time. The battles emerged in part from my personality and in part from the circumstances in my home country to which we opted to return fourteen years ago.

As you know, mum and I lived in Germany before that. We were a family. We had a life. We had a place in a liberal society with a thriving culture, buzzing with energy and intellectual restlessness, surrounded by people who lived and let live. We had friends, we were integrated in an artistic environment; we were involved in interesting projects. We had an income from doing what we loved most: Mum from producing jewellery, I from making music. We were living in a country where there was recognition for a task well done, where professional work was appreciated and reimbursed appropriately, where there were commissions for jewellery and music, where exhibitions and concerts were integrated into a way of living.

All that has changed. Mum has passed away, no jewellery is produced any more, no music made, we're hiding (more than living) in a country torn apart by violence and ignorance.

It is hard to believe how almost everything has just fallen away. How, in hindsight, returning to South Africa seems to have been a really bad decision.

Living in Germany was exiting and rewarding in many ways. But let me not idealize it: It never really became home. And so, in spite of all the advantages and opportunities there came a time when I desperately wanted to come back to South Africa. I wanted to come home. I wanted to be a musician in my native surroundings. I wanted to work where I could also live fully. I was convinced that I would be able to work more meaningfully if I returned to where I felt I belonged.

I had a dream of writing an opera that would put South Africa's cultural potential and strife onto a stage – transforming this into a safe space of interaction and communication. I wanted to be involved in what I believed was South Africa's most valuable asset: its potential to play a leading role in the global challenge of enabling meaningful, respectful and constructive intercultural interaction. I envisaged this to be a dynamic and enriching process from which all would gain. As a musician I wanted to give this asset and challenge a place; give it shape, give it music. I was thinking like a Baroque composer: of the opera stage being a genuine representation of the real world and the universal forces playing out in it; and of a Baroque 'masque' as the most appropriate form of a staged spectacle that would model the drama in the real world. Such a work could not be created in Germany. I imagined that it could be done in South Africa. It was the most important reason to return.

I thought that it could be done in a year or two and that from thereon other opportunities would open up, or that we would go back to Germany. Now, fourteen years later, *Masque*⁶¹ written and performed long ago, all opportunities seem closed. The opera's proposal of opening up a stage for similarly exploratory work has not been taken up. Its realization in Cape Town was a stark awakening to a very different reality than the one I had envisaged: that of South Africa's inability to build on its strongest assets, its refusal in playing an exemplary role, its stubbornness in clinging to ingrained structures of prejudice, segregation and distrust. Over time the dream turned into a horrible nightmare.

What happened was the following: While we were living in Germany I gradually realized that I wasn't a German as I had thought. Instead, I learnt – through the distance – that I related to South Africa much more strongly, realizing that the country had something unique and extremely valuable to offer to the world through its rare combination of different cultures, worldviews, landscapes and histories. Because of the distance I realised how rich its diversity was in comparison with the streamlined homogeneity in Germany.

⁶¹ Hans Huyssen & Ilija Trojanow, *MASQUE*. An African opera. First performance: Cape Town, 28.10.2005.

Over distance and time I had realised that in spite of speaking German and thinking in German I was an African in my heart.

Unfortunately one cannot write such things in a dissertation. There they will ring hollow and clichéd, even though they stem from an honest attempt at describing a genuine experience. It is not even a unique experience. On the contrary, it is very common, which is why it has become a cliché. But then one should acknowledge that underneath clichés real experiences lurk, experiences that connect what one does to who one is and how one lives. I wanted to surpass the cliché; I wanted to be a South African who had deliberately chosen to live in this country and deliberately chosen to engage with its unique potential and the unique challenges. I wanted to be part of a solution, not part of the problem.

So I set out to write the opera. Ilija came to South Africa and stayed with us for a while to work on the libretto. I realized that I needed indigenous instruments for the colours I wanted. After all, that was what I had come back to Africa for. I would obviously hire African musicians to do that and I believed that they would take pride in contributing their art to a mutually project. But then I realized that hardly anyone was still playing indigenous instruments and of the few players around, certainly nobody could play from notated music. I also woke up to the fact that hardly any of the indigenous instruments one reads about were actually around anymore. So it dawned on me that we would need additional funds to commission instruments to be made: an *akadinda*, a set of kudu horns, a *mbira* (all at orchestra pitch), as well as several new music bows. We would also needed money to train students to play the various instruments and to pay stipends to the students so that they could be relied on to attend the training sessions. In the end we needed even more money to buy a new set of horns after the first one was stolen.

I gradually realized that even though Cape Town Opera was acting as a professional production company, the organizers didn't understand the requirements of this specific piece. For example, the suggestion that in the African passages, the singers should be accompanied by *uhadi*, instead of a piano, in order to become acquainted with the specific musical texture required, was flatly dismissed. As the répétiteur on CTO's payroll was a pianist, it was a given that she would play at all rehearsals, regardless of the musical requirements. Colonial performance practice would thereby intrinsically defy the very possibility of arriving at a different kind of music making.

Then I noticed that the singing students who had been hired for the choir were far too inexperienced for the task at hand. But for organizational reasons, none of the more experienced singers were available. So I had to make numerous changes to make the production feasible in the allocated time. In some ways this is quite a normal procedure whenever a new work is tested for the first time and necessary changes should be improvements. But in this case most of the changes were detrimental concessions to educational shortfalls, to a lack of access to indigenous performance skills, to a lack of dedication to live up to a new challenge of embracing unique South African potential and instead succumb to prevailing compromising circumstances.

Even outside the production evil spirits conspired against its materialization. First my car was stolen. Then, just a few weeks before the final deadline, my computer, complete with the opera's score. All in all things became complicated beyond the worst expectations and I exhausted myself in trying to handle all the crises.

Under the circumstances the one thing that I didn't notice was that I was losing your mother. She didn't like the project from the start, because it seemed biased to her. She was also terrified when I had to travel to the townships to work with my indigenous musical informants. She resented the way things went wrong all the time, thereby constantly requiring more time and attention. She couldn't understand why I kept at the project, when it was clear to her that this was a dead end. In the end she was so negative about it that she couldn't support me any more. I had to withdraw myself from her criticism to focus on meeting my deadline and finishing the piece.

And therefore, when it was done – after a decade of intense work, on the day after the last performance and when she could not bear the strain any longer and the ultimatum of granting me a working asylum had

expired – she insisted that I move out. The day on which I had to leave and leave you behind clearly brought to light that my endeavours had tragically derailed. I had gone to the greatest possible troubles to create a space I would be able to call home and in the very process lost my home and my family.

Looking back I can now say the following:

Upon my return from Germany I had thought that composing was the best way for me to engage with the country, more specifically to invite its unprecedented diversity into my musical thinking. But I seem to have overlooked that many South Africans do not like to be reminded of the diversity surrounding them daily due to the seemingly overwhelming challenges it often poses. Hence they do not wish to be confronted with unfamiliar or foreign expressions in the musical domain, which many consider to be a private domain or even refuge, reserved for own preferences and comforting experiences. I was so completely preoccupied with my quest that I didn't notice how I lost support on all sides.

For some very conservative South Africans, writing an opera for black singers and African instruments amounted to a cultural betrayal. And for the African musicians involved in the piece I was just a crazy outsider, running with a mad idea and doing a very unusual project. Even though, after some initial scepticism, most participated more or less enthusiastically and therefore a level of close collaboration was reached (while it lasted), this wouldn't change the fact that I would never be one of them. And so once the production was over, all that it had required and entailed came to an end as well.

After the last performance a reviewer came to the conclusion that the composition was a failure. He hastened to make the prediction that it would never be performed again as it was too complicated and incoherent. What he failed to notice was that arguably the standards of performance (and further the prevailing circumstances determining attainable levels of performance) were perhaps more problematic than 'the work' itself.

The way in which musicians struggled with the most elementary musical requirements of the work was a stark eye-opener and forced me seriously to question the quality of musical training they were receiving. Singers often missed their entrances and pitches, the orchestra was acting clumsily in the unfamiliar inter-cultural arena, the indigenous instrument players struggled greatly to perform within the predetermined structures of a Western score. On the grounds of its inadequate realization it would have been impossible to determine whether the composition itself was incoherent. I will agree with a categorical dismissal of the work's first *realization*, but not of its compositional substance nor of its visionary scope.

I posit that the composition does not pose exceptional technical challenges. However, it does put forward an unusual proposition, requiring the integration of vastly different idioms in close temporal and musical proximity. It requires an approach that few were prepared to follow. And so, for all practical purposes, the work has not fully been realized yet. Accordingly, it has not had a chance to be heard and received. My vision of an opera, deserving to be called 'African', was never realized.

But African music wasn't my only battlefield. There were others, notably the realm of Early music.

While living in Austria, Mum and I had both come to love the interpretive method of period performances of early music. It was probably the most important experience we shared and gained in Europe. We both became enthusiastic advocates of this approach and for many years were members of various early music groups in Austria and Germany. When we returned to South Africa we formed our own group, the *Ensemble Refugium*. We were convinced that we would be bringing something of great beauty, importance and rich expression to this country, which at that time had been culturally isolated for a long time and cut off from recent musical developments such as the advent of HIP. We also hoped to find refuge in the ensemble from the mainstream tendency of performing predominantly romantic music. With its stereotyped expressions we found this kind of music rather out of place considering the richly nuanced qualities of the manifold South African environments.

Unfortunately I once again made a grave mistake. Fascinated by an intrinsic connection that would bypass the ‘political’ issues of Euro-centrism and musical relevance that would constantly raise their heads, I envisioned to relate the performance practice of early European music to that of early (indigenous) African music. HIPP clearly offered a possibility of grounding the process of African music-making in an interpretive approach that would be free of essentialist distinctions along stylistic criteria, but was instead concerned with relating current performances to specific historical and geographical models. The same methodology – an equal approach – could be applied to the most disparate musical idioms without having to sacrifice the richness of their diverse means of expression.

Sadly the idea of developing a specifically local (geographically informed) form of performance practice from within the amorphous zone of inter-cultural collaborations once again met fierce resistance – including that of Mum’s parents. I’m not quite sure about the extent their influence, but it seems quite clear to me now that their disapproval (of what they viewed as clichéd crossover projects) must have played a role in her withdrawal from our mutual ensemble. For the first European tour of the *Ensemble Refugium* together with the *Dizu Kuduhorn Band* I had to book another violinist on short notice. Thereafter we would hardly play together anymore.

After I had lost my home and my ensemble I found refuge of some kind by accepting a teaching position at the university in Bloemfontein. However, I could never imagine moving there permanently, with you living in the Cape. Therefore the invitation to become a fellow at the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study came as a godsend, affording me time to take leave from the Free State and return to the Cape.

The opportunity of engaging in interdisciplinary conversations with a large number of outstanding visiting scholars at STIAS proved to be a most stimulating experience. (Amongst other projects, the very possibility to undertake this study arose from conversations made possible by the residency.) Since STIAS is partly affiliated to the University of Stellenbosch I moreover considered my fellowship as a good position to refresh links with the *alma mater’s* music department. However, enquiries into possibilities of professional collaborations clearly met no reciprocal interest and had to be abandoned.⁶²

Forced to operate without institutional backing, I nevertheless set up a long envisaged Early Music Forum together with several local and European HIP practitioners, temporarily collaborating with STIAS (where we hosted several colloquia) and the Stellenbosch Museum (which permitted us the use of several of its historical venues in town for our *Stellenbosch Baroque* concert series). Pooling interested musicians as well as an interest group of potential supporters we founded a new early music ensemble, the *Cape Consort*, and registered the South African Early Music Trust to back the endeavour financially. With privately sourced funding the *Cape Consort* was able to stage 50 concerts with more than 14 different programmes⁶³ and produce a CD within the first three years of its existence – eliciting enthusiastic responses from its audiences. While these projects featured occasional collaborations with HIP specialists from overseas, its thrust was, for the main part, aimed at giving local musicians practical experience and tangible job opportunities.

The exclusion of HIPP from local syllabi – both as methodology and practice – amounts to a disconcerting anachronism compared with international educational standards. It severely compromises the expertise of locally trained musicians. Concretely, it means that it is well nigh impossible to perform Early Music in South Africa, as locally trained musicians are not equipped for the task. Accordingly I have tirelessly advocated its inclusion in curricula as a critically overdue matter of highest priority. In one case a motivation submitted to a university was rejected on the grounds of being unfeasible. In another case it was ‘high-jacked’ – used to implement a new institutional structure, but thereby completely marginalizing existing activities in the field,

⁶² The notable exception was the collaboration with Stephanus Muller, who took me on as doctoral student as a result of our STIAS conversations.

⁶³ For a current overview see www.mucaivi.com/CapeConsortProgrammes.html.

overtly refusing to collaborate with local practitioners and instead seeking more ‘glamorous’ European affiliations.⁶⁴

It will be understandable that from my vantage point both outcomes are equally affronting, as both the administrative rejection and the ‘hostile take-over’ display a wilful ignorance of the groundwork already done. In both cases my (substantial and sustained) personal input was simply cast aside, adding up to my legacy of defeats. It was indicative of either a seeming inability on my side fully to ground and formally implement lasting musical initiatives, or of institutional forces adamantly guarding against innovations that could potentially threaten their *status quo*. While I cannot deny mistakes made on my side, I do consider much of my work severely compromised by established – but unfortunately questionable – institutional hegemony.

The latter phenomenon reveals a pattern that is becoming ever more conspicuous of destructive processes into which South Africa currently seems to be locked. The destructive pattern probably results from a fatal cocktail of violence⁶⁵ and ignorance. In conjunction with each other – both, moreover, having reached unprecedented high levels – these two phenomena pose a truly wicked problem: violence manifesting in the wake of ignorance of more subtle methods of communication and ignorance constituting a severe form of violence, time and again trampling on sprouting potential.

Having successively lost my operational space in the realm of indigenous, contemporary and early music, the last resort for me was to write this thesis – as a means of doing my homework, to sum up, reflect, analyse and process the experiences of the last years. It has become necessary, because I’m hardly able actually to make music in South Africa anymore. It has become too dangerous, too stressful, too hurtful. The damage caused thereby has been too large, the chances of attaining satisfactory musical realizations remain too small.

I have realized too late that the perception of my music of being (too) demanding, complicated and difficult has by far outweighed its perception as nuanced and scrupulous response to specific local contexts. Or perhaps I should say that apparently the impression of these requirements has stood in the way of grasping the purpose to which they were intended. Thereby, ironically and frustratingly, I have gained adversaries on many different sides (those who didn’t like African idioms to be introduced into ‘serious’ music, those who saw no need to invigorate standardized conventions with a deliberate performance practice, those who would rather avoid the effort of engaging with contemporary music), instead of building a community around and through a shared space of worthwhile musical occasions and experiences as would have been my initial and ultimate intention.

Summing up, I would say that the musical propositions I have made as a performing artist, composer and teacher have not succeeded to become integrated into a fruitful discourse; in fact they have hardly been perceived at all and have certainly not granted me a homecoming. Instead, massive institutional resistance to such propositions has prevented me (just as many others) from making meaningful local contributions.

Severe institutional resistance has in fact prohibited meaningful change in the country’s music education at large, leaving most South African classically trained musicians with little more than the option of two disadvantageous alternatives: either to participate in problematically ‘anachronistic’ music making locally, or to leave the country. In spite of many wasted opportunities and much unhappiness in this regard, the odds are slim that music institutions will integrate important musical impulses rather than to stifle them; to stop ‘guarding’ over their musical hegemony and territory and instead start to serve the flourishing of music in general; to cling to comfortable privileges instead of initiating internal transformations enabling them to play a

⁶⁴ To me it is incomprehensible how the once-off import of European expertise can be hailed as benefitting a local approach of informed performance practice. With respect to prohibitive costs incurred as well as opportunities lost for resident musicians, it much rather amounts to a slap in the face of local pioneers, who persistently have to work under direly restrictive conditions.

⁶⁵ ‘Violence’ is used here in the Foucaultian sense of a propensity of ‘power’ that inheres in institutions themselves, rather than in deliberate acts of individuals that represent such institutions. In this context reference may also be made to Rob Nixon’s concept of ‘slow violence’.

more constructive and inclusive societal role. However, as long as formal institutions claim hegemony over professional musical activities, yet fail to acknowledge the responsibility arising from such a position, there will be little operational space for individualistic, locally informed and contextualized (i.e. structurally coupled⁶⁶) musical contributions to flourish.

Resorting to an academic discourse with its rigorous scientific tools has been an arduous task as the expressive and communicative idiom of this format is not my preferred mode of expression. However, I do appreciate the aesthetic of a rigorous argument and the ‘beauty’ of a logically compelling line of thought guiding a way out of the relativist domain of mere personal preferences and beliefs. But, just as in the case of any artistic expression, even the success or effectiveness of a scientific endeavour largely depends on its perception – its impression on the cognitive framing of a conceiving subject. Therefore it is not yet clear whether anyone will read it, understand it or take it seriously enough to respond in a constructive manner.

Fortunately the travails have been made worth the while since in the process I acquainted Paul Cilliers, who provided me with a compelling philosophical attitude and excellent theory. Without exaggeration I can say that Paul saved my life, meaning that he finally gave me a capable tool with which to unravel the complex entanglement of my biography with my musical thinking and my musical projects. Sadly, Paul’s life could not be saved when threatened by an aneurysm and I will not be able to share with him what has emerged from our initial, tentative conversations.

If Paul has introduced me to complexity, he has, in the same vein, encouraged me fully to espouse the subjectivity of this approach. This encourages me to include this letter in the thesis, to tell you that I’m writing first and foremost as a human being, even while assuming the role of an academic. I do not write to be proved worthy, but write as a desperate last resort to express my strong purpose of making something work and to relieve my intense pain at seeing that I could – in very important ways – not achieve it otherwise.

I was never able to convey to your mother that all my efforts towards music-making were about trying to create a home and a life for us – a space for living to the full. She died before I could achieve this – and before I realized that I was probably somewhat too stubborn in my pursuit. I would have dearly wished her to know that there could not have been a bigger misunderstanding than that I was betraying her culturally or morally. When I couldn’t spend sufficient time with her it was because I was caught up in carving out our niche. I will never be able to apologise to her that I failed her. The cruel irony is that not only the big plan never worked out, but that its pursuit destroyed our relationship even though being futile in the end.

I write to ask that you accept my apologies for failing you as well in the process. I realize that now and hope that I’ve learned the lesson. Once this work is complete I will make more time for you. I will focus on the small things that are possible and let go of the big dreams. Maybe letting go will allow me to act and react less intensely in future. Arguably this personality trait has, unfortunately, contributed considerably to my battles: the inability to see just how harsh and unforgiving my musical demands must have been on my immediate surroundings, how uncompromising my musical needs (or rather my personal needs projected onto my musical projects) and how hard it must have been to endure such demands. One of my blind spots has been the inability to recognize the correlation between my own intensity and the fierceness of my antagonists.

I have done and said what I could – in compositions, performances, projects and now even in an academic text. More I cannot do. I do not wish to be preoccupied by my old dreams any longer. I have wasted far too much time in senseless battles. I’d much rather let go of all of that and be available to you as the father you deserve. Perhaps, after all, it will be you who will grant me the homecoming for which I have been wishing for so long.

With love,
Dad

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3.3, pg. 70.

Chapter 8

PROFESSING A PERSONAL COMPOSITIONAL APPROACH

Concluding the theoretical considerations (Part One) of this thesis, the purpose of this chapter is to delineate my compositional position (profess compositional strategies, approaches and considerations) with regard to the tenets expounded earlier.

SUBJECTIVE EXPRESSIVITY

As a student of Hans-Jürgen von Bose in the 1990s I was initiated into (and influenced by) the thinking of a group of composers whose style has been labelled 'Neue Einfachheit',¹ an initially somewhat derogatory slogan for a compositional approach developed by a number of German composers in the 1970s and 1980s. Although the term is in many ways a misnomer (none of the members of the group ever wrote 'simple' music) it has nevertheless since become an accepted historiographic term, demarcating the group's collective stand against overly dogmatic avant-garde dictates at the time. Against the proclamation of a 'historical necessity for the innovation of musical material' (of Adornoian and, by implication, Marxist, Hegelian, Modernist provenance) the *Neue Einfachheit* composers postulated their *artistic subjectivity as arbitrarive*. Against predisposed structural developments and a serial treatment of segregated parameters they called for *the restitution of the categories of 'expressivity' and 'artwork'*. Instead of prohibiting or obliterating any emotionality, they wished for their music to offer *immediately tangible forms of experience*.²

As early as 1978 von Bose formulated some of the premises that his peer group shared, leading to aforementioned postulations.³ He argued that the loss of an overriding idea of progress forbade the notion of collectively working in the 'same direction' or even working with the same kind of musical material. Considering that every artist was therefore forced to work on his/her own (solitarily, not as part of a school or movement) a variety of artistic styles should be acknowledged as appropriate to the situation rather than a single, assumedly hegemonic aesthetic. He further conceded a 'longing for lost musical beauty',⁴ implying that longing (and its associated emotionality) should be kept alive rather than being rationalized in its unattainability. In the same vein he professed a commitment to the sensuality of music as communicative medium, a capacity he considered irredeemably wasted if music were approached only intellectually. Emanating clearly from all of the above was the wish to write succinct, immediately apprehensible, music.⁵

Although most members of the group attained prominent positions as frequently performed composers and influential teachers at various German universities, their aesthetic position remained strangely unnoticed in the new music debate, especially so in an international context. Moreover, if perceived at all, it was often strongly contested.

Analyzing the group's revolt and the ensuing debates at the *Darmstädter Ferienkurse* during the late 1970s and early 1980s, Carl Dahlhaus raised two important points. First he interpreted the 'rejection of material thinking'⁶ as a 'rebellion of the subject' against a process previously interpreted as 'necessary objectification',

¹ Rainer Nonnenmann, 'Geliehenes Pathos. Kritische Gedanken Zu Einer 'Zweiten Neuen Einfachheit' Am Beispiel Von Matthias Pintscher', *Die Musikforschung* vol. 57, no. 3, (2004), 215. Nonnenmann counts the composers Hans-Christian von Dadelsen, Manfred Trojahn, Reinhard Febel, Wolfgang Rihm, Hans-Jürgen von Bose, Wolfgang von Schweinitz and Detlev Müller-Siemens to this group.

² *Ibid.* 215, 216.

³ Hans-Jürgen Von Bose, 'Suche Nach Einem Neuen Schönheitsideal', *Darmstädter Beiträge zur neuen Musik. Ferienkurse '78* vol. 17, (1978) quoted in Nonnenmann (2004), 216.

⁴ 'Sehnsucht nach einer verloren gegangenen Schönheit der Musik'.

⁵ Nonnenmann, *Geliehenes Pathos*, 216.

⁶ Carl Dahlhaus, 'Abkehr vom Materialdenken', *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*, vol. 19, (1984), 47.

which eventually caused a 'fateful alienation'.⁷ Thereby he defended it against the incrimination of historical naivety while concurrently pointing out its own inherent problem – that of an unchecked subjectivity. ('A discussion of the *rejection of material thinking* and the perceived implications of the inhibitory material concept is thus inherently a discussion on the opportunities and challenges of a *blatantly subjective expressivity*.)⁸

Second, he argued that in actual fact both 'avant-garde' and 'reactionary' positions were equally 'subjective'. What had – under the spell of Adorno's *Philosophy of New Music* – been heeded as objective 'historical necessity' of 'material innovation', turned out to be anything but ostensibly 'objective'. Referring to Krenek's 'Freiheit der Axiomsetzung'⁹ – every composer's freedom to chose an individual set of artistic axioms, not bound to any assumed historical or natural norms – Dahlhaus views the rebellion against the avant-garde in the 1970s not as 'subjectivity replacing objectivity', but rather that of a 'latent subjectivity replacing a manifest subjectivity'.¹⁰

Adding to Dahlhaus's analysis I posit that – in spite of their protestations against the alienating effects of Modernist approaches – the *Neue Einfachheit* composers themselves subscribed to a modernist perception of 'subjectivity'. This is revealed by their wish merely to reverse a hierarchy, not to eradicate it. There endorsement of the notion of individual subjectivity aimed at overruling the idea of historical or material objectivity, instead of principally questioning the idea of (either position's) supremacy. Clearly the *mutual conditionality of subject and object*, and hence that of (so-called) subjective and objective positions was not taken into consideration in their argumentation.

Clearly the claim for subjective operational space in the 1970s was primarily motivated by the need to escape from stifling conventions. Under the circumstances the idea of 'subjective' composition was meant to promote non-normative, individual, even idiosyncratic and stylistically diverse artistic outputs. That such a self-absorbed and potentially even narcissistic understanding of subjectivity would subsequently lead to an output of 'unrelated', unconnected, disparate and dissociated musical works might not have been anticipated then. However, 'absolute' freedom gained from 'absolute' subjectivity proved to be impoverishing because of what may be termed its 'state of relational deprivation', in other words its meaninglessness. Therefore the movement's revolutionary potential subsequently dissipated, its initial thrust being subsumed by debates about 'musical postmodernism' in general.¹¹

If today once again a claim is made for 'subjective operational space' its thrust will be quite different from that 40 years ago. Other than opposing dogmatically persisting avant-garde aesthetics, it will rather have to be an attempt at countering the 'non-aesthetics' of insipid, piecemeal mixes of styles, idioms and techniques that forestall stringently coherent and persuasively compelling musical expression.

SUBJECTIVE EXPRESSIVITY REDEFINED

If I endorse the claim that musical composition should be 'permitted' to be an individual and subjective endeavour, I do so with the qualification that subjectivity is to be understood not from a modernist, but from a complexity perspective. In the sense in which it informs my artistic thinking, a subjective musical practice or approach will be *relational, mediatory, involved, contextual and open*:

⁷ 'Das Aufbegehren des Subjekts gegen einen Vorgang den man als notwendige Objektivierung aber auch als verhängnisvolle Entfremdung interpretieren kann...' Dahlhaus, 45.

⁸ 'Eine Diskussion über die Abkehr vom Materialdenken und die als hemmend empfundenen Implikationen des Materialbegriffs ist also zugleich und ineins eine Auseinandersetzung über Chancen und Schwierigkeiten einer unverhohlenen subjektiven Expressivität.' Dahlhaus, 46 (my emphases).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ 'Die Abkehr vom Materialdenken ... besagt also nicht, daß Objektivität mit Subjektivität, sondern eher, daß eine latente Subjektivität mit einer manifesten vertauscht wurde.' Ibid., 47.

¹¹ 'Der Streit über die Neue Einfachheit ging Anfang der achtziger Jahre bruchlos in die Diskussion über eine musikalische Postmoderne über.' Achim Heidenreich, *Gegen Die Graue Klinische Richtigkeit. Der Komponist Wolfgang Rihm*, <http://rihmcenter.com/gegen-die-graue-klinische-richtigkeit/> [accessed on 15.7. 2014].

- Instead of seeking to ‘express itself’ (expressionistically proclaim its subjectivity above all), it will be inclined to give expression to the important relationships that constitute it.
- Instead of postulating its unique position or identity it will rather endeavour to determine such a position by investigating its identity as a relational quality.
- Instead of fleeing from stifling circumstances or conventions it will attempt to revitalize and rehabilitate them.
- Instead of insisting on its subjective freedom it will be able to employ its freedom of choice to negotiate and assess meaningful and viable interventions.
- Instead of ‘searching its soul’ it will study its environment and seek for subjective responses to its surroundings.
- Instead of holing up in its own world it will attempt to reach out and over, to touch, communicate or even to facilitate a communion.

COMPLICATIONS CAUSED BY THE NEW SIMPLICITY SCHOOL

The situation that the ‘erstwhile’ *Neue Einfachheit* composers eventually held important teaching posts in Germany, without their aesthetic position bearing much weight in New Music circles (or, in fact, in the outside world in general), has created a difficult situation for the generation of their pupils, to which I belong. Practices and aesthetic or ideological conventions that were criticized in the composition classes continued to dominate the established new music circuit. Conversely, what was sanctified inside the seminars hardly had any currency in the real world. Ours was a doubly idealistic training, informed by the hope that the little-loved genre of ‘new’ music could be made socially relevant (acceptable, appreciable, intelligible) again by means of producing ‘genuinely’ new music.

Of course this hope was doomed: With new music in Germany hardly being performed and perceived outside dedicated new music concerts, the effort was lost on the general public and only fostered hostilities within the initiated fraternity.¹² This dire reality was one of the reasons prompting me to return to South Africa after completing my studies with von Bose. It seemed more compelling and promising to engage with South African musical topics than to be confronted with unacceptably rigid dogmas upheld by the self-proclaimed inner circles established ‘New Music’ institutions in Germany.

Viewed from the perspective of such centres, my work will be considered but of marginal interest, since it is located on a geographical and ideological periphery. Conversely I have reservations about these so-called ‘centres’, having perceived them in many instances as fortresses preoccupied with the preservation of their central positions, rather than as sources of excellent musical contributions. Having been introduced to the notion of ‘multiple modernities’¹³ through my experience of growing up in a colony and only getting to know my cultural ‘motherland’ as a young adult, the so-called cultural strongholds seem far less compelling to me than to my European peers and do certainly not succeed in justifying an assumed universal appeal or hegemony anymore.

The personal consequences I had to draw from this set of circumstances can be summarized as follows:

- Instead of seeking admittance to inner, authoritative or at least established new music circles, I opted to seek for more personally related opportunities or circumstances for which I could contribute tailor-made musical designs.
- Instead of adopting aesthetically dogmatic views of leading institutions, I have opted to defend my own aesthetic, even at the price of being excluded from institutional forums.

¹² At the height of his career Hans-Jürgen von Bose was severely victimized for his critical remarks about the established avant-garde, leading to a severe personal crisis and artistic withdrawal of nearly a decade.

¹³ Shmuel Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities* (Transaction Publisher, Rutgers University, Piscataway 2002).

- Instead of staying and working in an established musical centre (i.e. the cultural hub of a European city) I have deliberately opted for a peripheral position (i.e. returning to South Africa) – hoping, of course, that I would be able to make a difference here and, moreover, to slightly upset the notions of ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’.

MUSICAL ‘MIDDLE GROUND’ – AN ALTERNATIVE TO MUSICAL ‘MAINSTREAM’

It can be argued that the extreme poles of avant-garde (uncompromisingly self-axiomatic) music on one side of the artistic spectrum and commodified (uncompromisingly consumable) music on the other, constitute each other in a reactionary manner, seemingly preoccupied with delineating (proclaiming and defending) their respective positions for ideological rather than inherently musical reasons. From an intrinsically musical vantage point I consider it necessary to reclaim ‘middle ground’ of sorts between the extremes – to regain arable (habitable) land for a ‘generative’ (productive, constructive) musical practice, instead of clinging to merely ‘indicative’ liminal positions for the sake of upholding ideological frontiers.

Stylistically speaking, ‘middle’ is to be read here as *commonsensical* (sensible, reasonable, nuanced), not as *average* (compromising, shallow) means between *unintelligible* (indecipherable, experimental) and *redundant* (popular, fashionable) expression. Economically, ‘middle’ proposes a viable position between *subsidized* (dependant, weak, artificial) and *commercialized* (prostituted, debased, betrayed) dispositions. Artistically speaking, ‘middle’ implies a ‘structurally coupled’¹⁴ position: autonomous yet functional; liberally purposeful (‘of service’, but not subservient), playful yet impassioned, etc. In all cases, ‘middle’ is not a resolution (slacking) of tensions, but – rather to the contrary – the upholding (preservation, maintenance) of tensions. Arguably, the very possibility for artistic engagement only arises from such a balanced tension.

With respect to stylistic considerations the ‘middle’ position does indeed imply a moderation of extremes. However, this is not to be equated (or confused) with the vexatious misnomer of *gemäßigte Moderne*, a term vaguely circumscribing ‘moderately modern’, which denotes the uneasy and self-contradictory combination of ‘not going far enough’ in the anxiety of ‘going a little bit too far’ – a ‘neither-nor’ strategy from which nothing can be gained. Finally, ‘middle’ is not intended to connote to the notion of mainstream (in the sense of canonical, repetitive, limited, infallible, reliably profitable, etc.).

Instead ‘moderation’ here once again refers to a systemic quality of engaging with the tension between extremes, but not being pulled out of the playing field into an area out of bounds for any intelligible perception. The ‘extremes’ – manifesting in many forms, such as utmost diversity, intensity, antagonism, eclecticism, but also in the guise of chaos, violence, destruction – must indeed be noticed, yet also ‘managed’. No artistic position can afford to ignore them without losing its credibility, yet it arguably becomes an ‘art’ in itself to negotiate living spaces, interstices, safe havens but also opportunities ‘in the midst’ of such extremes. I would be reluctant to make an ultimate distinction between the challenge of an ‘art of living’ and that of any form of ‘viable artistic engagement.’ In both cases the aforementioned ‘middle ground’ is a functional grounding (for survival and expression), not an immoral compromise.

- Instead of presenting my work at dedicated new music concerts I prefer performances at ‘ordinary’ (non-specialist) concerts whenever possible, addressing unpretentious audiences and seeking to imbue ritualistic musical formats with momentary relevance and meaning.
- Instead of adopting an elitist attitude of regarding the anonymous category of ‘audience’ as a statistical entity of mass consumers merely after some immediate entertainment, I wish to consider my listeners to be made up of music-appreciating individuals, who not only deserve meticulously prepared and presented music, but moreover need to be respected as intrinsically

¹⁴ See Chapter 3.3 b) ii), pg. 70.

involved protagonists in the musical process and who are in fact constitutive to its successful completion.

- Instead of baffling audiences with exclusive (potentially unintelligible) musical propositions, I attempt to integrate them into an inclusive musical & communicational experience.
- Instead of perceiving and practicing composition as intellectual, ideological or academic (and in that sense as competitive, ‘professional’) quest, I hold that it should primarily be a musical task – ‘musical’ in the sense of relating to the human propensity of reflecting and ‘musing’ and thereby emanating as poetic, immediately sensory and richly nuanced and communal expression.
- Instead of writing for a closed and oversaturated circle of insiders and so-called ‘specialists’ at isolated new music events, I prefer to build musical relations where none exist or where they are not suspected or recognized.
- Instead of providing commodified musical products for consumption under the ritualistic conventions of generic ‘classical music concerts’, I am adamant that the relation between ‘presentational format’ and ‘content to be presented’ should be considered an intrinsic part of any performance. (If the concept of ‘concert’ is understood as that of ‘forum for conveying and sharing music in the best possible way’, its format will self-evidently adapt to particular musical requirements. The opposite practice of culling music to uphold a traditional presentational format amounts to putting the cart before the horse.)

INFORMED PERFORMANCE PRACTICE AS METHOD OF CREATING NEW MUSIC

While the 1980s marked an apex of HIP developments (amongst other factors indicated by its transition from an academic into a popular movement) it is remarkable that during that time there were no points of contact between the contemporaneous discourses about the production of *new (communicative) music* and the *new interpretation* of ancient music. However, from my personal vantage point, simultaneously studying the Baroque cello and composition in the mid 1980s, the similarity of the underlying questions in both fields was strikingly evident. Experiences from both realms have reciprocally informed my work ever since.

In both cases developments were motivated by an urgent need to escape from dominating, stifling conventions (the hegemony of a dogmatic avant-garde on the one side – romanticist interpretations based on superficial text-fidelity on the other) that were leading to disconcerting cultural alienations. In both cases dichotomies between new and old, relevant and dated, innovation and tradition had to be negotiated and balanced. In both cases a ‘resourceful rehabilitation of subjective artistry’¹⁵ as opposed to the professional subjugation to historical conventions was propagated. But whereas the thrust of the *Neue Einfachheit* debate subsequently slumped into oblivion, HIP developed into an immensely successful endeavour, not only as popular movement and innovative performance approach, but just as much for the constructive, rejuvenating influence it has since had on the perception and interpretation of music in the broadest possible sense. Briefly scrutinizing the differences between the two approaches is therefor warranted.

I have argued that the *Neue Einfachheit* movement based on the tenets formulated by von Bose in 1978¹⁶ was doomed to run to a dead end, as its premise – that of an ‘unconditional, categorical subjectivity’¹⁷ – would, by virtue of its own trajectory, be forced into positions of unrelated isolation, hardly dissimilar from those that had resulted from radical avant-garde pursuits. The notion of absolute, unconditional subjectivity revealed the blind spot of modernist thinking already mentioned: the inability of acknowledging relational ties (e.g. such as those of contextuality, structural coupling and conditionality) as *constitutional prerequisites* and *not compromising conditions* for the emergence of subjectivity and autonomy. The rebellion against the dictate of material innovation did not go far enough; it remained, as it were, on a ‘material level’, failing to find a

¹⁵ ‘... Subjektivität als entscheidende Instanz zu restituieren’, Dahlhaus, *Abkehr Vom Materialdenken*, 45, 46.

¹⁶ See footnote 3, pg. 134.

¹⁷ ‘... unverhohlene, rückhaltlose Subjektivität’, Dahlhaus, 48.

substantial substitute for the criticized material category. Similarly, the reinstatement of subjectivity as ultimate artistic category failed to grasp the notion of subjectivity beyond its reactionary modernist scope, not recognizing the complexity of relations required for the constitution of the creative subject; accordingly this impulse could not lead any further than into the maze of relativist blind alleys. As Dahlhaus succinctly diagnosed, the attempted restitution of the category of musical ‘work’, based solely on a subjective will to communicate, not on rigorous material discourse and deliberation, was doomed to become an exchange of ‘empty inwardness’,¹⁸ thereby ultimately jeopardizing its very *raison d’être*, i.e. its propensity and for meaningful communication.

Conversely the HIP methodology always had to find a balance between two focal points – that of a historically determined work and that of its ‘appropriate’ interpretation. The *subjectivity* and autonomy necessary for the interpretative act would always be *constrained* (read: guided, informed, moderated), while the apparent *objectivity* of extant works would often *disintegrate* to a remarkable extent by virtue of paradoxically becoming the subject (and product) of individual readings. Thereby the conditions for meaningful communication as postulated by Dahlhaus (‘meaningful communication requires a substantial object that effectively mediates between the subjects seeking to interact with each other’)¹⁹ were always fulfilled.

Moreover the irresolvable relationality between ‘source’ and ‘reading’ (text and act, object and subject, historical and contemporary expression, etc.) inevitably invited recursive interaction, feedback and mutuality – all the cybernetic phenomena that potentially inaugurate systemic and complex behaviour. HIP escaped the modernist imperative of innovation by virtue of embracing tradition and by defying the idea of material progress. It escaped postmodernist ambivalence by virtue of its immediate engagement with historical material. It continues to emanate as current (relevant, modern, connected) engagement by virtue of emphasizing the momentary performative aspect of music. It has introduced complexity thinking into music by virtue of estimating musical contexts as more important than musical material. If only with regard to these four aspects it has proved a far more robust model than the corresponding designs in the realm of composition.

I have therefore opted to actively engage with HIP – not just as performer but just as much as composer – finding its questions, debates and means of contemporaneous musical expressions far more constructive, meaningful and appealing than the parallel endeavours pursued in New Music circles. Accordingly the HIP methodology has strongly informed my compositional approach and professional affiliations:

- Instead of seeking professional affiliations in the field of new music, I have been drawn and found much stronger relations in the field of period performance practice, following an intuition that in the best of cases ‘new music’ was more effectively produced in the latter sphere.
- Instead of foregrounding the reified musical work as is common practice in conventional compositional training, HIP has taught me to consider equally the constitutive act of realizing (performing) a musical work, thereby balancing and aligning the composer’s contribution with that of the performer.
- Instead of a ‘dictatorial obligation towards material innovation’,²⁰ HIP has brought home the inescapable obligation of contextual musical thinking.
- Instead of (wishfully) dreaming of a global, international, dominant, absolute, generic forefront of musical advancement and production, HIP has beyond doubt reconstituted the value of (and encouraged me to engage in) immediate, localized, contingent, historic, particular musical production.

¹⁸ Dahlhaus, 54.

¹⁹ ‘Kommunikation ... braucht offenbar, um substantiell zu sein, ein Objekt, das die Interaktion zwischen den Subjekten, die Kommunikation suchen, vermittelt...’ Ibid.

²⁰ ‘Diktat des Materials’ Ibid., 45.

SOUTH AFRICA AS STAGE FOR THE CREATION OF NEW MUSIC

Apart from biographical reasons, the aspect of ‘contextual thinking’ underlying the HIP approach was crucial for my decision to return to South Africa. Although fascinated by indigenous musical forms, structures, considerations, instruments and performance conventions from Africa and sensing their importance, all these aspects remained remote and inexplicably foreign during my initial musical training, so that for a long time an engagement with them seemed futile or impossible. As European music, and especially Baroque music, was immediately accessible to me, it made sense to work in a European musical environment that I perceived to be my cultural home. This only changed when I realized that the HIP-approach had unexpectedly provided me with a key to gain access to indigenous African music.

Perceived as contextually (culturally historically, geographically) contingent form of musical expression, indigenous music as practiced on the African continent could be studied, understood and appreciated much in the same way as historically remote European musical idioms could be accessed by means of HIP methodologies. Thereby even bewilderingly foreign musical expressions could be bridged or translated, eventually to reveal familiar relational aspects of human, communicational, expressive and cultural interactions. Once locally specific cultural, traditional or symbolic connotations had been deciphered, it was possible to gain access to vastly differing kinds of indigenous music not as *exotic*, but as *principally familiar* expressive realm. Moreover, particular and idiosyncratic idiomatic qualities would appear as additional vocabulary to be employed in an inter-culturally expanded dialogue. From a HIP perspective South Africa – as repository of diverse traditions of ‘untapped’ early and even exceedingly ancient forms of music – is an irresistibly interesting musical arena. My motivation to return to the country and musically engage with its historic indigenous forms of music must be seen as an immediate consequence of such a HIP approach.

My subsequent musical engagements entailed practical research (studies of instruments and performance practice), field recordings, transcriptions and interviews with veteran practitioners that gradually fed into compositional projects as well as collaborative performances. The underlying impulse informing a variety of approaches and projects was to ‘translate’ unique historical and idiomatically African musical expressions into an evocatively contemporary musical language. Since I perceive skilled and informed performances on indigenous African instruments as containing a crucial element of nuanced musical quality it was a given that any compositions employing historical African instruments would be informed by a HIP approach. Obviously this would restrict the purely ‘compositional’ possibilities (for example not to deviate from idiomatic performance techniques or by explicitly making provision for players not familiar with musical notation). On the other hand it would expand purely ‘compositional’ possibilities by incorporating human, extra-cultural and unpredictable qualities that could otherwise not have been accessed.

A short summary of compositional consequences arising from this specific set of circumstances yields the following:

- Instead of discarding historical traditions to produce ‘new’ music, I have opted to study meticulously such indigenous traditions as a means to create ‘contextual’, rather than ‘materially’ new South African music.
- Instead of overriding old-fashioned, rural musical traditions, I have sought to reinstate such idiomatic expression as intelligible and evocatively nuanced aspects of contemporary compositions.
- Instead of focussing on the expression of my individually distinctive compositional voice, I have – as a matter of principle – embraced the country’s musical diversity attempting to create a forum for a multitude of voices that are threatened to be drowned by a territorially expanding but stylistically impoverishing generic mainstream.

- Instead of focussing on one explicit form of compositional expression, I have – again as a matter of principle – engaged with musical diversity as a means of substantiating the notion of multiple modernities.
- Instead of following a ‘work-orientated’ compositional approach, my South African pieces were, as a rule, ‘informed performance’-orientated.
- Instead of writing ‘pragmatic’ pieces (easily ‘performable’, commoditized for their commercial dissemination), I consider composition a form of practical research by means of which potentially new and locally relevant ‘musical ground’ should be made accessible.
- Instead of baffling (or merely pleasing) audiences, I intend to enrich them with unprecedented musical experiences.

COMPLEXITY AS COMPOSITIONAL CONDITION

The accumulative combination of all aforementioned aspects – subjective preferences and choices as well as external conditions – lead to a compositional (and biographical) situation that best can be described as complex. While I can now make this statement with a certain sense of ease, having found the vocabulary to describe it, I must confess that for a prolonged period of time circumstances seemed overwhelmingly difficult and hardly manageable. Unfortunately all attempted strategies to escape from unbearable situations were guided by the concept that it would be necessary to find a ‘solution’ to whatever appeared problematic at a certain time.

In hindsight it is now clear why such strategies (in modernist fashion subscribing to the principal possibility of a ‘solution’) would never be able to resolve matters. They amounted to category mistakes²¹ addressing mere consequences of an issue, when its roots would lie on an altogether different level.

Arguably the underlying problem was that of underestimating the complexity of the situation or, rather, of failing to understand and appreciate ‘complexity’ as underlying condition for the situation of a composer working in South Africa. Once again I can only express my gratitude to Paul Cilliers for this key insight, which has by now grown into a conviction from which I gain considerable solace. Instead of agonizing about seemingly insurmountable challenges, the complexity perspective has re-instilled in me a sense of marvel to the effect that the unknowable will always by far exceed any problem and its potential, provisional solution. The gift of existence is being able to witness such processes at all and – even more remarkable – occasionally to participate in them. Measured against this, the relative achievements of finding or not finding solutions fade into relative insignificance.

With regard to composing (in) South Africa, there are no ‘solutions’ to make this task easier. The decision once taken will imply negotiating an unpredictably complex process. No shortcuts can be taken, no simplifications are to be expected, no final results should be hoped for. The reward lies in exposing oneself to an immeasurable task – of experiencing the intensity of an impossibly difficult but, recalling Jamal, therefore all the more worthwhile quest.

Obviously the acknowledgment of ‘complexity as compositional condition’ is only a subset of a far more important acknowledgment: that of complexity as condition of living. If this connection is made consciously, composing can once again become a very human, lively and expressive way of interacting and existing mutualistically. Conversely, if employed deliberately to engage with the musical emanations of complexity, composition – unimpeded by modernist, ideological and institutional misunderstanding – may once again emanate as a truly enriching, community-building, as well as complexity- and life-enhancing activity.

²¹ See Chapter I, pg. 34, footnote 312.

COMPOSITION AS COMPLEX TASK

Finally the question should be answered what exactly changes with respect to a modernist, globalised, generic approach if composing instead is viewed from a complexity perspective. In conclusion of the theoretical elaborations of Part One, I attempt a concise response to this question in the form of a provisional summary:

1. Composition is but one aspect of the creation of music and should not be conceived of as separate from the complementary tasks of performing and perceiving music. This does not mean that it cannot be practiced in a highly specialized manner, as long as specialization implies focus and astute attention, but not isolation and withdrawal from an integrated performance practice.

2. Composing is a contextual activity. That implies that no composition can originate unscathed by traces from its context, even if these may be difficult to gauge. This might appear as a redundantly obvious statement, yet it needs to be reiterated with regard to the modernist (mis)understanding that artistic production will only attain integrity by being autonomous in an absolute sense. Complexity thinking acknowledges that autonomy and environmental integration are not mutually exclusive. Hence the integrity of artistic production is not jeopardized by its contextual relevance. To the contrary, as the analysis of the concept of structural coupling has shown, it is strengthened by it.

3. Musical parameters, understood as systemic components, cannot be treated separately or independently. Inevitably they recursively and retroactively affect one another and interact with one another; i.e. if a single parameter is changed this will in some way effect all others. Hence composing must be considered as a holistic task that cannot be achieved by the independent organization of separate parameters. (It follows, that from a complexity perspective the disintegrative nature of serial compositional procedures, for example, appears highly questionable.)

4. Musical quality is an emergent property. It does not rest with single, separate material traits, stylistic properties, techniques or choices of material, nor in the endorsement of certain ideologies or schools of thought. Quality is very difficult to pinpoint. Yet the fact that it seems evasive does not mean that it is unattainable or that therefore 'anything goes'. To the contrary, hardly anything goes if the quest for quality is relinquished. However, it must be pursued differently than modernist methods have suggested: Instead of safeguarding individual material solutions, complexity thinking suggests that quality 'emerges', i.e. it defies 'being manufactured', but can at most 'be facilitated' indirectly through an overall congruence of interacting components and contexts.

5. Very many different musical qualities exist. This implies that 'good' music (music of high quality) will 'qualify' as such, by displaying not only a single quality but instead a multitude of qualities. 'Quality' appears to be an inflationary quality, either not emanating at all or in great abundance. In musical terms such a 'set of qualities' may be circumscribed as follows: a good piece of music will be congruent (coherent, logical) with regard to its structure, functional with regard to its systemic interactions, specific in respect of a given context, intelligible with respect to its audience. Accordingly, any postulations of isolated quality indicators (e.g. to be found in style, ideology, conceptualization or popularity) are ultimately untenable.

6. Very many different forms of qualitative music exist. This follows immediately from the previous tenet in the sense that different kinds of music rely on different musical qualities. It implies that music cannot be assessed appropriately by a single, hegemonic set of criteria. Once again this doesn't mean that quality cannot be assessed at all, or that all different forms of music are (automatically) equally good. It does mean, however, that even criteria for the assessment of quality vary in quality and must be chosen appropriately in conjunction with what they are required to assess.²²

²² It will have been noted that – as opposed to characteristically vague postmodernist descriptions – the complexity perspective allows the negotiation of meaningfully normative agreements.

PART TWO

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

SECTION 3

FRAMING COMPLEXITY: OUTLINE OF COMPOSITIONAL STRATEGIES

INTRODUCTION

In this section I offer a description of the four works that constitute the portfolio of compositions accompanying this dissertation. With regard to the ‘integrated’ format of this thesis as described in its introduction, these four reflections constitute the link between the two sets of ‘texts’.

It is important to note that none of the descriptions, considerations and reflections regarding the compositional structures, strategies and intentions offered here should be read as ‘defences’ (apologetics) of these works. For this very reason the scores are included as an integral part of the thesis proper – in order to speak for themselves and to allow an assessment of the commensurability of the theoretical elaborations. The degree of congruence or discrepancy between the two distinctive but also interdependent designs, as an implicit third, ‘unwritten’ text, lies at the heart of the discourse opened by this study.

The composer does of course speak in both cases, but he will and should be saying different things, as each respective medium allows or disallows. To provide for the intended distinction between theory and practice (and subsequently facilitating the integrated inquiry into both), the scores should in this context be read foremost as ‘performance instructions’ referring to their sonic realisation, begging their ‘dissolution into an enactment’ rather than claiming a status as autonomous ‘texts’.

The most obvious approach of establishing a meaningful relationship between the two parts of the thesis is that of providing theoretically supported dense descriptions of various contextual and/or compositional aspects (background, history, intention, etc.) or structural considerations (musical devices, techniques, etc.). Another would be to present a specific theory of compositions, which could then be gauged against its effective practical emanation. Yet another approach would be a ‘classical’ analysis.

I suggest approaching the task of the thesis as the ‘composition’ of an elaborate theoretical structure, which attempts to ‘translate’ into verbal expression what has been proposed musically ‘in’ and ‘with’ the compositions. The underlying assumption is, of course, that theoretical and musical texts offer different but complementary insights into the complexities of music and should therefore, for the greater theoretical as well as musical benefit, be read in conjunction. Demonstrating the propensity of music to function as medium with substantial rhetorical and communicative prowess, amounts to a central thesis of this study.

Such a proposal reflects a perception firmly embedded in scholarship since antiquity and widely accepted far into the age of Enlightenment. Because of this conviction music was – as one of the seven ‘free sciences’¹ – centrally integrated into the educational system of the ‘civilized’ world.² However, what is unusual and perhaps contestable is to make a similar claim for the current situation and for contemporary music. Arguably music is still held in high esteem today, though one will need to qualify that this is not always the case for contemporary concert music. Moreover, the notion of ‘estimation’ has imperceptibly been replaced or suppressed by that of ‘popularity’. That music is in fact effectively trivialized in South Africa becomes fully

¹ ‘Septem artes liberales’; In this designation ‘ars’ refers comprehensively to the domain of a scientific discipline than to a mere art or technique. (www.phil.uni-passau.de/histhw/TutSchule/septem_artes.html).

² To this one should add that it always played a similarly central role throughout what then would have been called the ‘uncivilized’ world.

evident through its conspicuous absence from significant visibility in public (political, philosophical or academic) discourse.

I argue that the usual interpretation of this fact as being indicative of the final irrelevance of music with regard to 'more important matters' should not be accepted. It is more likely that the propensity of music to function as catalyst for societal processes, to facilitate social change, to carry, substantiate and communicate a discourse, to effectively help 'compose' the worlds in which we live – ultimately to help define humans as human and societies as humane – is catastrophically underestimated.

Against this backdrop I offer the following musical and programmatic reflections in conjunction with scores and recordings of the compositions. It is my hope that both sets of 'representations' or 'designs' will respectively gain and give added meaning and depth from this method of 'parallel presentation' and the informational and expressive mutualism that might subsequently arise thereof.

CHAPTER 9

UNEQUAL MUSIC: HARNESSING DIFFERENCE FOR A COMPOSITE DESIGN

THE SONGS OF MADOSINI

Lynedoch, 2002. Incidental music in seven movements commissioned by Robert Brooks (for the ICMF 2002) based on a selection of songs by Latozi Mpahleni (better known as Madosini) for an ensemble of clarinet, string quartet and narrator. The work features Madosini as performing soloist, showcasing her indigenous specialist skills of playing the *uhadi*, *umrhubhe* and *isitotolo*, as well as singing and ‘throat-singing’ in a culturally and idiomatically informed manner.

Alternative description:

A modern-day *intsomi*³ on the life and music of Madosini, combining storytelling and music, using European and indigenous Mpondomise instruments.

TITLES OF MOVEMENTS

- I. Uthando lunda hlule (Love has fooled me)
- II. Umjeko (The procession)
- III. Imfihlelo (The secret)
- IV. Nokuba ndilihule (I might be cheating you, but no worse than your wife)
- V. uLoliwe usuka eMtata (The train from Umtata)
- VI. Ndibona uMadiba Sophitsho (I see Madiba)
- VII. Hlakula ntokazi (Weed, old woman!)

SYNOPSIS

Commissioned and conceived as a prototypical form of musical, intercultural dialogue, *The Songs of Madosini* features an ensemble of ‘classically’ trained musicians playing on European instruments, responding to the informed indigenous performance of a selection of traditional Mpondomise songs on historical indigenous instruments. It specifically showcases the charismatic artistry of Latozi Mpahleni, better known as Madosini, an esteemed Mpondomise musician, who – as an exceptional exponent of a historical memory with the rare ability to evoke sonorities of Africa’s ancient musical past – has been referred to as a cultural treasure in world music circles.⁴

My conception and compositional contribution to the work lies in the creation of a musical commentary ‘framing’ exact transcriptions of Madosini’s original songs. Stylistically this ‘frame’ references musical features of European origin in deliberate juxtaposition with the starkly contrasting idioms of African origin. Hence the composition may be seen as a script for the enactment or situational performances of an intercultural encounter and emerging musical dialogue.

The work’s structure is largely determined by a live narration, which recounts Madosini’s biography as a journey from rural origins to a life in an urban environment. Its form may be described as processual and narrative: the tracing of an inner journey in which the explicit initial juxtaposition of characteristic stylistic

³ Definition to be provided duly.

⁴ As one of but a handful of artists acknowledged as appositely representing South Africa in this field, Madosini has regularly appeared at WOMAD festivals. See: <http://womad.org/artists/madosini>.

differences eventually gives way to a naturally evolving dialogue and exchange of musical ideas. The work finally opens into a self-reflexive and self-referential realm, merging the representational level (musical depiction) with that of the performance itself (musical immediacy).

The composition is a direct response to an aspect of South Africa's pluralistic society in which musicians representing independent and greatly differing musical cultures live in close geographical proximity, yet – perhaps inhibited by clichéd perceptions of insurmountable cultural differences – rarely engage in musical discourses or inquiries into what actually constitutes and characterizes these assumed musical identities and differences.⁵ By virtue of requiring an intercultural collaboration, the work creates the opportunity of a musical encounter as well as the challenge of deriving a meaningful musical performance from the occasion.

An assessment of the composition would be incomplete without recognizing this specific conditionality. In a sense *The Songs of Madosini* is perhaps better described as a musical and social 'intervention', rather than as an autonomous musical 'work'. This approach emphasises the aspect of 'combining' in the sense of 'creating a situation', which is implied by the notion of 'com-posing'. From this circumstantial, social dimension it follows that a courteous and congenial interaction of all participants is ultimately more important (i.e. amounts to the more apposite interpretation of the work's inherent intention) than a meticulous and technically proficient rendition of its score. I posit that in this sense the work's text has an implicit subtext, which amounts to a script for a type of 'secondary performance' (the act of getting and playing together) beyond its immediate musical reading (the act of 'realizing' a score).

BACKGROUND

LATOZI MPAHLENI (ALIAS MADOSINI)

The (seemingly simple) process of attempting briefly to sketch Madosini's biographical circumstances taught me an important lesson in complexity thinking with regard to choosing a perspective and deciding of the 'framing' a topic. The response to my initial version of such a biographical sketch by an African colleague was sobering, in as much as she perceived it to be informed only from a partial Western position. Though not 'wrong', it revealed rather more about the limitations of this specific framing than it did about its subject. This observation demonstrated the continuing challenges of meaningful intercultural transactions: The intention to 'see across' does not suffice; it also requires an insider's guidance to point out and interpret 'where to look' and 'how to understand' 'what one sees'. Even this will not provide the 'complete picture', but it highlights the processual nature of understanding; of gradually 'seeing more' by means of looking deeper, looking from different perspectives and assembling the insights from different vistas eventually to form a 'fuller' picture.

To illustrate the case in point, I opt to present three different biographical readings: One from 'outside' as it were, without deeper knowledge of Mpondomise culture, gathering the scarce facts as they present themselves to a modern ('Western') observer and adapting them to formulate a career-orientated biographical sketch; another from 'inside' Madosini's cultural network, offering a somewhat richer narrative, including a wealth of contextual information that is effectively invisible to the uninitiated observer. Amalgamating these different kinds of information leads to a third version.

The vastly different biographies emerging from a Western and African perspective respectively are revealing of the fact that the subjectivity of the observer is not a negligible question of position, but already a crucial epistemological component. Put differently, 'getting the facts right' depends on 'getting the approach right'. But as there can be no final 'right approach' (but by definition only individual, subjective approaches), it becomes important carefully to consider what constitutes an appropriate approach. Arguably more will be gained in this regard by establishing a 'lived' relationship with the 'informant' than merely to gather the required information.

⁵ These and other aspects pertaining to the South Africa's musical contexts are discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 1

Madosini is usually referred to as a veteran Pondo musician, much cherished in circles concerned with the appreciation and conservation of local, indigenous and/or rural music, but otherwise little known.⁶ Locally, this standing is corroborated by the fact that she is regularly booked for concerts – often in the context of conferences or political rallies – intended to ‘showcase’ the oft-evoked unique South African ‘cultural heritage’, and the diversity of its indigenous idioms. Internationally, Madosini often performs at festivals of the ‘world-music’ format, such as WOMAD⁷ or the Africa Festival Würzburg,⁸ where she ideally fits the archetypal requirements of a credibly authentic representative of an ancient localized, indigenous culture.

Indeed Madosini has succeeded to cultivate a hauntingly expressive musical style⁹, which is at once highly individual *and* thoroughly steeped in an idiomatic continuum of traditional Xhosa music. She is a singer, composer, storyteller and master performer on three different indigenous instruments: *uhadi* (music bow), *umrhubhe* (mouth bow) and *isitoloto* (the common Jewish Harp, introduced by British missionaries to the Eastern Cape in the eighteenth century and since then fully assimilated by the Xhosa people as one of their specific and prided ‘traditional’ instruments). Her performances stir the imagination of local and international audiences alike, and are generally appreciated as deeply traditional expression of a rural culture. It has been suggested that her music offers a sonic semblance of a sustainable rural culture, harmoniously embedded in its pristine African landscape.¹⁰



Fig. 8: Madosini, informally demonstrating her instruments. It is not surprising that in this unassuming guise – without any references to her music’s deep cultural embedment – this practice will easily be overlooked and ignored by the modern world.

A rather different picture emerges from the sketch that Mzikantu (Dizu) Plaatjies draws in his dissertation on Madosini.¹¹ Plaatjies, himself a well-known Xhosa musician and student of Madosini’s, must certainly be

⁶ I hold the following text as a typical example exemplifying this view: ‘After making a few great but o[b]scure recordings in the mid 1970’s Madosini disappeared into the Transkei only to be rediscovered by Robert Trunz of M.E.L.T. 2000 who proceeded to showcase her artistry with [h] sympathetic a[n]d imaginative production techniques, a leap of musical (and financial) faith that could only have occur[r]ed with a non-South African record label.’ Quoted (with spelling mistakes) from the *The Rough Guide to World Music* (1999) in a M.E.L.T. 2000 CD blurb: http://www.melt2000.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=216:madosini&catid=51:world-music&Itemid=86 [accessed on 8.11.13].

⁷ Acronym for ‘World of Music, Arts and Dance’; international arts festival founded in 1980 by Peter Gabriel and others and since held annually in different countries, celebrating the idea of a boundary-less, multi-cultural world.

⁸ <http://www.africafestival.org/main/index.php?webcode=freitag09> [accessed 8.11.13].

⁹ Numerous references to the notion of ‘musical style’ and to ‘stylistic differences’ will be made in this chapter. To delineate the use of the term in this context I propose the following definition:

A musical style is the result of the interactions of the sum total of specific musical devices and techniques, leading to the perceivable impression of unified musical features from which the characteristic nature of a given musical piece, work, genre or oeuvre emerges. While ‘stylistic features’ may occasionally be pinpointed as being very specific ‘devices’, or be the musical result of such material devices, the overall style is a less tangible quality, a systemic whole, resulting from numerous individual features that transcend and transform one another in their totality. As a consequence style can generally only be circumscribed and not defined comprehensively. A remaining intangibility in stylistic descriptions is inevitable.

¹⁰ For a telling example of this interpretation see Simon Lewis’s ‘Portrait of Madosini playing Uhadi, Transkei, Eastern Cape’ in his photographic series *Musicians, Storytellers and Healers* at: www.simonlewisphotography.com/pages/Madosini-photo.htm [accessed 8.11.13] This photograph also features as cover image of the M.E.L.T. CD *Madosini – Power to the Women*

¹¹ Mzikantu Zungula Plaatjies. ‘A cultural biography of an acclaimed Queen of Xhosa music, Madosini Manqineni, and her contributions to Xhosa cultural music’, M.Mus, Dept. Music, University of Cape Town (Cape Town 2005).

considered an insider and not only presents different ‘information’ but follows a completely different path¹² in order to arrive at his findings.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 2

The difference begins with the name. What has become her artist’s name – Madosini – is just one of her many clan names. She once revealed the whole list to me: Latozi Mpahleni, Manqineni Madosini Mqhorhana Phangelilanga Teketekana Mfazi Obelenye Pshesheya Komlanjana Abantwana Bomthwakazi.¹³ It therefore seems justified that Plaatjies goes to great lengths in introducing Madosini as a member of the Mpondomise clan by offering an extended reading of its ‘tribal history’. As he states, Madosini’s roots ‘are bound up with the stories, legends of the Mpondomise people and their history, enshrined in oral tradition and genealogies of chiefs, and ultimately with the branches of the Manqineni family tree.’¹⁴ Anthropological data – such as that ‘the Mpondomise are one of twelve unrelated chieftain clusters that are known as the Southern Nguni’¹⁵ – is supplied along with a wealth of mythological accounts and anecdotes. For example, we learn about *ingqithi*,¹⁶ the Mpondo custom of amputating the tip of the little finger of one hand of a firstborn child. In fact this ‘feature’ marks Madosini as a clan member and, as she once explained to me, was believed to safeguard a child’s good health, specifically that of unimpaired eyesight.¹⁷

Also of interest is the remark that the Mpondomise are considered to be one of the more conservative clans, apparently resisting change ‘to a degree unprecedented in Bantu Africa.’¹⁸ This perhaps explains why the Mpondomise people are especially renowned for having retained ‘much of their classical musical practices’ (along with other cultural features, such as traditional dress, hairstyles, dying techniques, beadwork, etc.)¹⁹

Plaatjies’s account further details childhood events, often by way of linking them to age-related customs, thereby stressing Madosini’s strict traditional upbringing as well as highlighting the predominant role of music ‘as an ongoing process of socialization.’²⁰ He claims that this ‘laid the foundation for Madosini’s expertise and the choice of a life heavily involved with traditional music’, while concurrently strengthening ‘her understanding of cultural notions’.²¹ The impression arises that Mpondomise culture provided numerous occasions for generic forms of music and narration to be practiced in conjunction with specifically defined situations or tasks. (This accords with Madosini’s accounts, in which she would, as a rule, more strongly emphasize the social or occasional context for music making than her individual contribution in the process of creating music for such occasions.)

In this respect Plaatjies mentions the genres of *iintsomi* (traditional song-stories told at night on the sleeping mats) and *amabali* (narratives told around the fire),²² as well as the



Fig. 9: Madosini in full traditional performance attire. Dressing up is considered as an inherent part of music making and ostensibly signifies this as but one component (amongst many others) in a complex cultural practice.

¹² ‘Path’ may here well be understood in Morin’s sense of ‘method’.

¹³ Personal communication.

¹⁴ Plaatjies, 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 *ingqithi* – finger amputation, in effect cutting off the foremost phalanx of the little finger of one hand.

¹⁷ personal communication.

¹⁸ Hammond-Took quoted in Plaatjies, 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 8, 9.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

occasions of *imbeleko* (sacrifice for a newborn),²³ *imitshotsho*,²⁴ *iintlombe*²⁵ (dance gatherings) and *ukuthombisa* (girl's initiation ceremony),²⁶ often complete with the titles or types of song that would accompany the events.

Of all the traditional genres the *iintsomi* seem to be of special significance for Madosini's art. Here Plaatjies stresses the individuality and contemporaneity of the practice, adamantly contesting evolutionistic and diffusionist (mis)understandings of *iintsomi* as mere traditional 'folk-tales'.²⁷ He claims that this view 'completely overlooks the contemporary relevance of the "tales" and their performance contexts, which are always in the present.'²⁸ Further, he emphasizes 'their variability (because oral tradition precludes exact preservation)', and the individuality of the teller, 'from whose contemporary performance [and not from the distant past] the true, real aesthetic comes.'²⁹ Finally he asserts that in fact the performative dimension of this art form must be recognized as its pivotal, essentially defining feature:

Intsomi comes to life in actual performance, in a special way in which the performer brings together the known material, main theme, counter theme(s), episodes, and the essential intsomi song. But she does so according to her own whims and preferences, and while she does this she manipulates her audiences, she skilfully manages and controls her participation and responses to a degree while she is also entertaining them. The successful intsomi performer is a true artist... who approaches intsomi as a living creative art.³⁰

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 3: INTERWEAVING THE STRANDS

Plaatjies's description in Biography 2 will probably be considered 'unscientific' in some respects (especially when he invokes myths and anecdotes), but it provides a poetic narrative and 'thick' description against which the 'bits' of information that have trickled into Biography 1 seem meagre and scarce. I therefore propose yet another perspective, a weaving together of the strands from both.

As an outsider to Mpondomise culture, I have always found it difficult to ascertain to which degree Madosini's music amounts to an individual (newly created) contribution or a traditional continuation (and perhaps adaptation) of existing songs. From my perspective I would appreciate her charismatic performance style as highly individual, yet consider the 'musical material' of her songs as 'traditional', even generic. Following Western distinctions of conceptualizing music, it was thus never clear whether Madosini's music should best be understood as compositional practice or as performance practice.

With regard to this question Dizu Plaatjies's explications are very helpful. His proposal to perceive Madosini's performance style as an extension of the *intsomi* tradition, both confirms and extends my conjectures. The fact that Madosini indeed employs entrenched traditional forms and idioms of expression presents no compromise with regard to her individual creativity. On the contrary, the artistry, as it is practiced and esteemed in the Mpondomise culture, lies precisely in presenting 'known material', but doing so in a highly individual manner according to the performer's 'own whims and preferences'.

This clearly defines the coordinates within which Madosini practices her art. Plaatjies attests that she is 'acclaimed as a skilled performer, who treats a particular *intsomi* in her own idiosyncratic way', demonstrating a 'vivid imagination and inventiveness that always impacts powerfully on her audience and is a hallmark of her style.'³¹

²³ Plaatjies, 21.

²⁴ Ibid., 22.

²⁵ Ibid., 24.

²⁶ Ibid., 28.

²⁷ Ibid., 62 ff.

²⁸ Ibid., 64.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 65-66, original emphasis.

³¹ Ibid., 67.

Although Madosini maintains a traditional homestead in the village of Mkhankatho³² in the Libode district, she has been living permanently in Langa³³ for almost two decades, earning her living by performing for urban and international audiences.³⁴ Arguably, the fascination that Madosini's music exerts in these circles will to a certain degree derive from unaccustomed listeners' projections, by virtue of which they might assume her utterances to be 'raw' and 'exotic', giving rise to evocations of an ancient, rurally pristine and in effect bygone world. In order to replace such projections with experience and thus better understand the nature of the music in relationship to its originating society and landscape, I visited Libode and arranged for (audio and video) field recordings on location.³⁵

For the occasion I requested Madosini to perform her music exactly as she would envision it preferably and ideally like to do it, if no constraints would impede the requirements of a 'traditionally informed performance'. I emphasized that this time – other than in our previous collaborations – I had no intention to interfere; I would like to hear and experience her music as closely as possible to its locally performed form. Research funds were made available to cover any incurred costs and enable her to arrange the event with all requisite means.

Madosini travelled to Mpeko (close to Mthatha) several days in advance to assemble a choir of 16 women, with whom she prepared the occasion. Upon our (somewhat delayed)³⁶ arrival in the afternoon, we were royally received and welcomed by the group adorned by their full attire, meeting us on the road in a singing procession. This first song only ended after everyone had proceeded into one of the ancestor's huts. Then a rich meal was served (to singers, visitors, assembled audience and gathered children alike), dished from



several huge pots, which had been simmering on a fire. After the meal the singing resumed and continued with unceasing energy and verve until sunset.

It was striking to observe that Madosini – while obviously being the central and overtly revered figure – kept a fairly low profile in the communal singing. As a rule, several other members of the group would begin a song with a call and continue leading it by evoking the mandatory responses. Yet others would regularly break out into raptures of frenzied praise song, whistling and handclapping. Several of the women proved to be strongly expressive and communicative performers. The group as a whole displayed a very high level of energy with many of the performers – singing at the top of their voices – overshadowing Madosini's more modest musical gestures. The afternoon's performance had the air of a spontaneous and even rather raucous festivity so that at times even Madosini seemed somewhat overwhelmed by the ebullient noise. But she had instigated it and let it happen, going along gracefully with the uncontrollable excitement.

Admittedly, I was at first somewhat surprised at her subordinate demeanour. The performance certainly did not depend on Madosini in any special manner. She was but one of many performers, in fact almost engulfed by the group, which as a whole thrived on its self-induced, ever-increasing positive feedback. If

³² Rural village in the Eastern Cape, ca. 30 km south-east of Mthatha.

³³ One of the satellite townships to the east of Cape Town.

³⁴ Personal communication.

³⁵ 17. + 18. December 2013.

³⁶ Accumulatively caused by a delayed flight, a misunderstanding as to the exact meeting point with our translator, heavy traffic, road works and finally a flat tire!

Madosini's art seems unique in foreign and urban spaces, here it could be observed as being deeply entrenched in customs still very much and vigorously alive. Assessing this experience I conclude that Madosini's music does in fact draw its strength from being expressive of a communal culture that continues to be practiced, albeit only in remote areas and – for lack of contexts in which such performances are meaningful in modern societies – probably not very frequently. If it seems exotic to the majority of South Africans, then this perception is possible only because this majority is evidently ignorant of these (and probably many other) cultural customs, which abide to this very day.³⁷

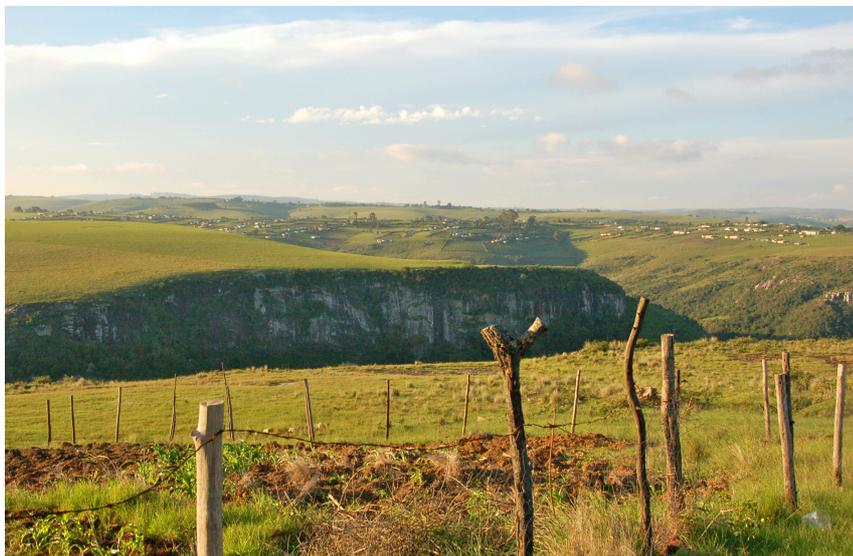


Fig. 11: North-easterly view from Madosini's homestead in Mkhankatho. The landscape framing her soundscape is characterized by gently sloping hills, occasionally abruptly fissured by deep, steep gorges.

In addition to these cultural and sociological observations a significant musical insight resulted from the excursion to Libode: I came to realize that all of Madosini's songs are conceived as multi-voiced music. None of her songs are 'complete' when she performs them on her own. Put differently, her solo renditions amount to truncated versions of the full, intended emanations. Apparently she simply puts up with this in the absence of

skilled performers with whom she could collaborate in urban areas. Furthermore, she compensates for

the absent communal and polyphonic aspect of the music by means of her subtly shaded vocal renditions (which would be lost in joint performances such as the ones witnessed in Libode) and greatly nuanced instrumental accompaniments.

The argument to support this claim arises from the observation that, given the presence of a group of informed musicians, someone would invariably join Madosini's singing, filling in the gaps between her phrases by complementary musical material. I therefore posit that every phrase in any of her songs in fact amounts to a 'call', inherently soliciting a 'response'. The unformed listener has no choice but to accept the pauses that follow every phrase in her solo renditions. But these gaps are apparently quite 'unbearable' to anyone brought up in this musical tradition. Instinctively one joins in, not only to connect the phrases and re-establish an uninterrupted musical flow, but probably just as much to reconnect to the musician and establish a collective musical performance and experience.

Arguably, Madosini herself does not perceive the inevitable 'truncation' of the music in her solo performances as problematic (and has never 'complained' about it). Given that, from her cultural outlook, music is not a 'reified entity', it also never exerts the kind of asserted, objective authority that subjects any performer trained in Western conventions to more or less binding text fidelity ('Werktreue').³⁸ Instead, it seems that for Madosini the emphasis always lies on the actual act of performing the music – in whatever way this is at all possible under given circumstances. Even so, it has time and again been noticeable how she would

³⁷ Moreover, it can be argued that it is never the musical expression *per se* which is exotic, but that a feeling of exoticism or inappropriateness will always arise when there is no congruence between musical style or expression and performance context, i.e. when the expression communicated is not understood by those receiving it. Framed in this manner, 'exoticism' as 'a problem of incongruence' cannot be attached to certain musical styles or performance conventions. (In the same vein, one could accuse an uninformed audience of being 'exotic' by virtue of being unaccustomed or uninitiated to a pertinent procedure). 'Exoticism' can only be addressed by aligning *all* aspects of a performance, to make it a meaningful exercise for everybody involved.

³⁸ Obviously my wish for 'authentic' field recordings of performances on location was motivated by this (European) thinking.

happily respond if a musically tight and neatly interlocking ‘call and response’ interchange were established during a performance. Correspondingly, she would become quite irritated (and even stop a performance) if an attempted exchange did not fall into place properly and disrupt the musical flow.

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Clarinet in Bb, Voice, and Uhadi. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The score starts at measure 78. The vocal line has lyrics: "Ho hla-kul a nto ka- zi, ho hla-kul a nto ka- zi, ho". There are triplets of eighth notes in the vocal line. The clarinet part plays a rhythmic pattern that fills the gaps between the vocal phrases. The Uhadi part plays a steady eighth-note accompaniment.

Ex. 1: Excerpt from the transcription of ‘Hlakula ntokazi’ in Madosini’s solo version of single voice accompanied by uhadi. The added clarinet part bridging the gaps in the vocal line emulates the kind of responses an informed listener (initiated to Madosini’s style) would typically contribute.

Assessing the style of Madosini’s music, I believe that she does in fact continue to relate her performances to the musical conventions of her rural upbringing and background. In an individual style and in the manner of a wisely obstinate elder she persists – and succeeds – in formulating musical expressions of rare quality and beauty.

While I am suspicious of a generic manner of exploiting notions of ‘rural’, ‘indigenous’ and ‘traditional’ in the context of a fashionably commoditized and commercialized world-music circuit, I am nevertheless convinced of Madosini’s musical integrity. On occasions of visits to her tiny and usually overcrowded apartment in a run-down Langa barrack – far removed from the grandeur and wide expanses of her rural home – she has time and again graciously transcended and transformed her humble surroundings by means of the most exquisite musical poetry, spontaneously produced with the help of an unsophisticated instrument such as a music bow, unceremoniously retrieved from the clutter underneath a brick-supported bedstead. On a par with memories of unpretentious, honest and deeply intimate performances of chamber music, such as those of concerts of the Hagen Quartet³⁹ that rendered me completely oblivious of the classicist splendour of Salzburg Mozarteum’s Großer Konzertsaal, I equally cherish those of Madosini’s tender *umrhube* playing – fully obliterating the piling garbage, mud and stench of a deteriorated township neighbourhood on a rainy afternoon in the Cape winter.

PARENTHESIS VIII: MADOSINI AS EXPONENT OF ‘AFRICAN MUSIC’

I have long since learnt to appreciate Madosini’s music as abiding to altogether different structural principles or musical considerations than my own. Before attempting to describe how her music was integrated into *The Songs of Madosini*, it is therefore necessary to give an account of what I perceive to be its quintessential features. Given the fact that my findings are based on painstaking studies of live and recorded renditions of her songs, this account is framed and informed by my specific interest in finding ways of relating and/or contrasting the selected music to my own. While I thus *admit* the (inevitable) subjectivity of the ensuing description, I would *object* to the suggestion of it being a mere ‘construction’, or – even worse – an opportunistic ‘essentialist interpretation’.

Over the years I have developed a practice of continuously cross-checking my own findings (and those of other scholars) with practitioners in the field in an effort to establish distinctions between consistent and contingent information. My understanding of concepts and performance practices of musical forms indigenous to Africa is mostly based on own experience (gained through continuous collaborations and performances

³⁹ World renowned Austrian string quartet consisting of the siblings Lukas, Veronika and Clemens Hagen as well as Rainer Schmidt.

with indigenous musicians spanning a considerably period of time)⁴⁰ and comparisons of these findings with available literature.

While the observations presented here are deduced from Madosini's music specifically, I hold that many of the pertaining musical qualities reflect more general traits of broader musical traditions, rendering her music – over and above its individual Mpondomise signature – also informative of traditions broadly representative of Xhosa music, and even of African music in the widest sense. While Madosini as performer is certainly endowed with a singular performance charisma, technical proficiency and a thoroughly ingrained sense of style, her contribution when composing or improvising is less unique: The structures of her pieces always remain firmly embedded in traditional conventions and reveal archetypal features that have been observed and documented elsewhere.⁴¹

The reference to the very wide, general and hence contested notion of indigenous 'African' music is purposefully included here. Contrary to the assumption that nothing can be gained from such a vague reference, I have come to appreciate that pre-colonial musical practices on the African continent as a whole display a remarkable kinship in approach and musical perception, which in several important ways extend across localized and stylistic particularities. Evidence for this phenomenon (i.e. support for this statement) is mainly found in earlier ethnological work, such as research reports by Nketia,⁴² Kubik,⁴³ Blacking,⁴⁴ Berliner⁴⁵ and Miller-Chernoff,⁴⁶ all of whom primarily describe particular practices, but understand these as *individual expressions* emanating from *general principles*.

Nketia has coined the notion of an 'African family of musical styles',⁴⁷ from which he explicitly excludes Oriental and Western music, which, though also practiced on the African continent, differ stylistically to such an extent as to prevent their inclusion 'in the family of indigenous African music'.⁴⁸ He defines the 'musical cultures' belonging to the group as 'a network of distinct yet related traditions, which overlap in certain aspects of style, practice or usage, and share common features of internal pattern, basic procedure, and contextual similarities.'⁴⁹

Following Nketia's and other scholars' definition of 'African music' as geographically confined musical traditions as practiced in sub-Saharan Africa, Kubik has argued that the very perception of these practices

⁴⁰ Projects that can be listed in this regard include the *Fynbos Calling* concerts and CD production (with Dizu Plaatjies, Mantombi Matotiyana and colleagues), repeated collaborations with the *Ngqoko Women's Ensemble* (as conductor of performances of Jeanne Zaidel- Rudolph's work *Lifecycle*), the opera production of *Masque* (with the *Todi Ensemble*), research and fieldwork in preparation of *Ciacona & Tshikona*, and ensuing collaborative performances with the *Thikundwi kha Sialala* (a Venda Tshikona ensemble), as well as an on-going collaboration with the Shona mbira virtuoso Tinashe Chidanyika.

⁴¹ I refer here to Dave Dargie's comprehensive studies of Xhosa music (see bibliography). Though mainly based on fieldwork conducted in the Lumko district, his descriptions correspond with my observations from the work with Madosini and Mantombi Matotiyana.

⁴² J. H. Kwabena Nketia, *The Music of Africa* (Victor Gollancz, London 1975). Throughout this monograph on rural music traditions, Nketia refers specific practices to central concepts. Some examples of such general traits are the following: '[M]usic making is generally organized as a social event.' (21) '[I]t is customary to organize ... music in relation to ... community life...' (24). '[A]n examination of the aesthetics of African music reveals a distinct bias towards percussion and the use of percussive techniques...' (115) 'African traditions facilitate [the process of keeping subjective metronomic time] by externalizing the basic pulse... The guideline... has come to be described as a *time line*.' (131) 'In African musical practice, the areas of tolerance of pitch variation for particular steps of the scale are much larger than those ... base[d] on a fixed pitch...' (147) The final chapter ('Summary', pg. 241.245) offers even more examples.

⁴³ Gerhard Kubik, *Theory of African Music* (University Of Chicago Press, Chicago 2010), 42. Kubik, for example, presents several examples of rhythmical structures, which reveal 'fundamental concepts' of 'principles of timing', which '[m]ovement organization in African music/dance cultures rigidly follows...'

⁴⁴ John Blacking, *Venda Children's Songs: a Study in Ethnomusicological Analysis* (Witwatersrand University Press, Johannesburg 1967).

⁴⁵ Paul F. Berliner, *The Soul of Mbira: Music and Traditions of the Shona People of Zimbabwe* (University Of Chicago Press, Chicago 1993).

⁴⁶ John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1979).

⁴⁷ Nketia, *The Music of Africa*, 4.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

should in principle be expanded to include dance, language, 'oral literature' as well as the 'socio-cultural side of the phenomenon' as 'intimately linked aspects of the same cultural complex'.⁵⁰ Such a broad understanding of music as an intrinsically integrated art form might well serve to describe a uniquely African concept, albeit very general, but nonetheless clearly distinguishing it from musical approaches elsewhere.

Another, much more specific instance is found in Kubik's observation and description of 'African Music/Dance as a Motional System', which he singles out as a trait of probably 'pan-African validity'.⁵¹ Its uniqueness rests not only with the fact that the complexes of music and motion seem invariably linked to each other, but that, moreover, musical traditions in Africa foster a style of multiple 'motional centres',⁵² on both a bodily (physical, spatial level), as well as (and correspondingly) on an acoustical level, where this very feature amounts to the often cited phenomenon of 'cross-rhythms'.⁵³

Notably the element of bodily movements is not only recognized in the category of dance but, just as much, forms part of the technique and style of playing an instrument: 'The musician not only produces sounds for his own sake, but moves his hands, fingers, and in some cultures also head, shoulders, legs, etc. in certain coordinated patterns during the process of musical production.'⁵⁴ It is this 'intimate relationship between body movement and sound'⁵⁵ that is jeopardized when 'playing music from the paper'.⁵⁶ Accordingly Kubik holds this ingrained tradition as the main cause for a widespread 'reluctance to use comprehensive [musical] notation.'⁵⁷ This in itself it manifests as a characteristic feature in the vast majority of musical practices in Africa and constitutes a significant difference with regard to common European musical practice. As Kubik has shown, this difference thus not only pivots on the 'improvisation–composition' dichotomy,⁵⁸ but in addition reveals a deep-rooted difference in understanding of the musico-kinaesthetic relationship and, by implication that between bodily and musical expression and/or movement.

One of the dangers of an undifferentiated use of 'African music' as a general qualifier is an implicit understanding of such a notion as a 'historically static' category. For this reason it is preferable to speak of 'musical traditions in Africa (as elsewhere in the world)', rather than of 'traditional [African] music' as a general African domain.⁵⁹ Such traditions will of course be just as historic, contingent, locally restricted, specific and subject to change or evolution as any others. However, this argument can be accepted fully without disqualifying the on-going quest of *recognizing distinctive qualities* of music 'made in Africa'. That an assessment of such characteristic qualities will have to apply to, or rather, be verified by a great number of differentiated, localized and even individual traditions, should eventually render it all the more substantial.

That more recent research tends to highlight particular and even individual forms of expression to the point of fully dismissing broader identities can be traced to the deeply entrenched postcolonial suspicion towards generalizations – mistrusting them as essentialist narratives, rooted in colonial and imperialistic attitudes. While it will be prudent continuously to guard against the danger of such misrepresentations, I posit that the time is ripe for a more differentiated counter discourse in which a comprehension of 'underlying principles' may effectively heighten the appreciation of particular and individual expressions *in relation* to a broader stylistic, conceptual and cultural context.

⁵⁰ Kubik, *Theory of African Music*, 9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵³ This rather overused and confusing term may effectively be replaced by 'multiple rhythms', which would clearly relate it to the notions of multiple 'motional centres'.

⁵⁴ Kubik, 38.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Daniel Kachamba quoted in Kubik, *ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Stating that Madosini's music is in certain pivotal ways 'typical of indigenous African idioms' elevates her particular locutions from potentially peripheral, arbitrary phenomena to representative cultural and historical signifiers. It also distinguishes her very mature art from that of similar, but seemingly only superficially imitated idiomatic renditions abounding in the many pastiche, 'touristic' presentations that pose as 'authentic' African performances.⁶⁰ In this context, musical 'veterans' cum 'indigenous knowledge bearers' like Madosini, must be recognized as a rare and unique brand of practitioners who are safeguarding a musical understanding and quality of decorum that is becoming exceedingly rare, but which still contains the essential ingredients of significant and broadly representative African principles.

While it is often difficult to see where and why 'indigenous knowledge' should still be of any relevance in a modern and developing world,⁶¹ informed musical performances certainly present compelling arguments for the relevance of this type of knowledge. What has been highlighted in Chapter II with regard to informed performance practice is also applicable here: Historically informed performance practice – understood as a method of meaningfully imbuing the contemporary with the historical – *constitutes what is contemporary* by virtue of relating it to the historical. In this respect the musical 'elders', in their capacity as historically and culturally informed performance practitioners, render the invaluable contribution of providing substantial coordinates to negotiate between the notions of 'historical', 'contemporary', 'individual', 'contingent', and even 'African', not as mere technical descriptors, but as categories of material qualities.

IDIOMATIC FEATURES OF MADOSINI'S MUSIC

The harmonic structure of all Madosini's songs is restricted to only two different basic chords. This reflects the idiomatic way of playing *uhadi* and *umrhubhe* (a gourd and a mouth bow, which are two most popular traditional instruments amongst the Xhosa people), and moreover seems to represent a consistent stylistic feature of traditional Xhosa music.⁶² In idiomatic, traditional performances only two different pitches are produced on both instruments: that of the open string (as ground note) and that of a stopped note a whole tone above. However, in both cases the resulting overtones are considered to be constitutive of the musical structure and skilled players render them clearly audible. The shape of the melodies adheres to the fluctuating chords, i.e. the melody's pitches will always be contained in the chords resulting from the overtones, thus constantly maintaining tonal harmonic consonance. (Incidentally, this same harmonic structure is preserved in the typical *umngqokolo*⁶³ songs, which amount to a vocal imitation or variation of the highly esteemed *uhadi* music.)⁶⁴

The predictability of the self-same harmonic alternations is in a certain way compensated for by irregular, 'asymmetrical' rhythmic patterns.⁶⁵ While the patterns as wholes are just as regularly repeated, they are internally structured around cells of irregular length – comprising of units of either duple or triple pulses – by virtue of which they maintain a high degree of ambiguity. This results in a rhythmic progression capable of continuously holding the attention of the listener. While it is always possible to react to the music immediately in a physical, bodily manner by responding to its 'groove', its detailed and nuanced structuring

⁶⁰ Unfortunately this superficiality very generally holds for younger African performers, who would have learnt to play 'traditional' instruments fully removed from their traditional connotations. This paradoxical situation of 'swimming without water' yields but an empty continuation of 'technical' playing, with no concern for historical or cultural context, nor a deeper sense of a what might be called an 'embedded performance practice'.

⁶¹ See Ndwamato G. Mugovhani, 'African Renaissance, Indigenous African Music and Globalisation: Collusion or Collision?', *African Musicology Online* vol. 6, (2012) for a reflection on this question.

⁶² David Dargie, *Xhosa music: its techniques and instruments, with a collection of songs* (David Philip, Cape Town 1988), 50, 79 ff. Other informants and performers, with whom I have collaborated, such as Dizu Plaatjies and Mantombi Matotiyona, as well as numerous field recordings by Dargie confirm this.

⁶³ Throat singing.

⁶⁴ This assumption is corroborated in David Dargie, 'Thembu Xhosa Umngqokolo Overtone Singing: The Use of the Human Voice as a Type of 'Musical Bow'', (1993).

⁶⁵ Dargie quotes Amelia No-Silence Matiso on this, saying that 'Xhosa people like to put salt into their songs.' Dargie, *Xhosa music*, preface.

often defies an intellectual grasp. I believe that – apart from the irregular (asymmetric) grouping, which can of course be pinned down – each ‘repeat’ of a basic structural pattern is in fact never an exact repetition, but always a ‘variation’ imbued with minute changes, different emphasises of colour and attack, shifts of timing, etc.

Having noted this quality as intrinsic to many performances (both recorded and live) of a huge variety of African music I have heard, I hold this to be one of the significant common features on which my defence of the broad typification of ‘African’ music rests. Perhaps it would be more precise to assign this quality to a certain intuitive ‘performance practice’ competence, or – for lack of a better term – a distinctive ‘African musicality’. But even so it denotes a remarkable sensitivity and nuanced approach.

From the description given so far it can be summarized that Madosini’s music (and this argument could be extended, I believe, to traditional indigenous African repertoire in general) utilizes *single, unchanging structures* (patterns, figures and rhythmical, melodic, textural elements) on the macro level that are interpreted in a highly nuanced manner on the micro level. Broadly speaking, the opposite may be said about European concert music: at least since the emancipation of the dramatic aspect of music in the Baroque era, musical form has become the prime compositional concern in this tradition. Since then musical units (movements, works, genres) are created from *greatly varying structural elements* on the macro-level, while particular details are often treated rather generically, their specific function effectively determined by the systemic whole in which they appear.

This distinction between opposite musical approaches is further underlined by the overall emphasis on *performance* in Africa versus *composition* in Europe. The former is primarily concerned with fashioning the musical rendition down to its most minute detail, while the latter focuses on the organization of the whole.⁶⁶

Yet another way of describing this phenomenon may be traced in the frequently used metaphor by which the structure of European music is based on an understanding of time as a forward arrow,⁶⁷ whereas that of African music assumes a perception of time as cyclic.⁶⁸ The former – aimed at a future that will be different to the present and therefore *allows and requires* the notion of ‘development’ – facilitates the conception of clear beginnings and endings and the possibility for ‘measured’ formal developments between such fixed, temporal anchors. I hold that even the feature of tonality – music’s ‘spatial’ dimension of depth that manifests in modulations and the relations between different keys – only becomes meaningful by gauging such ‘movement’ against temporal processes. This becomes quite clear by investigating one of the most typical features of Western music: the cadence. This device gains its unambiguous distinction from the dual coordinates of clear *temporal* as well as *tonal* location. As such it becomes an indispensable formal marker in any music conceived in terms of the Western idea of ‘temporal form’.

⁶⁶ This might also explain why the complex issue of performance practice has only received due attention in Europe once the possibilities of musical advances on the material, compositional level seemed to have run into a dead end at the beginning of the 20th century. Hence the trajectory / development of new music avant-garde and HIP pioneers may be seen as pursuit of the same goal – that of musical renewal.

⁶⁷ Time’s arrow and time’s cycle are metaphors that have been used recurrently to elucidate dichotomous perceptions of time, e.g. Stephen Jay Gould (1988) refers to both ideas in his reflections on geological time, Karol Berger (2007) employs them for a comparison between Baroque and Classical music. The image of arrow indicates a forward-moving time, progressing linearly towards a future. It is often generally ascribed to the Judaeo-Christian concept of a hereafter, towards which all historical development supposedly leads. The image of the cycle depicts the idea of recurring or seasonal time, deducted from natural life cycles and thus widespread in pantheistic cultures.

⁶⁸ It follows logically to associate European music with the forward moving time ‘arrow’, as it is part of a culture thoroughly shaped by its Judaeo-Christian worldview. On an immediate, material level this can be corroborated by referring to the musical notions of *functional harmony*, indicated by unidirectional harmonic *progression*, the importance of *musical forms*, which structure music by means of very clear temporal markers (openings, developmental sections, climaxes, recapitulations, codas, cadences) and by *tonality*, which opens a musico-spatial dimension through which temporal procedures (musical developments) gain depth and relational meaning. Conversely, indigenous African music aptly expresses a pantheistic worldview, which does not bet on progress and development, but on the embeddedness of cultural activity in natural cycles. Musical structures principally based on recurrences (repeated patterns, rhythmical figures, song phrases) and the absence of musical development affirm the metaphor.

The alternative notion, based on the idea of unchanging and recurring time, will accordingly resort to a celebration of the moment from which one can never fully depart. Such a perception of time is very aptly expressed by the recurrence of the same structural elements, rhythmical and tonal patterns, which in actual fact don't amount to 'repeats' (saying something for the second time) but much rather to 'reoccurrences' (saying it again and again, as though always for the first time). A phrase or rhythmical pattern in such a musical structure is a 'provisional momentary expression' which, by its very nature, remains exactly that, no matter how often it is offered as 'provisional momentary expression'. This *allows and requires* an improvisational approach to such material in order to shape or mould it provisionally and momentarily.

All Madosini's songs invariably abide to these principles; every performance celebrates the same principles. Even before setting out on the composition of *The Songs of Madosini* it was clear that as long as Madosini were involved as author and/or performer, these characteristics would not be negotiable. The music was, as it were, 'un-deconstructable'. Recognizing this conditional point of departure, the composition was designed around the pursuit of two objectives: First, it had to facilitate the rendition of Madosini's music as 'truthfully' (characteristically distinct, on its own terms) as possible, entrusting this task to an informed specialist practitioner using original instruments. Second, in spite of being a fully 'closed' musical entity adhering to its own, distinct musical rules, Madosini's music had to be integrated into the whole, transforming what would originally have been *exotic material* into *meaningfully related components*. Formulated in complexity terms, the hope was that from carefully organised juxtapositions and interactions of distinctly different musical entities a novel mode of expression would emerge in a dimension not contained in any of the components individually.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPOSITION

The Songs of Madosini – a 'miniature oratorio' commissioned for the opening gala concert of the South African International Classical Music Festival in 2002 – was intended to highlight Madosini's art. By extension it was designed to engage with a living indigenous South Africa tradition. The composition is structured around a selection of seven of Madosini's songs, which she herself suggested for this occasion and which she is required to perform as part of the realization of the 'com-position'. This then endeavours to create a forum for a meaningful rendition of Madosini's music in the context of a conventional Western concert. It creates a framework, enabling of a certain degree of mediation and translation between different musical idioms familiar to the Western musicians and audience and Madosini respectively. The musical, cultural and personal encounters resulting from the collaboration required by the 'forum', would otherwise have been highly improbable: Madosini's music is not intended for performances on a concert stage, and the average Western concertgoer therefore will have no opportunity to gain access to her musical world.

This uncomfortable, yet undeniable communicative and cultural gap in the very midst of our society is the point of departure for the composition. While it might *formally* be described as a cycle of song arrangements, a musical narrative, a praise song or an oratorio, it should *structurally* be seen as a deliberate response to this perceived rift, a 'composed' social forum negotiating (not only) musical ways of bridging the divide. *The Songs of Madosini* is therefore an occasional work, an intervention with regard to a certain cultural situation, persisting during a specific period of time. Suggestive in this moment of the possibility of a uniquely local and inclusive performance practice, Madosini is constitutively integrated into a chamber music formation made up of string quartet, clarinet, *uhadi*, *umrhubhe*, *isitolotolo*, song and narration.

The role of the music written for the European instruments is principally limited to providing a formal musical framing as well as an allegorical sphere within which Madosini's original songs unfold. However, the borders of the frame are fuzzy and certainly not static. Very soon the 'frame' and the 'framed' begin to interact, material is echoed, shared, transformed, relations are established, a dialogue evolves, bridging (not erasing) the differences of style and thereby allowing for the emergence of an essentially mutual form of poetic and musical expression.

THE 'STORY' OF THE COMPOSITION

In addition to the music, a script for a structured narration to be rendered in a synchronized manner by following cues in the score is an inherently part of the composition. In fact, in the process of structuring the composition, the text, almost in the manner of a libretto, largely determined its overall form. Based on Madosini's own accounts about the contexts of her various songs, cultural and traditional connotations, as well as biographical and personal information, the narration characterizes and connects the movements and in doing so gives insights into Madosini's perspectives from early childhood memories to her reflections on the status of indigenous music in an increasingly urbanized society. It renders translations of the Xhosa song lyrics, unveils their metaphorical meanings and aims finally to draw its audience into a self-reflexive and self-implicating process, drawing attention to modern societies' prevailing irresponsiveness towards the remnant emanations of traditional indigenous music.

The notion of 'ancient indigenous music' as part of South Africa's heritage is often hailed as important new signifier of the identity of the now liberated country.⁶⁹ This is central to the rhetoric attempting to substantiate claims that cultural minorities are democratically represented and their concerns appositely accommodated, which, in turn, would be an essential condition for the realization of the new state's signature idea of 'united diversity'. Yet, despite all public and political proclamations, the notion unfortunately does not resonate naturally with the underlying agendas of a modern state, especially not if 'indigenous' implicitly connotes with perceptions of 'old-fashioned', 'rural or backwardly conditions'.⁷⁰

For Madosini this results in the personal dilemma of being publicly *celebrated* officially⁷¹ but factually remaining *marginalized*. Her remarkably singular 'otherness' is at once her asset and the cause of her relative isolation in a society that will on the one hand randomly consume any exotic novelty, yet on the other has become practically deaf for the unique utterances of individual voices that don't comply to the ever-narrowing norms of the 'international generic' (universal but indistinct) modern mainstream idea of entertainment.

However, to the attentive listener Madosini offers the rare chance of gaining an impression of how Africa's ancient indigenous music might have sounded. The emphasis here is not to make any claims for some kind of music-historical authenticity, but rather to honour the authenticity of the personal expression of someone who dares to represent the unbroken continuation of a lineage, right up and into the twenty-first century. The subtle intrinsic artistry, with which Madosini imbues the traditional forms that she employs, demands the highest respect for her authority as musical emissary against all odds.

I posit that her music is no artificial reconstruction of a bygone lore, but the contemporary rendition of an idiomatically unique form of expression, imposingly calling to be heard and recognized as part of humankind's diverse cultural legacy.⁷²

PRINCIPAL CONSIDERATIONS

One way of describing *The Songs of Madosini* is to identify the *play of stylistic*⁷³ *difference* as its hallmark. This is not quite the same as saying that it facilitates the interaction of different musical styles (although this is also true). Rather, I hold that the *inconvenience and friction* resulting from the stylistic interactions qualifies as its main feature. The composition is all about bringing to the fore a quality that is contained in no one single style

⁶⁹ Mugovhani, *African Renaissance*, 2: 'The re-assertion of people's cultural heritage is a national imperative'. This formulation from a 2003 government whitepaper that has since been adopted as policy, echoes the sentiments of a widely proclaimed 'African Renaissance'.

⁷⁰ This underlying conflict is the topic of the cited article by Ndwamato Mugovhani.

⁷¹ In 2013 Madosini received The Arts and Culture Trust's Lifetime Achievement Award for Music.

⁷² I am aware that the last part of this sentence sounds dangerously similar to the political rhetoric criticized earlier. The difference is, however, that I am not speaking as a politician using a vague cultural claim to disguise a certain political agenda, but as – and on behalf of – a musician, and from a position where the same claim can in fact be substantiated. The erosion caused by political abuse of cultural statements is evident here: Once they have been hollowed out, nobody tends to believe them anymore, even when they are in fact meaningful.

⁷³ I use 'style' here and in the ensuing elaborations in the sense as defined in footnote 9, pg. 147.

but only emanates on a processual level from mutual juxtaposition. This positioning in close proximity limits the scope of each singular expression as it extends that of the combined means. The prime motivation of the composition is not only to demonstrate differences, give them voice and refer them back to their shared environment of South Africa's diverse cultural texture, but to show that the differences concern each other in ways that are both irritating and invigorating, contradictory and complementary, constraining and enabling.

It will have become evident that many of the 'complexity features' exemplified in the first chapter apply here. By implication the notion of 'music as a complex phenomenon', suggested in Chapter 4, can now be substantiated more fully, with reference to specific examples or 'applications'.

- Considering that a *play of difference*⁷⁴ is necessary to establish identity as well as meaning, the composition makes provision to keep musical and stylistic differences intact on the levels of 'text' and 'act'. The score provides deliberate spaces (windows, 'silences') for the insertion of material by a different author and hence a different style. On the level of the performance this stylistic and structural distinction is further exemplified by means of discrete culturally informed performance practices employing historically and geographically apposite instruments. A negation or deliberate dismissal of such differences as mere constructs would have negated, destroyed or at least significantly diminished the scope of meaningful and characteristic interactions.
- The process of *negotiating identity and meaning* in a *dynamic and constantly evolving manner* is fully congruent with the musical propensity to *play and enact* (physically, acoustically) in performance. In this case the musical procedures shaping the composition can be described as *relational negotiations* (between stylistic differences) tasked with *establishing an operational space* (determining musical form) by probing the *communalities* (shared, mutual ground) and *antagonisms* (exclusive singularities).
- The specific structure of the composition induces and allows for *emergence*, the enigmatic systemic phenomenon, by virtue of which certain especially interesting qualities only manifest indirectly, i.e. only 'realize' from the organized relational interaction of other, fully different, qualities.⁷⁵

For such a complex process effectively to fulfil its function certain rules or conditions apply. In systems language this could be expressed through the acknowledgment of the inevitable 'boundedness' of any system as a necessary aspect of its functionality and integrity. Complex interactions will always contain constraints: Not everything is possible; not all potentialities can be realized. In this sense a complex structure (such as I am positing *The Songs of Madosini* to be) imposes some very real musical limitations that need to be recognized if the overall process is to work.

The following section highlights some of the restrictive conditions pertaining to *The Songs of Madosini* and subsequently describes ways of productively working with(in) these restrictions. Obviously any 'engagement' will be determined ('conditioned') by the specific intractability it grapples with, i.e. there is a strong systemic relation between the 'problematic' and the 'creative' aspect. On reflecting these relational 'sets of limitations and resulting strategies' here, three different categories of such interactive sets emerge. These might be described as respectively acknowledging negative, neutral and positive conditions. Put differently, these sets indicate a gradient, ranging from 'effectively compromising' to 'effectively enabling' conditions. Yet it is understood here that often the greatest difficulties contain *within themselves* the seeds or potential for their 'overcoming'. In hindsight all obstructions will have been more or less enabling.

Following on this, even the first category of severely restricting limitations (such as stylistic and linguistic incongruities in the case of the collaboration with Madosini) can be seen as constitutively constructive: Only by way of negative deduction (clearly recognizing what cannot be done) a positive, workable strategy will become clear. This then leads me to a second 'categorical' appreciation of the notion of the 'constrained

⁷⁴ For an explication of this concept following Derrida and Cilliers see Chapter 1, pg. 32 ff.

⁷⁵ For explications of the notion of emergence see pg. 38 ff.

design' in which the 'remaining strategy' is recognized to be integral to the 'circumstantial conditions' of any work. Circumstances may never be used as 'excuses'. To the contrary, thirdly and finally I wish to make an argument for the serendipitous benefits of working within limitations, as constraints may ultimately become catalysts for true transformation.

LIMITATIONS: A MEANS OF DETERMINING 'REMAINING STRATEGIES'

a) incongruent ensemble, cumbersome processes

The Songs of Madosini brings together newly composed and traditionally handed-down music, implying the coexistence of a written score and spontaneous renditions, i.e. a script and deviations. As it calls for the immediate interaction of 'classically' trained musicians with a 'traditionally' trained but illiterate indigenous knowledge bearer speaking only deep Xhosa, the collaboration already requires the services of an interpreter on a purely organizational and pragmatic level. Moreover, the 'Western' musicians perform on historical European instruments and within the performance conventions implied by their training and their instruments, whereas Madosini's performance is obviously determined by an entirely different set of conventions, strongly influenced in turn by her training as well as the physical and acoustic properties of the African instruments she employs. The process of rehearsing (determining musical criteria and agreeing on musical decisions) therefore necessitates a high degree of mediation and negotiation, over and above the mere linguistic translations.

These factors result in a somewhat incongruous situation in which any procedures require cumbersome negotiations and clarifications. The only strategy remaining here is that of working patiently. This has been required from every participant on each occasion of a performance and has always brought out the best qualities from those willing to abide by the rules of the process. It shifts the emphasis from a professional musical engagement to that of human arrangement, requiring the virtues of flexibility, interest and tolerance, over and above those of efficiency, dexterity and technical proficiency.

b) indispensability of broad signifiers

For the dramatic juxtaposition of contrasting stylistic elements to work effectively, the composition chooses to operate with fairly large units, 'broad signifiers', so as to underline or emphasize structural, textural and idiomatic differences. In this manner traditional, direct and 'unbroken' references are made on both sides of the spectrum.

Under a modernist paradigm the use of such broad references is principally regarded as naïve or anachronistic, for the obvious reason that, in a broken world, such unbroken tropes have no more credibility. The music I composed for the work employs obvious and immediately recognizable signifiers of 'European' music in the widest sense, such as an extended functional tonality allowing for motivic and melodic structures, as well as conventional developmental and contrapuntal procedures. Similarly, Madosini's songs broadly reference archetypal features of indigenous 'African' music, more specifically Pondo traditions by means of the Xhosa language, idiomatic idiosyncrasies and the sonorities of culture-specific instruments and vocal traditions (such as the *umngqokolo* throat singing). This general characterization holds true, despite the fact that her performances are uniquely personal renditions, imbued with a charismatic individuality.

I hold that it is justifiable to use these broad signifiers and speak of 'Europe' and 'Africa' where the reference is not intended to identify, but to express 'relationality'.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ See reflections on 'African' music in Parenthesis VIII, pg. 152.

c) limited operational space

As Paul Cilliers has argued, too much difference prohibits meaningful comparison.⁷⁷ Such a situation could have occurred if Madosini's culturally bound musical utterances were treated as exotic, i.e. fully unrelated, foreign, incomprehensible material.

Admittedly, these adjectives fairly accurately describe my very first impression of Madosini's music. I vividly recount being dumbstruck by what I experienced as bizarre peculiarities of almost all musical parameters: unflinchingly repetitive structures, understated formal or dramatic features, unfiltered sonic qualities, apparently contingent intonation, etc. From within my frame of reference at that time the expressive qualities of the songs were effectively indecipherable. It required considerable effort by way of enquiry and exegesis eventually to grasp the musical approach and translate what the pieces were about. This of course was a crucial and non-negotiable step towards the realization of the project.

I have elaborated elsewhere⁷⁸ rather extensively on the process of intercultural 'translation' and its intricacies. In this context it suffices to stress that not only would it have been impossible to collaborate meaningfully without first establishing common musical ground and operational (performance) space, it would also ultimately have been amoral (even 'immoral') to do so. An approach in which Madosini's musical contribution were merely sought as exotic attribute and her musical expressions were degraded to an especially colourful but superficial element in some kind of gallimaufry pastiche, would amount to moral transgression. In the arena of musical 'fusions', this danger of the 'meaningless *mélange*' remains very real, clearly indicating the need for a different 'remaining strategy'.

I posit that the only viable option is that of relating and structurally integrating musical features, regardless of how different they may be. If the differences are significant, the resulting texture will become less coherent, yet gain a richer identity, even though (in complexity terms this may be replaced with 'because') it has become less determined, consistent and closed. The process of integration at stake here is not one of indiscriminately 'lumping together', overseeing or eliminating differences for reasons of convenience (which would ironically result in a similar mishmash than its opposite procedure), but one of deliberately safeguarding and accommodating differences in a larger context by extending the scope of the underlying structure.

I believe that the texturally heterogeneous yet structurally integrated form of *The Songs of Madosini* may serve as a direct exemplification of what Cilliers means when he emphasises that one has to refer to the complex relationship between 'what is similar' and 'what is different' in order to establish meaning and, in analogy, to that between the 'self' and the 'other', to establish identity. It warrants quoting him at length, as the following passage aptly demonstrates the irreducible state of mutual interdependence and constantly necessary to-and-fro referencing:

... [T]o think that one could talk about difference without involving the singular is ... problematic. The mistaken opposition between the notions of difference and identity is a ... result of confusing the notion of "difference" with that of "opposition"... In order to recognize a difference between A and B, they must in the first place be identifiable as A and B (in their singularity), and secondly they must, even if only slightly, share something that makes a comparison possible...

Let us consider briefly what the implications of this understanding of difference are for our relationship with the other in the social sphere. ... If, as a result of the insight [that differences are constitutive]... the notion of difference is absolutized, it may lead one to think that no relationship between the self and the other is possible; that the other is absolutely other. However, in order to be able to recognize the other as other at all, some form of identity between the self and the other is required. ... Does [this] ... imply that the other can be fully appropriated? Not at all. There is an irreducible difference between the self and the other that will always complicate the relationship ... Merely acknowledging this does not guarantee that the other will not be

⁷⁷ Paul Cilliers, 'Difference, Identity and Complexity', *Philosophy Today* (2010), 60.

⁷⁸ Hans Huyssen, 'Music Production in the Intercultural Sphere: Challenges and Opportunities', *Acta Academica Supplementum: African and other cultures: traces and processes of mutual translation.* vol. 1, (2012), 55 ff.

violated. It merely provides a point of departure, from where a relationship, even if it is a tenuous one, with the other can be attempted...⁷⁹

To me the conclusion of this passage reads like a direct summary of the musical experiences gained during the process of rehearsing and performing *The Songs of Madosini*. Beyond experiencing a degree of frustration, due to the 'limited operational space', many strong relationships between various performers and Madosini were formed in the process.

d) composition as 'balancing act'

In this situation the compositional challenge may be described as negotiating and maintaining a workable balance between *integrating similarities* and *juxtaposing differences*: to assess what may be assimilated without losing its specific singularity and what should remain distinct, without jeopardizing the compositional unity.

This requires an altogether different approach than the 'analytical' method (of breaking up, investigating and reassembling musical variables on a material level), as a modernist position intrinsically and tirelessly demands. Against this claim I argue that in this specific work the 'engagement' occurs on a different level, not *within the material*, but even deeper, *within the style*, or rather at the level of an unacknowledged assumption of 'stylistic tenacity, indefatigability or supremacy' (in German this might be called 'stilistisches Selbstverständnis') in the context of altogether different stylistic propositions originating from the situation of an intercultural encounter.

I further argue that only such an approach amounts to a full appreciation of the notion of 'multiple modernities',⁸⁰ which avant-garde postulations still not seem to recognize. Composing in South Africa (or for that matter in any other alternatively localized modernity), as though the local context were of no concern, can at best be called colonial in the sense of 'proclaiming – without so much as a hint of troubled consciousness – the universality of one's own solipsistic rules, and applying them to a new environment, haughtily ignoring or evading the 'nuisance' of prevailing contingent, local conditions and conventions and their legitimate claims to be recognized in their own right and on their own terms'.

By virtue of its apparent conservative character (judged from its tonal, melodic, motivic design) the work is vulnerable to the critique of naïve anachronistic devices and features. I hold that, on closer scrutiny, an astute observer will not be misguided by the seemingly conservative (material) design about the (structurally) radical stance the composition in fact takes.

2. CIRCUMSTANTIAL CONDITIONS: AN APPRECIATION

Having demonstrated how the use of unambiguous signifiers or a conservative design could be misinterpreted and lead to a dismissal of the underlying compositional approach, I wish to argue here for a more nuanced perception – and hence appreciation – of what I will call the 'limited' or the 'circumstantial' design. The characteristic features of *The Songs of Madosini* will be used to exemplify the general argument from a specific set of conditions. A quote from Paul Cilliers's interpretation of Derrida's elaborations on the 'necessity of constraining structures'⁸¹ for the deconstruction (i.e. establishment) of meaning, guides this section: 'Only a limited context allows for meaning.'⁸²

⁷⁹ Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 60-61

⁸⁰ Borrowed from Shmuel Eisenstadt's title. Shmuel Eisenstadt, *Multiple Modernities* (Transaction Publisher, Rutgers University, Piscataway 2002)

⁸¹ Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 59.

⁸² Derrida quoted in Cilliers, 60.

a) suitable performance settings

In previous programme notes to *The Songs of Madosini*, I have made the following claim: ‘*The Songs of Madosini* are not meant to be performed in Donaueschingen or Huddersfield,⁸³ but much rather in Langa, Cape Town or Libode.’

This statement implicates two widely accepted musical conventions: i) that of the format of concerts dedicated solely to new music and ii) the notion that music is an ‘international language’ and as such can function everywhere and anywhere. The composition under discussion resists both notions. This position warrants a closer investigation.

i) I posit that a performance of this specific work under the auspices of a New Music paradigm (understood in a modernist, avant-garde sense as defined earlier) will in all probability not succeed due to incongruences between the compositional approach followed and the expectations and conventions characteristic of New Music events. From the perspective of an avant-garde aesthetic the composition will be deemed not sufficiently new (modern, materially and technically advanced), too closely bound to traditions and thus stylistically inappropriate.

Instead the work has deliberately been tailored to function as suitable item on the programme of what I will call a ‘conventional classical-music concert’.⁸⁴ (With this I broadly refer to the now global tradition of repeatedly staging concerts preferably containing masterpieces from the canon of western classical music in dedicated concert halls by more or less famous performers.) While this format presents immense problems (on the one hand being stuck in a nineteenth-century middle-class conservatism, on the other hand subjugated to the forces of a commercialized music industry systematically degrading its assets into mere commodities) it potentially still offers a space and forum for focussed musical communication. Moreover, it continues to attract patrons from all walks of life; people with a genuine musical interest and desirous of ‘live’ performances.

In principle, this is the best audience any composer can hope for: interested, attentive, educated and – not altogether unimportant – usually affluent. It is a tragic state of affairs that historical developments and institutional structures have almost fully separated contemporary music production from the expectations and frame of reference of these typical middle-class music lovers. As a composer I cannot accept the categorical condescension relegating this audience to what Adorno has stigmatized as the mindless entertainment-seeking mass consumer society.⁸⁵

As an alternative I posit a more differentiated stance. Admittedly the currently prevailing concert format *falsely* proclaims to represent an unbroken, living tradition and thereby upholds a system of specious conditions. Yet I hold that concert-goers’ expectations – to be treated to genuine musical experiences within this format – are legitimate. Moreover, audiences frequenting events such as these justifiably expect to hear decipherable music. This means that the logic, syntax, the rhetorical devices and musical signifiers must be within their frame of reference. To baffle the audience in the context of an institutionalized practice, to which it is nevertheless expected to grant its unfaltering support, is simply nonsensical.

The ‘traditional concert convention’ thus creates a situation that can only be described as bizarre and, literally, ‘ana-chronistic’. Yet concerts in this format not only persist but even thrive as highly esteemed and globally significant social and cultural institutions. As an extant, traditional musical forum they pose an on-going challenge as to their revival and reinvention as socially, historically and geographically contingent practice. I hold that this can be done in spite of the inherent shortcomings.

⁸³ Erstwhile insignificant villages, now prime destinations for their international New Music festivals.

⁸⁴ Amongst other factors, this was the brief of the commission.

⁸⁵ My combination of keywords taken from various texts by Adorno.

Most contemporary composers, however, seem to choose the alternative and in principle conceive their works to be performed in special New Music concerts.⁸⁶ The supposition here is that this focus will guarantee more thorough and devoted preparation and also that the eventual performance will attract a specially interested, educated and appreciative audience. But as no such ideal audience exists anymore, the assumption somehow entails that uncompromisingly self-axiomatic (autonomous or immanent) music can/should function without an audience. 'New Music'-concerts implicitly convey the message that music (or musical novelty, or the quality of novelty) is self-sufficient and deserves to be performed for its own sake (or that of its ingenuity), even if this occurs in relative isolation. Obviously this poses its own sets of challenges, such as the question about the relevance of such a process or that of funding such 'market-unrelated' endeavours.

With its broad references to Western musical conventions, *The Songs of Madosini's* 'framing' of Madosini's songs is a deliberate construction to meet (not fulfill!) the initial expectations of a conventional audience as described above. Subsequently, the musical structure creates a space for African music to unfold. On its own, this 'foreign' form of expression would be unexpected, possibly even unwanted, in this context. Within the composed structure this musical 'other' is mediated within the strictly formalized rules of this kind of concert-ritual.

I am well aware of the criticism that this kind of approach amounts to subscribing to compromising conditions that will *in principle* prevent any such work of attaining self-axiomatic authenticity and, moreover, cannot do full justice to all significant nuances and aspects of indigenous African music. This is a criticism that implies an understanding of composition as the essentially closed, fully coherent act of imagining and designing autonomous musical works, ontologically unrelated to their sounding realization and certainly independent of the contingencies of their performances and performance circumstances. Instead, I argue through a work like *The Songs of Madosini* for an understanding of the notion of composition as implicitly and essentially including performance and reception. Accordingly, I must embrace all contingencies that this implies.

From this position it may then be argued that the composition of *The Songs of Madosini* amounts to the decision to *act* under given circumstances, accepting that these are not ideal. Moreover, what would often be judged as *compromising conditions* could, from a complexity perspective, be recognized as *enabling circumstances*. By virtue of presenting bounded conditions that concurrently constrain and permit (entitle, even catalyse), some strategies are prohibited and, precisely in the act of prohibition, allow others.

The risks of patronizing indigenous musicians and of compromising or domesticating the expressive scope of African music are difficult to avoid, whether one subscribes to the New Music paradigm or the conventional concert paradigm. It is well-nigh impossible to ascertain from the outside whether rural settings for the contextually appropriate performance of indigenous African music still exist and function in a meaningful manner. Even if this were the case, such occasions would certainly not be accessible to a Western audience. Therefore such 'authentic', 'more apposite' and embedded performances are in principle excluded from a wider dissemination. Accepting that historical developments have led to an age where the 'imagined real or ideal' is now being re-enacted in museums and concert halls, the composition is an intervention under such (modernist) circumstances.

ii) As the work constitutes a deliberate communicative *design* in relation to an aspect of its South African context, I posit that its *performance* will also be optimally meaningful in this very context. In other words, the work will resonate on more levels and in a more nuanced manner in the South African environment than elsewhere. The design I am arguing for does not claim to function equally well internationally (generically, generally), removed from its referencing context. Instead it aims, paradoxically through a design aimed at communication, to be specific and to act and resonate locally, portraying and conveying the quality of a unique

⁸⁶ See elaborations on the schism between presentational formats of traditional and progressive music, pg. 78 ff.

situation and place, expressing an experience at a specific historical moment in a singular anthropo-socio-biosphere.

This 'restricted focus' does not make the work 'provincial' in the sense of being limited. Instead, the very restrictions enable it to open a space for a dedicated, nuanced, attentive and differentiated dialogue. Only from this position is it possible subsequently to derive, negotiate and set up rules of consensus for meaningful interaction. On the level of the musical performance the work uncompromisingly demands playing 'in harmony' and acting synchronously as an ensemble so as to achieve a consistent and unified expression. Setting up such rules of consensus for performance could also be criticized as a patronizing gesture. I maintain, on the contrary, that only rules of consensus allow for the freedom of interaction. Moreover, from the experience of many performances of *The Songs of Madosini* and other similar pieces, it became clear that musical rules of consensus were not bound to culture, making the establishment of such consensus the invaluable constant in an otherwise incalculable and uncertain process.

From these conditions and experiences a complex deduction can be made: The required 'universality' of rules as 'reliably holding' and 'guaranteeing the play' arises from their specificity and strict application. In other words, only a very narrow perspective will enable a 'lawful' universal deduction, whereas the opposite – vague, broad universal observations – do not offer specifically meaningful or helpful deductions. Following from this I maintain that the acute and vigilant observation of a strictly localized situation on which the design of *The Songs of Madosini* is based, enables the work to beg for universal 'suffrage', not through appointed representatives, but rather in the manner of an intercessory petition for the singular, unique and individual expression.

If a more differentiated, nuanced or complex level of musical reception, such as suggested here, could be presupposed in Donaueschingen and elsewhere in the New Music scene, a staging of *The Songs of Madosini* in such a context could be possible. However, I fear that for the time being general ideological conception, rather than astute, immediate and perceptive apprehension continue to limit the scope of what is acceptable in the well-guarded terrain of the institutionalized ('official') contemporary music arenas.

b) open structure

For the composition to function in the way it does, it needs deliberately to maintain an openness towards the contribution of agency acting entirely outside its stylistic and conceptual scope. If this were not the case, it would hardly be legitimate to speak of an intercultural, or even an inter-personal, encounter. For a musical form to remain open in such a radical way means to accept, allow, accommodate, embrace and manage whatever contingencies might arise from such a condition. This demands a high degree of flexibility and patience from all participating musicians.

The stylistically heterogeneous agency scripted into this specific composition relies on Madosini's charismatic performance and musical contribution to the whole, without which it cannot function. The work therefore becomes vulnerable to an intrinsically insecure and uncontrollable condition, but its vulnerability is constitutive of the quality of the sought interaction. Accordingly its 'performances' will – to a certain extent – always remain unpredictable. They need not amount to executing a script in a fully controlled manner, but much rather to creating a situation of trust and a degree of sufficient mutual understanding in order that the work may manifest as an instance of its own performance. For this to succeed, that which is contained within the score and that which is invited to enter into it from outside the auctorial agency of the composer, must relate dialogically. A 'rendition of the music' will only qualify as a 'manifestation of the work' if the process of its performance facilitates what is supposed to happen 'inside' and 'through this process': an inter-idiomatic, inter-personal, inter-cultural communication.

In this context it should be mentioned that the notation of Madosini's songs in the score should be understood as a kind of shorthand, even a mere placeholder, indicating only the very basic structural features

of each respective piece of music. In no way is any of the actually sounding detail adequately represented here. This method is feasible, as it is foreseen that Madosini will always perform her own music and will do so by heart, without the need for a score. Furthermore the improvisational nature of Madosini's performance style defies a final, detailed and fixed notation. With an unambiguous performance practice implied – Madosini's personal, authentic style – the shorthand in this instance suffices completely. A more detailed transcription (and by implication 'prescription') would contravene the requisite openness.

c) creative potential of cultural difference

The 'cumbersome' design of *The Songs of Madosini* is the result of my interpretation of the prevailing cultural and socio-political exigencies of South African society. It is a (desperate) response to what I perceive as a deep crisis, but also a reality with which, I believe, many South Africans continuously grapple.

South African society has to date not managed to overcome the legacy of apartheid. Despite far-reaching political and constitutional changes in the last two decades, many South Africans continue to live in and with deeply segregated mind-sets, divided spaces, separated and distant localities, altogether different worlds. Incongruent life-styles prevail that overlap only very superficially if at all. The enactment of 'exchange' is for the most part limited to that of 'human resources' understood as work force in a commercial sense, not as resource of cultural difference or diversity.

The Songs of Madosini raises the uncomfortable implication that political programmes and interventions have to date failed to understand and address the problem as well as the creative potential of cultural difference. Mindful of the risks involved, the composition proposes that there is merit in the investigation and appreciation of difference.

An 'interest in difference' could easily be criticized as a continuation of 'apartheid thinking', whereas creative approaches focussing on 'negating differences' promise a metaphorical erasure of past obsessions with separations. It is therefore hardly surprising that the latter are widely regarded to be appropriate, whereas the former is frowned upon.⁸⁷

As should by now have become clear from the complexity perspective expounded in Chapter I, the notion of difference deserves an urgent reappraisal.⁸⁸ I believe a more differentiated understanding of its significance is required; an understanding that will enable distinctions between instances where difference is merely 'constructed', and instances where it is acknowledged as a meaningful, constitutive, 'irreducible' factor. Such a differentiated understanding is especially pertinent to the South African situation: Appraising and/or overcoming differences (whichever is apposite in a given situation) in either case requires careful negotiations and deep insights into the complexities at stake. As the country's history has amply demonstrated, the problem defies a simple solution.

The choice of retreating to a sheltered sphere of privacy and secure existence – personally, culturally and creatively – should be respected as an individual choice. However, withdrawal from a shared and communal public sphere has serious consequences, as no individual can be exempt from the political implications of such a withdrawal on society. Assuming that art by its very nature contains a communicative, public and hence political dimension, the position of 'artistic isolation' is problematic and therefore hard to defend. This having been said, I wish to stress that *The Songs of Madosini* definitely doesn't advocate any 'political programme'; it is political ('concerning many') through its mere existence. Whatever 'political agency' may have accumulated around the performances and perceptions of the work, results from the fact that the work 'exists' (not that it 'wants to propagate something') and from its immanent musical processes, which have taken place in the public domain.

⁸⁷ A prime example is Agawu's notion of 'contesting difference', which has assumed the status of currently prevailing musicological dogma. Kofi Agawu, *Representing African Music: Postcolonial Notes, Queries, Positions* (Routledge, New York & London 2003), 151-171.

⁸⁸ See reflections on Difference in Chapter 3.1. pg. 54 ff.

d) individual *versus* political strategy

Art ultimately cannot be subsumed to the purpose of any explicit political programme.⁸⁹ By its very nature art assumes an alternative position, proposing as it were an artistic instead of a political 'programme'. While (external) political convictions or considerations as such cannot determine, justify nor guarantee artistic quality and relevance, art nevertheless always contains a political dimension (within), simply by virtue of being a public utterance with an innate social or political pertinence derived from raising questions concerning 'the many'.

While *The Songs of Madosini* may overtly communicate what could be called a 'reconciliatory gesture', the composition in no way intends to make any explicit political statement to this or any other effect. Its political potential lies solely in the very fact that it can be and has been performed and in that capacity freely and publicly speaks for itself and (in this case) deliberately for another. The work contains no final 'message', nor does it offer a 'solution'. Yet it dares to engage with a challenging situation by facing the challenges, thematizing the subsequent process, performing and revealing the necessary negotiations, compromises and difficulties, thereby concurrently facilitating and self-referentially investigating the process. While it cannot proclaim any comprehensive results, it can do slightly more than only demonstrate an approach. By virtue of its 'performability', i.e. manifesting an idea in an embodied, physical dimension, it does to a certain degree substantiate the possibilities arising from its approach.

I therefore posit that *The Songs of Madosini* may be recognized as a model with regard to its strategy of interactively sounding out a possible expanse of genuinely shared expression in a historically and culturally contested environment. In this sense I underwrite Denis Constant-Martin's plea to acknowledge the musical realm as equally potent as the (long since recognized) sports arena in the on-going, inherently natural (i.e. *not* politically motivated) process of growing together as a nation.⁹⁰

e) temporary intervention

I have argued that *The Songs of Madosini* was specifically designed in response to a situation I perceived and interpreted a decade ago. Strangely, in many regards not much has changed since then. The same approach, based on the acknowledgment of disastrous and shameful intercultural ignorance, continues to mitigate for the appropriateness of what I attempted then. Even now, twenty years into South Africa's democracy, I have little doubt that most local music graduates from university music departments still do not know what an *umrhube* is, even less how it sounds or how to play it.

For the time being then, and probably for some time to come, it is an inevitable strategy to meet audiences in their pitifully ill-informed and uninitiated ignorance with regard to the multicultural society to which they have always belonged. Once a situation has arrived in which it will no longer be necessary explicitly to acknowledge, highlight or identify differences, an approach such as the one followed here will be outdated and performances of works like *The Songs of Madosini* will have become obsolete. Until then it is my wish that its continued performances may expedite the arrival of such times.

3. CONSTRAINTS AS TRANSFORMATIVE FORCES

In this section I finally reflect on those aspects of the composition where 'solutions' ('strategies' to bypass certain 'restrictions') eventually became unimportant as conditions emerge where such restrictions seem unproblematic and the notion of 'problem solving' becomes irrelevant. In contrast to a strategy, which always remains on the same level as the restriction it addresses, the focus now moves to a kind of 'reshuffling' of the

⁸⁹ Any attempt to this effect infringes on the autonomy of the artistic expression, which is by definition not negotiable. Where the infringement occurs, art ceases to be art and becomes propaganda or another subservient messenger.

⁹⁰ Suggestion made by Martin on the occasion of the book launch of *Sounding the Cape* at STIAS, Stellenbosch, 30.5.2013.

components onto different levels, replacing the concept of (limited) solutions with that of (deep) transformations. Recapitulating Cilliers's emphasis on 'the play of difference' to establish 'meaning', I hold that difference plays an equally crucial role in reaching a critical point where 'meaning' is transformed into a qualitatively new dimension of 'understanding'.

The following distinction may be helpful to clarify these two terms in this context: 'meaning' arises from grasping or explaining something in terms of something else; 'understanding' implies a non-referential comprehension from within the observer. The latter presupposes dimensions of history and experience through which references and cross-references are internalized, eventually accumulating towards the faculty of being able to make well-informed and mature assessments.

My desire to include these contingent (historical) elements in the discussion of a musical work once again underlines the necessity of an inclusive concept of 'composition' that encompasses the aspects of performance, as well as performance and reception history beyond its mere existence as a document or text. Arguably the most interesting aspects of a musical work only emerge on this level, when it takes on a life of its own in performances. These present varying degrees of unpredictability generated from the details contained in the score and, sometimes, even fairly independent of these.

Composition understood as conception eventually becomes irrelevant in relation to the subsequent unfolding of a reception history, the 'biography' or 'performance' of works. Obviously composition-cum-conception must always be acknowledged as *sine qua non* event. Yet – emphasizing the essentially transcending functionality of the act in defiance of all too self-indulgent and solipsistic perceptions thereof – its fruitfulness can only be assessed in hindsight by the vitality and / or longevity of its offshoots.

Assuming such a broad understanding, the following section entails reflections on transformative designs, as well as *experiences*. It therefore references both the material (textual) as well as the performative domains. With regard to the latter it should be added that the *The Songs of Madosini* has been performed seventeen times over a period of twelve years⁹¹ and therefore already possesses a fairly rich performance and reception history from which the reported experiences are drawn.

a) weaving different material into an organic whole

The following fairly detailed description of each movement of *The Songs of Madosini* focuses on its underlying dramaturgy resulting from the material itself, as well as from the narrative that continues to emerge from the on-going conversation with Madosini. While planning the work, it soon became apparent that the dramaturgy of the music constituted far more than coincidental background information. In fact, it emerged as necessary for any form of contextual understanding and thereby constitutive to a meaningful performance. Without narration the different songs could at best be presented like items in a catalogue: unrelated, on display, irrelevant in their isolation, meaningless as empty, solely material simulacra. This would be an unattractive, at best archival solution.

While searching for an optimal solution for the integration of the 'African material' into my own composition, it gradually dawned on me that the narratives should be considered intrinsically part of the expressive scope of the songs. Subsequently the inclusion of their actual renditions as part of the performance emerged as an attractive means of effectively introducing each new song in its own context. It then serendipitously proved to achieve even more, namely to open a wide scope of expressive connotations contained in Madosini's music and, finally, to bind together vastly diverse material and 'transform' it into a unified, formally coherent work. To demonstrate this point, a concise overview of formal and dramaturgical design of the composition is inserted at this point.

⁹¹ Performances of *The Songs of Madosini*: Pretoria, 15.8.02; Johannesburg, 17.8.02; Cape Town, 20.8.02; Vienna, 27.6.03; Salzburg, 28.6.03; Ingolstadt, 1.7.03; Stellenbosch, 1.10.03; Cape Town, 17.8.05; Bonn, 23.9.07; Sandton, 14.10.07; Grahamstown, 26. and 28.6.08; Stellenbosch, 12.3.09 and 27.7.09; Berlin, 29.10.09; Durban, 24.6.10, Stellenbosch, 12.3.14.

PARENTHESIS IX: DRAMATURGY OF *THE SONGS OF MADOSINI*

The first song, '*Uthando lundahlule*', introduces *uhadi* through a direct quote, referencing the instrument in a specific role within its origins in rural society.⁹² Its first entry is preceded by an introductory narration, touching on its origins and historical use, thereby creating some expectancy as to its actual sound. Before its second entry the scoring of the clarinet⁹³ draws the attention to the overtone melody emanating from the *uhadi*'s gourd resonator, a feature that can easily be drowned by the noise-component of the twig hitting the string. By virtue of its overtones, *uhadi* must in fact be recognized as a fully chordal 'continuo instrument', providing both bass line and implied harmonies. It can therefore be integrated harmonically into the chamber music texture on a par with the Western instruments and need not be treated as exotic component. However, by sounding different it expands the scope of expressive means considerably and thereby adds a novel quality to the ensemble.

The second movement, '*Umjeko*', follows a much more playful approach. According to Madosini traditionally *umrhubhe* would be regarded as far less important than *uhadi*. It was therefore accessible to children, who used it almost like a toy, accompanying their games. In the middle part⁹⁴ of this ternary movement an account of such a situation is re-enacted playfully. While the narration elaborates on the background of a girl gang fight, the string instruments enter one after the other, imitating the *umrhubhe* playing (including its *ponticello* sound) depicting a 'little procession'⁹⁵ of girls to readying themselves to finish off their rivals. This builds up to a dense imitational texture – structurally wholly determined by the idiomatic style of *umrhubhe* playing, yet dramaturgically embedded into an illustration of the gang fight. As accents begin to lash out of the overall texture, the orderly procession begins to derail, leading to the turmoil of a brawl. With the return to a shortened version of the opening section the narration returns to the present tense (excited commentary on the happy memories of childhood games). In a chance moment of self-oblivion the viola falls into a trance-like imitation of the repetitive *umrhubhe* pattern, from which only a friendly rebuke by the narrator calls him back.

'*Imfihlelo*' introduces the third of Madosini's instruments, *isitolotolo*,⁹⁶ and once again does so by referring to a game traditionally played with this instrument. In this case the game is completely re-enacted, becoming part of the performance itself, contributing to the initially mentioned ever-increasing self-referentiality of the composition.

'*Imfihlelo*' is the Xhosa version of the apparently universally played guessing game, in which only binaries such as 'hot' or 'cold' are offered to help a player identify a certain object, on which the others decided on in her absence. In the Mpondomise tradition, this is done by means of two different musical motives – 'yeka' (no!) and 'umbonile' (yes!) – played on the mouth harp.⁹⁷

Disrupting the construct of a mediated, purely 'representational performance' and instead replaying a tongue-in-cheek imitation of the game (i.e. 'finding Madosini's music'), the ensemble 'offers' the opening

⁹² According to Madosini only married women were permitted to play the instrument and, moreover, only at night (personal communication). A highly sensual and erotic dimension is clearly implied. To this may be added that Madosini would always stress that the instrument must best be played 'topless' (In fact her performance attire foresees only a light cloth as a top.) It suffices to mention the acoustical reason for this practice: When playing *uhadi* the gourd rests on the chest or breast of the player. By tilting the instrument to and fro, a good player will constantly adjust the gap between the body and the opening of the gourd from which the resonating overtones emanate, allowing for a kind of dynamic overtone vibrato. Lest this very special and hauntingly beautiful sound be muffled by any clothing, it is best reflected off the bare skin.

⁹³ *Uthando lundahlule*, bar 150 ff.

⁹⁴ *Umjeko*, bars 45-136.

⁹⁵ See narration of *Umjeko*.

⁹⁶ *Isitolotolo* is the 'Jews Harp', which was apparently introduced to the Eastern Cape by British missionaries in the nineteenth century but – as its name indicates – has since been adopted fully as an 'indigenous' instrument.

⁹⁷ *Imfihlelo*, indicated in the first two staves respectively.

phrases of several excessively well-known pieces. The selection of generic snippets include the Nokia cell phone tune, Kalaf's *Nessun dorma*,⁹⁸ *My Sarie Marais* as an example of an Afrikaans folk song and even the national anthem *Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika* – all examples of ubiquitously present mainstream music, from which, typically, indigenous references are conspicuously absent. Madosini rejects all of these offerings, interrupting them all with a decisive 'yeka'. Only when 'Uthando' (her song from the first movement) is finally played, will she give her consent and join into its lilting rhythm with the affirmative 'umbonile' motif.

The following, central movement of the cycle presents the performance of a full-length *uhadi* song, 'Zwelendaba'. The Western instruments play a subordinate role throughout this movement, merely supplying a dramatic insertion towards the middle of the song, reinterpreting the repetitive *uhadi* pattern in the manner of a Baroque ostinato, and by providing a transition into the more reflective mood of the second part of the composition.

'Loliwe' once again features *isitolotolo*. Played with an incessant drive and unceasing energy, the repetitive strains evoke the sounds and movement of a steam train, making its long journey from the Eastern to the Western Cape. As this has long since been one of the main modern migration routes it symbolises the transition from rural to urban existence. Madosini herself has undertaken this relocation and performs this song as a deliberate allegory and reflection on the disintegration of rural culture caused by urban enticements.

In the composition the implied transition is illustrated by having the continuous *isitolotolo* ostinato 'passing through' a series of musical quotes, which in turn reference specific areas, mapping a section of South Africa's cultural geography. A rendition of Nofinishi Dywili's⁹⁹ *Whistling Song*¹⁰⁰ locates the departure from a rural environment of the Eastern Cape. A reference to *Early one morning* symbolizes the passing through the area which the British 1820 settlers occupied. *Al lê die berge nog so blou* refers to Afrikaans settlements further west and finally a Coon Carnival evergreen, the *Song of the Riverside Roses*, indicates the arrival in Cape Town. This song, a typical example of what Denis-Constant Martin sees as the on-going process of 'creolisation'¹⁰¹ defying all attempts at segregating musical cultures in South Africa, thus encapsulates the shared, contemporary, urban space, in which, after all, the composition under discussion also came into existence.

It is from this sphere that Madosini offers a praise song to Madiba (Mandela), hailing him as the one who has 'opened a road' and 'shown us the way', by implication ultimately enabling the kind of collaboration occurring in this very project. To this very personal homage, 'Ndibona uMadiba sophitsho', the Western instruments can add very little other than to support and – in the second part – substitute the *umrhubhe* texture when Madosini stops playing in order to sing.

A short transition leads to the last movement, '*Hlakula ntokazi*', featuring a shortened recapitulation of the opening of the first movement. The narration comes to an end with Madosini's conclusion that everything has been said, that the audience has been initiated and should by now be familiar with the most pertinent musical background.

This allows for a final self-referential evocation, rapidly switching between levels of direct speech and self-reflection. On the structural (musical) level the fluctuations are facilitated by changing between Madosini's

⁹⁸ This aria, removed from its dramaturgical context in Puccini's *Turandot* and reduced to a splendid tenor showpiece, encapsulates the notion of 'operatic popularity' in South Africa.

⁹⁹ Nofinishi Dywili was a hailed veteran musician of similar stature as Madosini, from Ngqoko (Glen Grey district, Eastern Cape). See: David Dargie, 'The Redoubtable Nofinishi Dywili, Uhadi Master and Xhosa Song Leader', *SAMUS, South African Music Studies* vol. 30/31, (2011).

¹⁰⁰ Transcribed from a field recording by Dave Dargie.

¹⁰¹ Denis-Constant Martin, *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present* (David Philip, Cape Town 2000), 53.

persistently repetitive ‘epic’ style¹⁰² on the one hand and highly dramatic interjections (always initiated by the cello with a restlessly impatient motive)¹⁰³ on the other.

An image taken from the song’s lyrics is translated into the performance itself: The song reprimands an old woman, who is complaining about her misfortune, is reprimanded by pointing out to her that what is causing her misery is her own negligence (of not having tilled her land). In a similar vein this movement (and by implication the composition as a whole) directly addresses its audience, metaphorically conveying the point that it is futile to lament the loss of indigenous music, when in fact musicians like Madosini continue practicing this art and all it would take to safeguard its existence and continued practice, would be to lend them an ear

Unfortunately it is a very real prospect that very soon it will not be possible any more to witness skilful and informed performances of indigenous music – the spectre of extinction looms just as large over the diversity of forms of expression in the cultural realm than over that of ‘expression of viability’ which manifests in species diversity in the natural realm. The coda of the work¹⁰⁴ depicts the scenario of such an aftermath: Only the Western instruments remain playing as the work comes to a close, filling in the remnants of a fragmented, void texture. The sustained notes and prolonged rests convey a haunting quality – but only as long as one remembers what is missing from them. Once this memory fades, ignorance will overplay the loss of an erstwhile much richer and more diverse scope of musical expressions.

In hindsight I posit that it would have been impossible to foresee such an organic congruence arising from such diverse material. Instead I can only report that this transformation – from disparately separate to constitutively related material – *emerged* from a close observation of pertinent limitations posed by the significant differences and the ensuing design’s inclusion of apposite strategies to accommodate and integrate these limitations.

b) self-referential ‘loops’ as transformative ‘loopholes’

A close reading of the preceding section might have already foregrounded the recurrent instances of self-reflexive references where the subject of contemplation is performance that, by virtue of being performed, reflects on itself. In other words, this kind of self-reflection occurs where the act of performing in the first instance serves as a frame or basis to re-enact a performance in the composition. Specific examples in *The Songs of Madosini* are the re-enactment of the girls’ procession and ensuing brawl in the second movement,¹⁰⁵ the staging of the guessing game in the third movement and, most pertinently, the recurrent changes of dramatic position effected by alternating between the ordinary narration and directing the scolding of the *Weeding Song* at the audience (as though it were the old and ungrateful woman) in the last movement.

The propensity of *The Songs of Madosini* for this kind of self-referential engagement is facilitated by its engagement with distinctly different material and the manner in which such difference can be treated on various levels: historic references, play, metaphor or literal reference, foreign elements or appropriated and integrated influences. It can thus be said that rich identities potentially advocate self-related interaction or, conversely, that the richness of such identities results from the possibilities of multiple and unsuspected references.

As was shown in Chapter I, the phenomenon of self-organizing circularity entered into systems thinking from cybernetics, where it was first observed that (the subjectivity of) the observation of a system had to be taken into account just as much as that which was being observed. Since then it has been recognized as an indispensable component of autopoietic (i.e. living and complex) systems where ‘each part/process is at once

¹⁰² *Hlakula ntokazi*, bars 49, 103, 130.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, bars 25, 43, 88, 117.

¹⁰⁴ Bar 155 to end.

¹⁰⁵ Bars 52-136.

cause and effect, a means and an end [and] owes its existence/explanation to the organization of the remaining parts, [which] interact, modify and create themselves so as to realize an autonomous self-fabricated, self-organized whole.¹⁰⁶

Self-referentiality for its own sake amounts to nothing more than solipsistic recursiveness, which inconsequentially loses itself in potentially infinite truisms or dead-end loops. A famous example is Douglas Hofstadter's *Hofstadter's Law*, which states that 'it always takes longer than you expect, even when you take into account Hofstadter's Law', (which states that 'it always takes longer than you expect...' etc.).¹⁰⁷ The Cretan, Epimenides's saying that 'all Cretans are liars' is another famous example.

These familiar but rather meaningless examples tend to obscure the far more interesting aspect of self-reflexivity. Once again Morin must be credited for having recognized the significance and profound dimension of the 'loop'. Reflecting on naturally occurring 'retroactive loops' such as vortices, eddies, the rotation of celestial bodies and by implication also those of biological processes, ecological cycles, the flow of information in cybernetic circuits 'born of the encounter of two antagonistic fluxes',¹⁰⁸ Morin establishes that such 'retroactive loops' are 'simultaneously genestic, generic, generative', thereby assuring 'birth, specificity, existence, autonomy' of themselves: 'The loop is not born of a negative retroaction or regulation. It is the negative retroaction and regulation.'¹⁰⁹ It is 'the retroactive whole, producer, and organizer-of-self.' Not to be confused with the circular form itself (although 'the idea is clearly visible in the eddy, where phenomenal form and generative loop blend'),¹¹⁰ it is the 'idea of circulation, circuit rotation, *retroactive processes which assure the existence and the constancy of the form.*'¹¹¹

In the informational sphere the loop 'is a device for the elimination of deviance by correction of error'.¹¹² The loop 'does not proceed from an entity called "information"; the loop precedes information genealogically. We must introduce information into the loop, and not reduce the loop to information.'¹¹³ For both cases Morin stresses the 'organizational character' of the loop: 'It effects the passage from the thermodynamics of disorder to the dynamics of organization.'¹¹⁴

This is a significant insight: Looping becomes 'the constitution, permanently renewed, of a systemic totality, whose double and reciprocal emergent quality is the production of the whole by the whole (generativity) and the reinforcement of the whole by the whole (regulation).'¹¹⁵ This in turn shows that the loop is not only *retroactive* but also *recursive*, a property concisely defined as a 'process whose final states or effects produce initial states or causes'.¹¹⁶ This Morin sees as the 'logical foundation of generativity' and hence he deduces that 'recursivity, generativity, production-of-self, re-generation and (consequently) re-organization are so many aspects of the same phenomenon.'¹¹⁷

In addition he links the idea of 'recursion' to that of 'active totality', from which follows that 'isolatedly, nothing is generative' but only the 'process in its totality ... provided it loops on itself.' Simultaneously 'the total action depends on the action of ... particular elements' and – as an aside – 'this dissipates every obscure or mystical idea of totality.'¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁶ Wolkenhauer & Muir (2011:359) quoted in Rika Preiser, 'The Problem of Complexity. Re-thinking the Role of Critique', Philosophy Ph.D, Dept. Philosophy, University of Stellenbosch (Stellenbosch 2012), 127.

¹⁰⁷ Douglas R. Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid* (Basic Books, New York 1999), 152.

¹⁰⁸ Morin, *Method*, 180.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 181 (original emphasis).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 181 (original emphases).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 181.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 182, original emphasis.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

One of the most important conclusions here is that of recognizing *organization* as ‘constituted of elements in transit’, appreciating its complex nature whereby on the one side ‘permanent activity produce[s] stationary states’,¹¹⁹ but on the other that ‘the *invariance* of form depends on the *turnover* of constitutive elements’.¹²⁰ These kind of ‘states’ – externally stable, internally unstable and hence active – therefore exist not only in spite of their ‘disequilibrium, instability, movement, change’ but *because* of these conditions.¹²¹ What Morin describes here is the emergence of the (phenomenon *and* idea of) ‘organization’ as *concurrently forming and being formed, simultaneously generative and constricted*.

This finally leads him to one of his most visionary conclusions, that of ‘radical openness’, where ‘opening [of a system] is linked to the idea of active organization’.¹²²

In what I hold to be a decisive twist to the somewhat stifled debate on whether complex systems should be considered open (Cannon – for thermodynamic systems; Bertalanffy – for living systems)¹²³ or closed (Luhmann – for social systems),¹²⁴ Morin suggests an altogether new appreciation of the principal problem. He convincingly argues that the notion of *openness* is intricately linked to that of the *activity* of a system, thereby directing the focus onto the ‘*organizational character* of opening’.¹²⁵ Departing from a mere ‘external and behavioural’ way of describing the openness of living beings – attesting the input and output of matter and energy, or by just postulating general ‘interactions’, he links the uptake and discharge to the ‘organizational activity’ or, by implication, to the idea of ‘active organization’.¹²⁶ Hereby he emphasises that for a system to be open, this is no ‘secondary character’, but a ‘fundamental and vital’ one since it is a prerequisite ‘not only to the functioning but also to the existence’ of such a system.¹²⁷ Conversely, the ‘integrity of a non-active system [like a stopped machine] is linked to the absence of exchanges with the outside’¹²⁸ The ‘principal opposition’ thus lies between ‘fixed and active, not between open and closed’.¹²⁹

He further discards a ‘general’ notion of openness (or ‘closed-ness’), by distinguishing between certain ‘qualities’ of openings (or closures), allowing concurrently dissimilar states on respective levels. A system might be thermodynamically closed (a ‘dead’ planet, like Mars, not partaking in an energy exchange with its environment) but still be open to gravitational interaction.¹³⁰ Or it might be organizationally and thermodynamically open (a functioning machine consuming energy and producing or manipulating something), but *informationally closed* (mechanically performing but its designated function). Or it might be ontologically, i.e. existentially open (like any living being, dependant on its environment in many respect), but *communicationally closed* (if living in seclusion).¹³¹ In addition to these distinctions he posits that no system can be absolutely closed. (‘From such a system it would be impossible to obtain the least information’,¹³² nor would it have an origin.) Nor can any system be absolutely open. (In this case a lack of integrity would defy its existence.) Every opening, somewhere, requires a closing somewhere else.¹³³

¹¹⁹ Morin, *Method*, 184.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 197.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹²⁴ Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (Stanford University Press, Stanford 1996).

¹²⁵ Morin, *Method*, 196, my emphasis.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 196.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 197.

Returning to the composition and following Morin's 'path' through this newly unlocked terrain, the following can be said:

Generating musical ideas from within distinctly different styles, which respectively act as one another's sounding boards or mirrors, invites a description in analogy to Morin's imagery of musical processes locked between two non-negotiable boundaries and hence as 'born of the encounter of two antagonistic fluxes'. Under such circumstances music – with its manifold options of retroactive and recursive to-and-fro-referencing – provides conducive conditions for the 'activation' of dynamic forces ('regenerative, organizational, morphogenetic') as described by Morin, which in consequence will 'collaborate' towards the intrinsic, radical opening of their constrained condition. Without the need for *spectacular* but ultimately merely *functional escapes* (such as might be pursued by declaring boundaries, conventions and traditions to be mere constructs and therefore spurious and not binding), the recursive loop becomes the 'loophole' for gaining a quality of 'existential freedom' *within* and precisely *because* of such boundaries. This kind of freedom is not measured in relation to more or less contingent circumstantial restrictions or gauged by a certain degree of independence from such restrictions, but may be defined as *having part in the radical opening originating from and originated by existing*. This opening, as I understand it, is synonymous with traditional notions of transformation and transcendence; however, it does not depend on the crutch of vague metaphysical references.¹³⁴ The transformation occurs 'within' the insoluble whole and 'inside' the recursive loop of *systemic organization*, which *transcends the roles of individual components and individual action*, which in turn (concurrently, conversely, complementarily, correspondingly) generates *systemic organization*.

In this instance, Morin's vision by far exceeds that of my composition. Moreover, I cannot claim to have been aware of these reflections – at least in this articulate manner – ten years ago when I was composing *The Songs of Madosini*. Therefore I cannot wish to offer them as considerations underlying the intentional structure, but do wish to propose them as an interpretive tool, guiding a possible perception of the work. In any event I sense a deep kinship between both designs: seeking for the marvellous within the ordinary, holding that the more 'spectacular' solutions are often those that spectacularly fail this very attribution.

c) accommodating different musical material

Working with musical material characterised by difference with the clear intent of respecting the differences according to their distinct axiomatic logic, requires a specific compositional approach. Early on in the process it became clear that – as in any 'marriage' – the emphasis should be placed on investigating and shaping the *relationship* between elements, rather than dealing with questions concerning the *individual* elements. Instead of inward, analytic processes (for example by isolating and 'deconstructing' the material to extract new meanings from its components) the situation would require an outgoing gesture; synthesizing, even embracing external impulses. Instead of indulging in the respective propensities on either side, both emanations would have to be constrained, make room, occasionally even be silenced completely to proffer sufficient space for another subject to coexist in close proximity, yet on its own terms.

Shifting the emphasis from the (identity or meaning of) individual components to (that of) the organization of their interactions requires a correspondingly altered compositional approach. This might be summed up as the challenge to facilitate interesting relations, meaningful interactions and a sense of mutualism or complementarity in which the 'different' positions should not remain 'indifferent', isolated, unconcerned with each other, but instead function as poles. This is the prerequisite for the maintenance of an energizing tension. From this image it should be evident, that the necessary negotiations in a relationship should not be aimed at eliminating or negating the polarity or the differences of the respective positions, but to uphold the tension

¹³⁴ It warrants repeating this statement: '...total action depends on the action of each moment or of each particular element; this dissipates every obscure or mystical idea of totality.' Morin, *Method*, 183.

and to extract from it the necessary creative energy for a purposeful and mutual expression: richer, more nuanced, more pronounced than that of either individual in isolation. Cilliers's reflection on 'identity' may just as well be read as a description of such a 'meaningful relationship':

The more diversity there is involved in the construction of identity, the richer it will be. A "rich" identity does not imply that such an identity is open, general or vague. This is exactly the nature of a lean identity. A rich identity is also richly constrained. It is more specific and at the same time more nuanced ... [and] will also be more resilient.¹³⁵

Lest this 'relational perspective' should sound too utopian, it is important to mention its constraints. Once again it warrants recalling Morin's qualification of systemic interactions as always concurrently enabling and constraining. It is evident that while tension may be energizing it can at the same time be antagonizing. Unsurprisingly, in the manner of an infinite self-referential loop, this element of constraint might once again enable a certain transformation, which in turn will have its limitations, repeating into the realm of complexity. Along the line of such on-going, processual interactions, the compositional intervention marks but a provisional, interpretive position.

I suggest describing the compositional method followed here as a *dialogic approach*. It implies an internal *dual logic*, as well as an external *dialogue*: Refraining from attempts at self-assured (in the sense of self-centred, clear-cut, final) statements, it does not withdraw from ambiguous meaning, but instead engages with the possibility of multiple meanings as well as that of referenced and hence plausible broader meanings. It resorts to the fuzzy logic of giving meaning by negotiating differences and similarities while at the same time finding an arrangement for the self and the other. This process not only defines a space, but creates one, 'com-posing' instead of deconstructing.

In the poststructuralist discourse the latter notion carries the greater credibility for its propensity to narrow down from the vague to the specific. Composing, in turn, has become implausible – not only in the sense of 'unconvincing' but also as being 'unlikely'. I posit that it has become the composer's task or even duty to reinstate trust in this process.

d) one-off dedication

Perhaps the most radical 'restriction' of *The Songs of Madosini* lies in its deliberate dedication to a single individual. Written as a unique and personal homage to Madosini and based specifically on her music and performance style, it cannot be performed by anybody else. The manifestation of the work requires her active involvement. Its realization depends not only on her availability, but just as much on her willingness 'to play along'. *The Songs of Madosini* can only be a 'temporary' work, as all its possible performances are restricted to Madosini's lifetime; beyond that its feasibility ceases to exist.

This specific dedication was further constrained by significant natural barriers presenting themselves in differences of age, ethnicity, language and cultural conventions. These could become insignificant once the ongoing translations had uncovered a shared passion: It proved that both Madosini and I were inspired by the (then novel) idea of a truly unified South African nation¹³⁶ and the propensity of a musical collaboration to substantiate this notion. Responding to what we perceived as an implicit call to contribute to the realization of this grand idea, we felt surprisingly comfortable to invest in a highly improbable mode of collaboration, of which the outcome was fully unpredictable. From there on the project had a clear direction and could

¹³⁵ Cilliers, *Difference, Identity and Complexity*, 61.

¹³⁶ In *Ndibona uMadiba sophitsho* Madosini explicitly mentions and hails Madiba (Nelson Mandela's clan name and nickname), for having finally 'opened this road' for all South African citizens.

successfully be pursued in spite of being the result of a highly fragile and most improbable relationship between two individuals from very different backgrounds.

And yet, perhaps the more important consequence of the process has been the establishment of a truly constructive, mutualistic (reciprocally complementary) *human relationship as a result of the composition*. Defining the latter as a *means* rather than an *end* shifts the emphasis significantly from a *professional musical* to a *personal and social engagement*. The composition, and more specifically, each request for its performance has time and again demanded a new 'coming together'. These 'appointments' are more than mere rehearsals. Each time they require the resumption of the task of probing into the possibilities of musical expressions that could only arise from such a 'concerted' effort in a complementary and mutually supplementary manner. The resulting collaborative performances, by now spanning a period of more than a decade, have become something of a mutual musical journey, which – certainly from my perspective – has impacted decisively on my life.

I most gratefully acknowledge the privilege of having experienced a true transformation of conditions: My relationship with Madosini has grown from one of total foreignness to one of deep respect and even friendship. Furthermore this most 'improbable' composition has to date been one of my most frequently and consistently performed pieces.

CHAPTER 10

VARIATIONS ONLY: DIVERSITY AS THEME

PROTEUS VARIATIONS

or

PROTEUS' FLORIFEROUS TEMPERS

A musical portrayal of selected South African PROTEACEA for orchestra

Stellenbosch, 2006. Set of eight variations for symphony orchestra commissioned by the *Deutsche Welle* (Germany's international broadcasting service) for the South African National Youth Orchestra (SANYO) for a performance at the 2006 *Beethovenfest Bonn*. The commission, as well as the facilitation of the SANYO tour to Bonn and Berlin formed part of the *Orchestra Campus project*.¹ This on-going cultural exchange initiative, co-developed by the *Deutsche Welle* and the *Beethovenfest* since 2001, features the invitation of a selected youth orchestra from a different country every year to perform at the renowned Beethoven Festival, prominently positioning the premiere of a newly commissioned work by a composer of the same country.

The *Proteus Variations* are dedicated to the Betty's Bay Hack Group² in recognition of its continued vigilance and hands-on contribution towards conserving the especially rich indigenous biodiversity of the Betty's Bay area within the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve.

TITLES OF MOVEMENTS

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| 1. AULAX | Call and Response |
| 2. DIASTELLA | Chase and Cavalcade |
| 3. MIMETES | Chorale |
| 4. LEUCADENDRON | Continuum |
| 5. SERRURIA | Cavatina |
| 6. LEUCOSPERMUM | Coils and Curls |
| 7. OROTHAMNUS | Canzona |
| 8. PROTEA | Cape Chaconne |

¹ See www.beethovenfest.de/orchestercampus/.

² Hack groups (*hack* as in *cut, chop, hew, lop, saw*) are local initiatives of resident volunteers, who (quite literally and physically) combat aggressive and invasive alien plant species in areas where these threaten local indigenous biodiversity. Such independently and individually organized groups are found throughout the Western Cape, which boasts an especially rich and diverse floristic kingdom, which accordingly justifies and inspires special protection measures. The emergence of such groups may be interpreted as the manifestation of a local and self-responsible custodianship, often individually assumed in the absence of effective official environmental management.

The tiny coastal resort of Betty's Bay, just to the east of False Bay and situated within the UNESCO accredited *Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve*, counts as an extreme 'hotspot' of plant diversity. Therefore, the encroachment of foreign species (such as New Zealand Christmas trees, Rooikrans, Myrtle, Pittosporum, Black Wattle, Port Jackson, Spider Gum, Stinkboon and *Acacia Elata*, etc.), having the advantage of flourishing over-proportionately without being checked by natural enemies, is in this case an especially sensitive matter of great environmental concern.

The local hack group, currently convened by Ed Silberbauer, is part of the Kogelberg branch of the Botanical Society of South Africa and has been engaged in its 'Battle of Betty's Bay' since 1963. Having called its troops to arms (secateurs, tree-poppers, saws and garlon) without interruption on every 1st Sunday of the month – each onslaught followed by an all-important traditional 'aftermath' with tea and sandwiches – the group celebrated half century of hands-on environmental care with its 600th hack in February 2013. (More information at www.bettysbay.info/80-category-nature/79-merran-silberbauer) Introduced to this initiative by my parents, who – instead of retiring in Betty's Bay – became regular hackers, I have on occasion also participated in this type of fieldwork. From this experience stems my highest esteem for this very tangible engagement, dedication and tenacity with which a minority of activist residents express their special love of place or (to use Yi-Fu Tuan's term) 'topophilia' and with that their responsibility towards maintaining the environmental quality for which their home area is famed.

SYNOPSIS

According to Greek mythology the demigod *Proteus* is equipped with the faculty of prophecy. Hence mortals constantly beleaguer him, wishing to learn their future. To evade their curiosity and insistence, he assumes all sorts of different shapes and appearances to hide and make himself unavailable. However, a persistent questioner, who could force him to return to his original shape, would receive an answer.³

From this mythological narrative the adjective ‘protean’ derives its meaning of ‘variable, inconsistent, mercurial, volatile, whimsical, capricious’. These kinds of associations apparently struck the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, when he was studying some very unusual plant specimens sent to him from the Cape in the eighteenth century. Linnaeus (1707–1778), who is regarded as the founder of modern systematic botany and zoology because of his binomial taxonomy still in use today, was so intrigued by the newly discovered plant family whose various species assumed such vastly differing forms to the point of concealing their underlying relatedness, that he named them PROTEACEAE.

The composition of the *Proteus Variations* – composed amidst the Cape’s flowering manifestations of the ancient prophet’s mischievousness – was motivated by the wish to respond musically to the extreme diversity of forms, shapes and appearances found within the PROTEACEAE. The work consists of eight variations, each named after one of the Protea families endemic to South Africa. It accordingly reflects certain key features of their family traits. Many instances of circling or spiralling patterns may be perceived, as well as a wide array of different colours; similarly the forms vary from the minute to the elongated, the textures from the filigreed to the sweepingly expressive. Even the fact that some species feature individual male and female plants (*AULAX* and *LEUCADENDRON* are such a dioecious genera) finds its analogy in the juxtaposition of two opposite themes and occasionally evokes an instance of ‘call and response’ between the two.

Most importantly, the Proteas inspired a novel approach to the conventional form of theme and variation: In this case there is no (single) theme, for which one of the species should be the most important to define the norm? Only variations exist. As they all share certain similarities they gradually contribute to a connecting idea or some form of identifiably overlapping expression. Yet this kind of identity or kinship cannot be postulated or extracted per se, but only emerges from the comparison of its varied emanations. In other words, it is an identity that arises from a play of difference. Thus (the principle of) *variation* becomes the *theme* itself.

The music reflects this observation made with regard to the Proteas’ diversity: their essential identity or structure cannot be summarized in a single manifestation. Only an appreciation of the complexity and the entirety of their manifold appearances will eventually lead to a deeper understanding of the style and manner of expression with which they contribute to the rich local biodiversity and adorn the Cape’s mountain slopes.

It is worth noting that the King Protea (*Protea cynaroides*) is South Africa’s ‘national flower’. Its sheer splendour and impressive size may have been sufficient reason to choose it as a symbol for an aspiring country. However, the symbolism goes much deeper if one perceives the specific flower as member of a botanical family boasting an unparalleled range of diversity. What could more appositely and poetically refer to the country’s diverse cultural fabric?

With its subtle but frequent references to musical devices from indigenous African traditions, the set of variations naturally embraces the local musical diversity as well. In doing so it advocates an interpretation of the national symbol in its widest sense. It is my wish that a composition such as this may contribute to a body of work, which – while remaining in a ‘classical’ sphere – deliberately and immediately engages with what is close at hand, thereby linking locution to location, history and nature, and sounds in resonance with its environment in a responsive and responsible manner.

On commissioning the work, the representative of the *Deutsche Welle*, Gero Schließ, conveyed that the new work should express or transport ‘something uniquely South African’. Having just completed my African opera *Masque*, which involves a combined orchestra of indigenous African and European instruments, my immediate

³ ‘Protean’, *Word Histories and Mysteries: From Abracadabra to Zeus* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, Boston 2004)

thought was to resort to such a device again in order to represent South Africa's cultural demography and physically and acoustically to bring indigenous African music to Germany.

However, as SANYO is traditionally an exclusively western orchestra, and its audition system and chosen repertoire does not include African instruments, this option would have caused too many logistical challenges. On considering another truly 'representative' or uniquely South African topic, the Cape Floristic Region sprang to mind. Several reasons made this a very attractive choice. The fact that it would side-step overtly political questions, but nevertheless engage with a highly relevant national and ecological issue made it an appealing option. It would convey something of the natural riches with which South Africans are amply blessed, and with which I had already previously engaged in *Fynbos Calling*.⁴ Moreover, it would allow for a continuation of the explorations of the possible relatedness between music and ecology in a given region.

BACKGROUND

THE CAPE FLORISTIC REGION

The south-western most coastal strip of the African continent (i.e. the area from Vanrhynsdorp in the northwest to Port Elizabeth in the southeast) is home to a flora that is so distinct from that of the rest of the continent, that it is often described as a floral kingdom in its own right.⁵ A division of the world into six discreet plant kingdoms, suggested by the British botanist Ronald Good,⁶ defines and delimits a terrestrial zone throughout which a certain selection of species occurs. According to this system, which also roughly coincides with zoological kingdoms, the whole northern hemisphere (Asia, Europe, North America) is subsumed under a single ecozone, the Boreal (or Holarctic),⁷ covering some 42% of the earth's surface. Against this the CFK⁸ covers but 0.04% of earth's landmass and therefore seems incomparable small to count as a 'global zone'. Moreover, the usefulness of such very broad distinctions seems questionable and, as Goldblatt and Manning note,⁹ there are no universally accepted criteria for this division.

The controversy over a definition should not detract from the fact that the Cape Floristic Region is indeed a most unusual and botanically remarkable area. It boasts a diversity of approximately 9 000 vascular plants (these include all ferns, gymnosperms and angiosperms), of which the vast majority (counting 8 888 in the year 2000) are flowering plants, in a strictly limited territory of a mere 90 000 km².¹⁰ Moreover, about two thirds of these plants are endemic, i.e. are confined to this region and occur nowhere else on earth.¹¹

In this context it is often enthusiastically reported that for its size, the Cape floristic region hosts the world's richest floral diversity. This statement must be qualified slightly. Measuring diversity on a local scale (for a given delimited area) the most diverse habitats on earth are the tropical rainforests with 'local richness' ranging from 130 to 190 species per km².¹² For the Cape region this local (alpha) diversity averages around 65 species per km².¹³ However, where the distribution of its diversity in fact exceeds that of any other vegetation type is in the low 'proportion of species that is shared between sites'.¹⁴ The Cape flora is uniquely characterized by

⁴ *Fynbos Calling*, multimedia concerts and CD & CD-ROM. Collaboration between the Ensemble Refugium and the Dizu Kuduhorn Band, combining European and African period instruments, 'reading' the natural diversity of Fynbos as symbol for the Cape's cultural diversity. (mucavi records, Stellenbosch 2002).

⁵ Peter Goldblatt & John Manning, *Cape Plants. A conspectus of the Cape flora of South Africa* (National Botanical Institute of South (SANBI), Cape Town 2000), Introduction.

⁶ Norman Myers in the introduction to Richard Cowling, & Dave Richardson, *Fynbos: South Africa's Unique Floral Kingdom* (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew 1995), 7; John Manning, 'Field Guide to Fynbos', (2007), 8, etc.

⁷ See <http://global.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/269108/Holarctic-region>.

⁸ CFK: Cape Floristic Kingdom.

⁹ Goldblatt & Manning, *Cape Plants. A conspectus of the Cape flora of South Africa*, Introduction.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Manning, *Field Guide to Fynbos*, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

exceptional numbers of 'highly localized species'¹⁵ and thus by the rate 'at which species give way to others across environmental and geographical gradients'.¹⁶ Whereas one will typically encounter a similar array of more or less the same plants (whether of high or low diversity) in all other regions of the earth, the species occurrences in the Cape are not at all evenly spread. Each microenvironment (as for example determined by specific soil quality, altitude, temperature, humidity, aspect relative to sun and wind exposure etc.) boasts its own unique assemblage of plants. Hence hiking in the Cape is so especially rewarding, as the explorer William Burchell already noted back in 1810:

All that I had pictured to myself of the riches of the Cape in botany, was far surpassed by what I saw in this day's walk. At every step a different plant appeared; and it is not an exaggerated description, if it should be compared to a botanic garden...¹⁷

Under these circumstances plant endemism is very often synonymous with confinement to very specific and limited localities. In some cases only very small numbers of extant individuals exist in single territorial pockets, rendering such species direly vulnerable to localized disturbances that would be negligible under circumstances where species are more evenly and widely distributed.

It seems counterintuitive that precisely the prevailing harsh environmental conditions (nutrient-poor soils, extremely hot and dry summers, gale force winds, salty coastal air, frequent wild fires, limited physical space in a narrow belt between coast and mountains, etc.) should foster such a remarkable diversity of species.¹⁸ No fully satisfactory material explications have been given for this phenomenon.

One theory holds that 'even slightly differing ratios of limiting soil nutrients constitute microenvironments that are sufficiently different to permit a greater variety of plant species to occupy a given area than is the case in more fertile soils...'¹⁹ Another is the existence of a great 'diversity of microclimates that characterises the Cape Floristic Region as a result of its varied topography, soils and rainfall patterns...'²⁰ In addition, fire plays an important role 'in disrupting the succession of species and in providing opportunities for different survival strategies'.²¹

I doubt that any research will one day reveal 'material reasons' for this remarkable diversity. Instead I suggest an attempt to understand this phenomenon from a systems perspective. While we will never be able to 'explain' scientifically why forms of life emerge in certain ways, it seems that not only overtly favourable conditions constitute 'ideal' habitats. Apparently, constraining conditions may be especially enabling, resulting in a proliferation of survival strategies, in this case that of species diversification.

FYNBOS

As will have become clear by now, the Cape Floristic Region is no uniform area and is therefore subdivided into at least seven distinct vegetation types.²² Of these the Fynbos is the largest, covering 41 000 km² and thus almost half of the area under discussion. As it contains 70-80% of the region's species, Fynbos – taken on its own – does in fact constitute one of the most species-rich vegetation types.²³ In this regard it has received widespread publicity. Fynbos has become a buzz-word, not only in botanical circles, but also in the tourism industry, which is actively promoting it as natural heritage of the Western Cape. In this context it is often used

¹⁵ Manning, 8.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Burchell quoted in Ibid., 14.

¹⁸ Manning, 14.

¹⁹ Ibid., 15.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 9. Manning lists Fynbos, Strandveld, Renosterveld, Forest, Karroid shrubland, Albany thicket and Grassland.

²³ Ibid. 14.

synonymously for the whole Cape Floristic Region, which is thus technically not correct. (To confuse matters even more the 'Fynbos biome' refers to the two vegetation groups of Fynbos and Renosterveld together.)²⁴

While Fynbos is 'one of the more distinctive vegetation types',²⁵ it is not altogether easy to define.²⁶ The name was first recorded by John Noble in 1868 as *fynbosch* and probably results from the first Dutch settlers' derogative description of the vegetation as consisting of mere *bosjes*,²⁷ noting the sad absence of much more useful trees. In fact, the near-absence of indigenous trees, which only occur along rivers in protective mountain gorges, is a conspicuous characteristic, once again accounted for by the poor soil and dry climate. Furthermore, Fynbos may be described as an 'evergreen, hard-leaved shrubland ... occurring on heavily leached sandstone and limestone...'.²⁸ Its appearance is determined by the predominance of a relatively small number of plant families – half its species are provided by just thirty three Cape lineages, plant groups that have originated in the Cape.²⁹ The overall diversity derives from the vast numbers of species within these few families. This phenomenon greatly contributes to the appeal of Fynbos: Its diversity is *strictly related* and appears as seemingly *infinite variations* on but a *few consistent themes*. In fact its always-varying assemblages of plants more often than not convey the impression of deliberate 'compositions', in which assortment, colours, hues, distribution and shapes have been carefully arranged in the most sensitive manner. Rather than presenting extreme differences, the vegetation emphasises nuanced, sometimes minute variations that easily escape the cursory glance, but all the more reward punctilious observation.

The five largest Fynbos plant families are ERICACEAE (Heaths), PROTEACEAE (Proteas), RESTIONACEAE (Restios, rushes), RUTACEAE (Citrus family) and RHAMNACEAE (Phyllicas), which in sum already contribute 1 730 species.³⁰ Within the Cape Floristic Region the presence of any of these five indicates the vegetation type as being Fynbos. (According to other sources³¹ the Restios provide the 'diagnostic' factor: without Restios no Fynbos.) However, as all these families obviously share a preference for certain environmental conditions, they most commonly all appear together and – in combination with a host of less conspicuous and less dominant plants – contribute to the specific amalgamation and coalescence that is Fynbos.

Another way to 'define' Fynbos is by means of its growth forms, which might coincide with plant families, but will allow for some overlapping. The major growth forms are tall shrubs with large leaves (proteoids); heath like shrubs (ericoids) including needle-leaved species, wiry reed like plants (restioids) and bulbous herbs (geophytes).³²

Interestingly, none of the defining Fynbos families are restricted to this vegetation type: 'Only' 670 *Ericas* occur in Fynbos, while this family boasts 4 500 species worldwide.³³ Of the total of approximately 1 400 *Proteas*, only 330 species occur in Fynbos and apart from 320 Fynbos *Restios*, 80 more species occur elsewhere.³⁴ However, of the species occurring in Fynbos a very high percentage is endemic – on average 77%, but 96.6% for *Ericas*, 92% for *Restios*, 97% for *Proteas*.³⁵ In this respect this minute floristic enclave manifests as a most extraordinary botanical region, adding – even in global terms – a remarkable extension to total terrestrial species diversity. Expressed in figures: Fynbos covers only about 0.028%³⁶ of terrestrial surface, hosts

²⁴ South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI), www.plantzafrica.com/vegetation/fynbos.htm.

²⁵ Manning, 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Sean Privett: www.fynboshub.co.za/fynbos-conservation/what-is-fynbos/ [accessed 7.7.13]; Els Doratt Haaksma, & Peter Linder, *Restios of the Fynbos* (Botanical Society of South Africa, Cape Town 2000), 3.

³² Sean Privett: www.fynboshub.co.za/fynbos-conservation/what-is-fynbos/ [accessed on 7.7.13]

³³ Manning, *Field Guide to Fynbos*, 10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Peter Goldblatt, & John Manning, 'Plant Diversity of the Cape Region of South Africa', *Annals of the Missouri Botanical Garden* vol. 89, 2, (2002), 286.

³⁶ Ratio of total global land surface of the earth (148,9 million km²) to that of Fynbos (401000 km²) expressed in percentage.

14%³⁷ of all *Erica* species worldwide, 73%³⁸ of all *Restios*, 22%³⁹ of *Proteas*. The ratio between available area and species contribution is thus 1 : 514⁴⁰ for *Ericas*, a staggering 1 : 2 670 for *Restios* and 1 : 828 for *Proteas*.

While I am not a trained botanist and cannot therefore offer a scientific interpretation of these figures, it seems clear that what has been presented here is something highly unusual. The Cape Floristic Region must be recognized for an exceptional rate of speciation, the 'birthplace and habitat' of a large array of globally unique and, moreover, in many cases spectacularly beautiful plants. Ever since I have come to appreciate the peculiarities and riches of Fynbos, it has enthralled me and kept me marvelling. I certainly underwrite Norman Myers's exuberance: 'The Cape Fynbos is a wonder of the world'.⁴¹

PROTEACEAE

As explained above, the South African *Proteas* are Fynbos-defining plants. While many of these species are endemic, the family as a whole is not. PROTEACEAE occur only in, but throughout the Southern hemisphere and contribute to the indigenous plant species of South America, Southern Africa, Australia, New Zealand and the south-western Pacific Islands.⁴² This is considered a 'Gondwanan distribution', meaning that the plant family must have existed before the current southern continents began to drift apart from the presumed ancient supercontinent Gondwana. It also implies that this is a truly ancient family, which had already developed into two subfamilies (the *Proteoideae* and the *Grevilleoideae*) before the continents split.⁴³ This geographical event is currently dated to have occurred ca. 160⁴⁴-140⁴⁵ million years ago. Considering the huge fascination that dinosaurs exert, having become extinct 'a mere' 65 million years ago, the survival and continued presence of a very much older life-form should be all the more awe-inspiring.

Of the estimated 1 400 species (in more than 60 genera) most occur in Australia (800 species in 45 genera), followed by Africa (ca. 400 species in 14 genera). In both cases the vast majority of species is restricted to the south-western regions of the continents (550 in south-western Australia, 330 in the south-western Cape).⁴⁶ Even within these restricted regions specific 'hotspots' sporting the greatest abundance of species occur. An example in the Western Cape is the Caledon area, which boasts more than 130 species.⁴⁷ Furthermore, certain species are fully confined to single localities, such as specific mountain ranges or even single mountain peaks.⁴⁸ It must be considered most remarkable that these plants have survived for so long, while all the while displaying such extreme sensibilities with regard to microclimatic and soil conditions, as well as many other ecological factors.

In all cases they seem especially well adapted to nutrient-poor soils, as a study of their leaves confirms. *Protea* leaves are typically leathery or woody, a structural feature arising from excess carbon produced during photosynthesis, due to a shortage of nitrogen and phosphorous. This not only makes the leaves drought and wilt-resistant, but also renders them indigestible to most insects (due to the high carbon to nitrogen ratio) and mammals (due to high level of tannins).⁴⁹ The remarkable feature to be observed here is that the solution to

³⁷ Of a total of 41500 *Erica* species 637 are Fynbos endemics, i.e. 14,16%.

³⁸ Of a total of 400 *Restio* species 294 are Fynbos endemics, i.e. 73,5%.

³⁹ Of a total of 1400 *Protea* species 319 are Fynbos endemics, i.e. 22,79%.

⁴⁰ 14,16 : 0,028 = 514.

⁴¹ Cowling, & Richardson, *Fynbos: South Africa's Unique Floral Kingdom*, 7.

⁴² Tony Rebelo, *A Field Guide to the Proteas of Southern Africa* (Fernwood Press, Cape Town 1995), 13.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See www.sciencelearn.org.nz/Contexts/Ferns/Sci-Media/Animations-and-Interactives/Gondwana-animation [accessed on 7.7.13].

⁴⁵ Rebelo, 13.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The Marsh Rose (*Orothamnus*) as the possibly most famous example is restricted to the Overberg (Ibid., 168). A less well-known case is *Leucadendrum bonum*, which is confined to several square kilometres in the mountainous terrain of Gideonkop near Ceres, where in 1995 only ca. 50 individual plants could be counted. (Cowling, & Richardson, *Fynbos: South Africa's Unique Floral Kingdom*, 134).

⁴⁹ Rebelo, *A Field Guide to Proteas*, 14.

one ecological problem, which has enabled the species to occupy an ecological niche not viable for other plants, has become advantageous in yet another way: The adaptation to nutrient-poor soils has concurrently capacitated a strategy for the protection from pests and grazers. As with the puzzling explosion of species diversity in response to difficult environmental conditions, I regard this as exemplary of the principle of 'enabling constraint'.

All Proteas are woody and perennial, but vary greatly in appearance. Sizes range from plants with underground boles from which only some branches emerge, to upright shrubs in all dimensions, to fully-grown trees.

Distinguishing them from most other flowering plants, Protea flowers have no separate sepals and tepals. Instead, a set of four elongated segments makes up the perianth – the flower proper.⁵⁰ Whereas 'normally' flowers (sepals and tepals) are far more conspicuous than their bracts, this relationship is turned around in Proteas: What appear to be colourful petals in some species (for example the famous Sugarbushes)⁵¹ are in fact only highly prominent bracts, which in some cases even fully enclose and hide the flowers from view. Often the bracts are hairy and sometimes they are adorned with prominent and dense 'beards' at their tips. Needless to say, their trims vary as greatly as do their colours: white, brown and pitch-black beards occur. In other genera again, bracts are fully absent. Here the perianths, usually separate and brightly coloured themselves, are prominently displayed (as in the well-known Pincushions).⁵² In yet another variation flowerheads occur axillary, hooded and often largely hidden by modified and hued leaves (such as in some species of the Pagodas).⁵³

The variation extends to the leaves, which can be isobilateral (flat leaves, with no difference between top and bottom surface), needle-like, grooved and divided,⁵⁴ hairless or covered with hair or denticles.⁵⁵ Even here the variation is boundless: Hairs may be short, long, straight or curled.⁵⁶ Even within the four categories of leaf-forms their individual sizes, shapes, geometrical arrangements and colour vary greatly, the latter encompassing a myriad of hues ranging from silver and grey through all shades of bright and matt green to almost brown. Moreover young leaves are often hued brightly red⁵⁷ (apparently to render them inconspicuous to colour-blind herbivorous insects).⁵⁸ In fact, close observation will reveal that no two species share the same exact same colour, nor shape, size and texture of leaves.

The list of variations is much longer and extends to strategies of pollination (by rodents, birds, insects and wind),⁵⁹ fruit storage and dispersal (plant-stored serotinous fruit, elaiosome-covered fruit inducing ant dispersal, cached fruit buried by rodents, water-dispersed fruits)⁶⁰ and defence against fires (serotiny, i.e. pyriscence,⁶¹ bud-protective barks, bole resprouting).⁶²

To my knowledge no other plant family displays such a degree of divergent features and characteristics as the Proteas. Considering its truly *protean* nature, Linnaeus's nomenclature is most appropriate. While the immense degree of variation must probably be ascribed to the result of a desperate struggle for survival, the term 'desperate' may well be replaced with 'most creative', indicating an important functional link between both

⁵⁰ Rebelo, 16.

⁵¹ See section 8. Protea, pg. 199.

⁵² See section 6. Leucospermum, pg. 193.

⁵³ See section 3. Mimetes, pg. 187.

⁵⁴ Rebelo, 14.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 15.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ See photograph at 1. Aulax.

⁵⁸ Rebelo, 15.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁶¹ Seed release is triggered by fire, rather than seed maturation.

⁶² Rebelo, 17.

notions: creativity is no luxury. Somehow this plant family's diverse appearances offer a natural 'encapsulation of the notion of variation'. Arguably the aesthetic appreciation of the magnificent diversity of Proteas rests on the phenomenon of the plants as manifesting as a natural 'encapsulation of the notion of variation'. But such an appreciation must include an ecological dimension. This 'play' with variety is no mere game, but has ensured this life form's overall sustainability over an incredibly long life span and in spite of severe threats. The obverse statement is just as valid: The precarious circumstances constantly necessitating new survival strategies have facilitated and even capacitated the utmost creativity. I suspect that these two concurrent and antagonistic natural facets hold true in art as well.

Before finally offering a detailed description of the composition itself, a reflection on the scope of a meaningful relationship between a cultural artefact (a composition in this case) and random living beings in a chance environment (the Proteas) will be postulated and substantiated beyond mere subjective description of associations or intents. For this purpose I revert once more to Edgar Morin's elaborations on the notion of 'open systems' and what he calls 'the ecological relation', traversing some of the terrain already explored in Chapter 9, but with a slightly different goal.⁶³

PRINCIPAL CONSIDERATIONS

As has been shown previously, Morin – from a differentiation of various 'qualities of openness', as well as the pivotal association of openness with the 'existential activity' – arrives at a 'radicalisation of opening', whereby he means that the 'idea of opening transcends that of system'.⁶⁴ There could be no such thing as system (bounded entity), if it were not for the fact that such a thing could at the same time be open. This is no contradiction, considering Morin's understanding of the border:

Whereas we tend to consider frontiers essentially as lines of exclusion, the word frontier, here, reveals the unity of the *double identity*, which is both *distinction* and *belonging*. The frontier is both *opening* and *closing*. It is at the frontier that the *distinction* and the *linking* with the environment is effected. Every frontier, including the membrane of living beings, including the frontier of nations, is a place of *communication* and *exchange*, while being a frontier. It is the place of *dissociation* and *association*, of *separation* and *articulation*. It is the filter which both *represses* and *allows* passage. It is an act by which osmotic currents are established and that which prevents homogenization.⁶⁵

Hence, Morin deduces that the environment 'is not only co-present [but] also co-organizing'.⁶⁶ In respect of a living 'system' its environment becomes an 'eco-system', a new reality born from interaction between all the beings or systems it cradles. As such it is far more than 'a reserve' of energy and shelter, but in fact one of the very 'dimensions'⁶⁷ of the life it supports.

Another way of expressing that the 'environment is permanently constitutive' of the beings living within it, is to say that these beings and organizations are 'permanently eco-dependant'. This reveals an indissoluble relationship between autonomy and dependence. Morin again:

[Living] beings can build and maintain their existence, their autonomy, their individuality, their originality only in ecological relation, that is to say in and by dependence on their environment... [T]he independence of a living being necessitates its dependence with respect to its environment.⁶⁸

Conversely the environment is not immune to the life and activity it 'allows' but will inevitably be changed by this. ('Praxis transforms: exports are not the restitution of import in, the fashioned is not the given. The outside

⁶³ Edgar Morin, *Method*, 201; heading of a subsection in a chapter titled 'Opening'.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 200, my emphasises.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 201.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 202.

is transformed under the effect of actions, reactions, products, and by-products.’)⁶⁹ But once again the transformation is twofold – constructive and concurrently destructive: ‘[L]iving beings transform their environment; in self-producing they feed and co-produce their ecosystem, while at the same time degrading it by their pollution ... predations (animal), depredations (human)’.⁷⁰ Therefore the notion of ‘ecological opening’ is not a mere ‘window on the environment’, or for that matter some ecological ‘window dressing’. Summarizing the relationship, Morin states:

Active organization and the environment, while at the same time being distinct from each other, are *in each other*, each in its own way, and their undissociable interactions and mutual relations are complementary, concurrent, and antagonistic. The environment both feeds and threatens, brings to existence and destroys. The organization itself transforms, pollutes, enriches. A phenomenal retroactive loop is going to unite the living being to its ecosystem, the one producing the other, and conversely.⁷¹

Translating Morin’s reflections into musical or cultural considerations applicable for an estimation of the relationship between the composition and the plants, I perceive the following to apply.

The document of the score (‘the work itself’), amounts to an inactive system (thing), containing the subjective ideas resulting from a personal process of interpretation and assimilation. As such it is ontologically and historically open, but organizationally effectively closed; in its current state it is completely unrelated to the plants. Neither score nor plants can be compared (other than in a wholly subjective manner), nor ‘measured’ against each other meaningfully.

However, with the music, as a cultural ‘activity’ encoded within the score, it is a different matter. Here an altogether different ‘system’ of systems (Koestler’s holarchies)⁷² applies: that of musicians being part of a profession being part of a society being part of a biosphere being part of a culture being part of a perception of an anthropo-geo-bio-logical existence. The circle closes on itself when considering that being thrown into such an existence also entails being responsive to music, to communication and information, i.e. to the world of ideas. But it equally means to be dependent on a life-sustaining ecology, on food, shelter, security, community and (perhaps foremost) to an actual (geographical) place somewhere on this planet.

Based on this understanding (of the living human as an ecologically, culturally and ideologically ‘open’ being) I posit that a ‘systemic activity’ (such as the one ‘inscribed’ into the score of the *Proteus Variations*) will essentially be part of this openness and thereby not only foster, but in fact establish a ‘connectedness, relatedness, belonging’ in a ‘Morinian’ sense.

Clearly the composition alone will not be able to establish such a link. It will require an ‘active opening’ from all involved to make the connections. But given this activity (the willingness to open or step out, observe, be aware) it may well play a role as catalyst, wake a dormant resonance, stimulate a repressed response. After all, the composition does not attempt to construct an imagined or wishful relationality. It only highlights one that already exists, though, under current cultural conventions, hardly carries any weight and is thus underdeveloped.

I therefore suggest reading this work as an emergent of the anthropo-geo-bio-sphere of South Africa’s Western Cape and the region’s natural and cultural habitat. The composition originated from this context, whence its content is informed and to which it deliberately responds. It takes its immediate cue from a unique and localized botanical aspect and in its design strives to relate its *musical expression* to that of the specific *floristic’ expression* (both ‘being tied’ and immediately ‘affiliated’ to the defined biosphere). While no direct, ‘verifiable’ links can be made between music and flowers, I posit that a relationship between both ‘worlds’ already exists via the (detour of the) systemic whole to which both belong. The work manifests as part of the

⁶⁹ Edgar Morin, *Method*, 202.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 202-203, original emphasis.

⁷² Koestler’s term; see footnote 103 in Chapter 3.

'opening' between *natural* and *cultural biome*, which, as Morin argues, transform each other, as they exist each within the other.

I further posit that this is more than a virtual construction. This would be the case if systems were mere phenomenological constructs, for which a particular observer would draw more or less subjective boundaries, determining what could and what should not belong to a determined system. Yet – as again Morin has shown – systems, and even more importantly, their 'openings' must be recognized as existing ontologically.⁷³

Without the *Proteas* the work would not have originated. Even on that primal level they are 'in' the score. Without the references they present to an impartial and outside observer, the composition would be meaningless, or certainly far less meaningful. Without the 'inspiration' (not in the romantic, metaphysical sense, but concretely, with regard to formal and structural solutions drawn from the observed biological and botanical organization), the work would not have found its current form. Without the interest of a commissioning agent (and behind that a music festival, i.e. a conservative 'classical' audience) in a particular global region, the work would never have materialized. Arguably, therefore, the *Proteas* are historically, existentially, informationally, organizationally, causally present in the composition.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPOSITION

In the following section I intend to explore a manner of *describing* and concurrently *contextually reflecting* on the work by employing a kind of 'triangulation'. Under each heading selected features of (firstly) the pertaining plant genus, (secondly) the musical movement and (thirdly) potential associations and relations between these two worlds will be highlighted, hopefully resulting in a rich and more comprehensive description than separate botanical and musical explications would provide. Once again, this procedure of describing 'something by means of something else' – in this case a musical description with reference to its flowery models – rests on the consideration that systems 'bind' varied and distinct components into a self-transcending whole. (As argued earlier, important characteristics of the components cannot be grasped on the component level itself, but only emerge from a systems perspective.)

The accounts of each movement are detailed in the sense that they cover all significant musical events. However, they engage with the music foremost dramatically and hardly analytically⁷⁴ in the classical (conventional) sense: The descriptions follow musical and dramaturgical processes comprehensively and only cursorily touch on questions of musical 'material' or compositional devices and techniques. This approach follows my compositional thinking and in that sense the texts offered here once more trace the compositional process. Arguably they translate the processual and relational thinking that gave rise to the musical score in the first place into a textual document. In that sense the following section is a *para-composition* or *meta-composition* and I present it here as yet another 'layer' of the musical work.⁷⁵ The somewhat 'flowery' formulations are intentional and hopefully permissible in the given context.

⁷³ While a particular observer can never 'overcome' his subjective observation of a system, this constrained perception does not reduce the system. The systems perspective relativizes constructivism (i.e. marginally corrects the radical constructionist view): the world does not exist because (and only when) I see it. Rather: because the world exists, I exist and hence my subjective view exists *as part of the world*.

⁷⁴ I believe that analysis is to a certain extent the opposite of composition and hence cannot be the domain of a composer.

⁷⁵ Considering the dense programmatic content of the composition, such a layer is perhaps indispensable? Affirming this question I hereby declare it – even though a later addition – to be constitutive to the composition proper.

1. AULAX

FEATHER BUSH / CHANNEL-LEAF⁷⁶

Greek: *aulax* – furrow; refers to tiny grooves in the leaves. Dioecious shrub (i.e. separate male and female plants) with narrow, needle-like leaves, which have a reddish colour when young;⁷⁷ male flowers appear in clusters on cylindrical spikes, female flowerheads are borne in a woody cup of modified branches.⁷⁸ Very small genus with only 3 species, all endemic to the Cape Fynbos.⁷⁹

Conservation status:

least concern (1 species), near threatened (2 species)⁸⁰



Fig. 12a: *Aulax*, male plant

CALL AND RESPONSE

Taking its cue from the dioecious nature of this genus, the movement is structured around two ‘opposite’ sets of material. They play on archetypal tropes of male and female characteristics, but deliberately extend this metaphorical play of difference further to create an inter-cultural allegory in which musical principles of respectively European and African origin are mirrored or offset against each other.⁸¹

The ‘male’ complex or theme with which the work opens, is embedded in simple quadruple meter, characterized by bright colours, rendered by trumpets, high strings and Glockenspiel, as well as sharply syncopated and dissonant accents. Initially the music is harmonically static (unchanging) but texturally ‘highly strung’, conveying an expression of edginess and tenseness. When the tension relaxes momentarily, it reveals a much gentler musical gesture. This consists of two major 6th intervals (in this context seemingly fragile), the first descending, the second rising again immediately from a lowered semitone (bars 5-6). Upon its repeat the motif is shortened, curls in on itself as it were, with the first note immediately connecting to the third, resulting in a major 7th interval, which then remains suspended (unresolved). (Figure 2)

Ex. 2: Opening of first movement (*Aulax*) with the ‘male’ (‘European’) theme highlighted in its distribution over various parts

⁷⁶ Rebelo, *A Field Guide to Proteas*, 215.

⁷⁷ Frank Rousseau, *The PROTEACEAE of South Africa* (Purnell South Africa, Cape Town 1970), 68.

⁷⁸ Terry Trinder-Smith, *The Levyns Guide to the Plant Genera of the Southwestern Cape* (Bolus Herbarium, University of Cape Town, Cape Town 2003), 137.

⁷⁹ Manning, *Field Guide to Fynbos*, 254.

⁸⁰ Plant species that are threatened or considered of ‘conservation concern’ are categorized according to their ‘national status’ on the ‘Red List of South African Plants’ published by the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) at <http://redlist.sanbi.org>. The categories reach from ‘least concern’ through ‘rare’, ‘vulnerable’, ‘endangered’ to ‘extinct’.

⁸¹ For a reflection on the problem of generic signifiers see Parenthesis VII in Chapter 9, pg. 147 ff.

For easy reference in the following description I shall call this motivic cell the work's 'DNA motif'. Coincidentally it consists of four notes, just as DNA consist of four nucleobases,⁸² the sequences of which are understood to encode genetic information. Without wanting to stretch this metaphorical comparison unduly, it is deliberately chosen, for the role of this minute motive is in fact better described as a *gene* than a *theme*. It is intended to function as an *initial catalyst*, rather than manifest as a *full-grown form*. It is considered an *inner theme*, not an *outward feature* and only shows on a morphological level indirectly, by having exerted its influence on the structural level. Furthermore, this idea does not evolve, but will on occasion reappear unchanged and thus act as *consistent genotype* (conserving the inheritable information or relational identity). By securing the structural integrity, it allows the concept of variation to be stretched beyond the conventional scope of *phenotypic comparability* (where only outward features determine the degree of relationality or difference). The example for this approach is of course taken from nature and in this case specifically from the highly diverse family of PROTEACEAE. Here the 'blossoming' of extreme phenotypic variety in spite of genotypic unity is a most remarkable feature.

In order to obtain a contrasting 'female' expression just about all musical parameters are changed: The second complex is introduced by the asymmetrical African time-line pattern (see *Figure 11*) played on the original double-bell, but doubled by flute and piccolo, whose changing pitches hint at a harmonic progression not traditionally associated with the rendition of this rhythm. A slightly slower tempo now applies, as well as a compound 12/8 meter, which is expected to imbue the new texture with an inherent lilt or swing. A short phrase, more fragment than tune, and determined by warm woodwind colours in a middle register, evolves melodically, starting from the very major 6th where the contrasting material had left off. (*Figure 3*)

Except for this single link of a 'shared' interval, fully different musical procedures apply otherwise. The structure of the first movement results from three such juxtapositions of both sets of material. The formal procedure rests solely in a gradual expansion and development of the respective material on each consecutive appearance. In this way the traditional notion of 'call and response' (due to its wide-spread occurrence in itself a broad signifier of musical practice in Africa) is concurrently upheld and transcended. As the pertaining material directly signifies the different sexes and extends this illustration of the dioecious plant to symbolize cultural representations from two different continents, the music assumes a strongly allegorical function.



Fig. 12b: *Aulax*, female plant

To be more precise, this last statement should probably rather read 'the music *may be interpreted* as having an allegorical function' as this semantic dimension relies solely on an apprehending performance and accordingly comprehending reception. And it might in fact be necessary to make yet another differentiation: The music *can be performed* in such a manner as to successfully communicate the implicit allegory. The three different versions of this sentence thus distinguish between the *text* of the composition, its *reading* and *realization*, but once again emphasize that they inseparably belong together.

All actual performances of the work to date have shown that the purposeful structural design towards expressing and conveying the pertaining metaphor can easily be overlooked. Although all the differences between the two thematic sets can be pinpointed on a purely material level (as demonstrated in the description above), their propensity to refer to different worlds or ideas cannot be tied to the text directly. This will only

⁸² The four nitrogenous bases are guanine, adenine, thymine, cytosine. Their abbreviations – G, A, T, C – are the famous four letters, of the 'genetic alphabet', a metaphor for the fact that specific sequences of the nucleobases on the DNA strands are interpreted as 'codes' for the production of correlating amino acids. Correct sequences of amino acids in turn produce functioning proteins. John Blamire, *The Genetic Code*, 2000, <http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/bc/ahp/BiolInfo/GP/GeneticCode.html> [accessed on 5.7. 2013].

emerge from the recognition of an aspect of implicit (unwritten) performance practice conventions to be read from 'in between the lines'. However, as a score will never be able to contain truly comprehensive performance instructions, the aspect of unwritten performance conventions must *always* be taken into account.⁸³ A congruent performance of the text thus relies on the judicious assimilation of explicit and implicit information. I posit that such a reading (and ensuing realization) may well result in effectively conveying the intended metaphor. This amounts to a musical parable about the procedure of *gradually increasing enumeration of identification* facilitated by 'calling for' and 'responding to' difference. It advances the *possibility of the emergence of a universal dialogue*, emanating from such an initial gauging or 'play'⁸⁴ of difference.

1 poco meno mosso
♩ = 100

The musical score is for a piece titled 'Female theme' of Aulax. It is in 12/8 time and features a variety of instruments: Piccolo, Flute 1, Clarinet 1, Bass Clarinet, Bassoon 1, Bassoon 2, Double Bell, and Wood-blocks. The tempo is marked 'poco meno mosso' with a metronome marking of 100. The score shows the instruments entering after a bell pattern. Dynamics include *mp*, *dim.*, *pp*, *sfp*, and *mf*. A 'c.f.' (crescendo) marking is present above the Clarinet 1 and Bassoon 1 staves.

Ex. 3: 'Female theme' of Aulax in bassoon and clarinet entering after the bell pattern has established its asymmetrical swing.

2. DIASTELLA

SILKY PUFF

Greek: *diastellein* – to separate, literally 'place apart'; refers to the distinctly separate petals, an unusual feature, as they commonly overlap and even densely dovetail in other Proteaceae genera. Bisexual plant; erect or creeping shrublet flowering in small terminal, many-flowered heads with inconspicuous bracts;⁸⁵ overlapping leaves, oval to needle-like; 8 species with two subspecies,⁸⁶ all endemic to the Cape Fynbos.⁸⁷

Conservation status: rare to vulnerable⁸⁸



Fig. 13: Spiky florescence of Diastella

⁸³ As was shown in Chapter II this is one of the central HIPP considerations and motivations.

⁸⁴ Paul Cilliers, 'Difference, Identity and Complexity', *Philosophy Today* (2010), 58.

⁸⁵ Trinder-Smith, *The Levyns Guide to the Plant Genera*, 137.

⁸⁶ Rebelo, *A Field Guide to Proteas*, 155.

⁸⁷ Manning, *Field Guide to Fynbos*, 270.

⁸⁸ See <http://redlist.sanbi.org/genus.php?genus=806>.

CHASE AND CAVALCADE

The musical 'seed' of this movement is a short motive which may be described as a twirl followed by a relaxing but expressive gesture:



Ex. 4: Seed motive of *Diastella*

Elements of this motif are juxtaposed in different voices and different positions in such a manner that the 'twirls' add up to a densely intermeshed texture. The immediate, near-literal musical depiction (or is it after all *figurative* in this case?) is that of the image of a densely blossoming *Diastella* with its conspicuous, separate-petaled flowers somewhat resembling the interlocking 'clockwork' of cogwheels. The two distinct components of the motivic 'seed' yield two developments:

The one is a proliferation of the 'twirling' figure, which – as it meanders through the musical texture – literally is a 'motive' (driving, propelling) motif [sic], 'chasing' its kinetic impetus from voice to voice, from 'locomotive' to 'locomotive'. Activating its catalytic function from the very beginning (*Figure 5*), it permeates and thus largely determines the musical texture. Here 'texture' is not meant as mere 'background', but both background and foreground – the musical 'substance' as a whole. The twirl 'obsesses' all material; no instrument / participant / component is exempt from its stimulating or 'genetic' influence.

Chase and Cavalcade

A musical score for the opening of *Diastella*. It features three staves: Harp, Violin I, and Violin II. The Harp part has a tempo marking of quarter note = 120 and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The Violin I and II parts are in 4/4 time. The score includes various dynamics such as *mp*, *p*, *mf*, *f*, and *p*, along with 'espress.' markings. The first few notes of the Violin I and II parts are highlighted in yellow, indicating the 'cogwheel motif'. The Harp part has a sequence of notes: E, F#, G, A, B, C, D, with a sequence of triplets marked '3'.

Ex. 5: Opening of *Diastella* (with 'cogwheel motif' highlighted initially).

The other development is a gradual expansion of the initial 'expressive gesture' which is, however, interrupted several times and only fully 'takes off' in a melodious and sweeping phrase in the strings between bars 90 and 100.⁸⁹ This coincides with a continuous strand of twirls in the woodwinds, ever increasing in density in the exact same passage. Thus at this moment two fully developed elaborations of both germinal elements are deliberately offset in what may be perceived as a complex, mature whole. The relation between the two textures (motives/kinds of material) manifests as concurrently antagonistic (on a rhythmical, motoric level) and complementary (on a harmonic level) resulting in a rich interaction between high ratios of difference and hence a steep energy gradient. The momentary free flow of kinetic energy is, however, cut short by a formulaic gesture imposed onto the texture by rudely intruding brass and percussion immediately leading to a finite cadence (bars 98-100).

This then is the 'final blow' to all 'budding tendencies' resulting from an antagonistic, increasingly inhibitive formal process, which has been constraining all developments from the very beginning. It results from a musical

⁸⁹ Proteus Variations, score, pg. 13-15.

allusion to the relative smallness of the *Diastella* plants (in comparison to those of other genera) by means of a playful and jocular miniature ‘march’. By its very nature this formal element fundamentally prohibits all growth or development beyond a certain scale. It is already inconspicuously present in the harp part at the very beginning (see Figure 5), and repeatedly reappears in the form of cadential interruptions, in bars 74, 80, 87 and in the already mentioned instance at bar 98. But it only materializes fully – after finally having subjugated the ‘growth forces’ – in its rendition on the piccolo, in what might be described as a toy-like ‘cavalcade’ from bar 120 onwards: (Figure 6)

Ex. 6: The ‘miniature march’, the constraining element in *Diastella*.

If read as latin, the name *Diastella* contains a reference to the notion of ‘star’ and in fact the vernacular Afrikaans name for the plant in question is *Sterretjies*⁹⁰ (starlets), obviously referring to small but brightly coloured flowers. This idea is also taken up musically, or rather emblematically. Once the restriction to a miniature musical format has been finally determined at bar 100 any further formal development has become futile. The initially germinal material has been – as it were – ‘deactivated’ and in two final fragments reveals nothing but its static structure, which is no longer generative. In this ‘constellation’ the ‘star’ is clearly visible in the score and perhaps even symbolically ‘audible’ for a listener perceiving tone registers spatially (Figure 7): one axis follows the pizzicati from low to high, the other crosses downwards with the twirling motive. But here it is a mere emblem, no longer a ‘motive’.

In the ensuing coda the 4-note *DNA* theme appears once again (in the solo viola, bars 114-115). This is the sole indication as to the ‘relatedness’ of *Aulax* and *Diastella* and should demonstrate the point made in the previous section about the relationship of the variations being ‘genetic’ rather than ‘thematic’ (i.e. thematically audible or morphologically perceptible). The distinction between genotype and phenotype has been pivotal for the concept of variation applied here. It is based on the observation that there must be ‘room for play’ between the genetic blueprint of characteristic traits and their actual physical (phenotypic manifestation) as it is from this ‘measure of freedom’ that the propensity of life to evolve into ‘related diversity’ arises. Hence the suggestion to rethink the conventional notion of musical ‘variations’ from the perspective of organic (dynamic, seminal, inherent) rather than structural (rigid, formal, external) organization was close at hand.

Ex. 7: *Diastella*, bars 101-102. The ‘X’ emerging in the score refers to the star-flower emblematically.

⁹⁰ Rebelo, *A Field Guide to Proteas*, Afrikaans edition, 149.

3. MIMETES

PAGODA BUSH

Greek: *mimetes* – imitator. The reason for the name seems unclear. My interpretation is that it refers to the feature of the leaves ‘imitating flowers’. The plant is in fact highly conspicuous in the veld and visibly from afar for its hued leaves, becoming all the more brightly coloured towards the tip of its branches, hooding and almost fully hiding the inflorescences. All species grow into tall shrubs; leaves overlap densely, completely cover the stem and display markedly coloured glandular teeth at their tips.⁹¹

Conservation status: 13 endemic species to the Cape, of which only one is not threatened.⁹²



Fig. 14: *Mimetes*

CHORALE

Mimetes is a flamboyant genus and the music attempts do justice to this feature. A broadly sweeping and lushly harmonized chorale summons the impression of equally sweeping strokes of hues and colour which dense stands of *Mimetes* often lend to the Fynbos landscape. This time there are no formal constraints. From a modernist point of view, the symmetry and unending (unbroken) predictability of the chorale phrases might be considered ‘limiting’ (preventing a more experimental approach to the material) as they result in highly conventional (and therefore rather undifferentiated), large signifiers. However, the invocation of the comprehensive notion of ‘chorale’ – including its stirring, simplified, homophonic and chordal progression, inviting collective and communal emotional involvement by delineating an elementary, principally participatory structure – is fully intentional here. It not only grants formally and psychologically necessary repose from an otherwise extremely filigreed and rather nervously busy score; it also wishes to establish an unambiguous reference point in order to juxtapose, offset, demonstrate and clarify a differing musical principle.

Therefore, against the broad chorale phrases in the strings, the woodwinds (in unison, spread over several octaves and with often changing timbres) hold on to the asymmetrical African time-line pattern, which was first introduced in connection with the female *Aulax* theme.⁹³ Whereas these two musical principles – archetypally representative of distinctly European and African traditions respectively – seem irreconcilable for a moment, a remarkable complementarity soon emerges: The African rhythm acts as a reliable driving force, constantly energizing the sustained string phrases. In return the clear harmonic progression derived from the chorale melody integrates and directs the rhythmical pattern, persuading it to develop a melodic logic of its own.⁹⁴

Chorale

Ex. 8: Excerpt from opening of *Mimetes*. The choral theme ‘forces’ the time-line pattern into a melodic shape.

⁹¹ Trinder-Smith, *The Levyns Guide to the Plant Genera*, 136.

⁹² See <http://redlist.sanbi.org/genus.php?genus=804>.

⁹³ 1. movement, bar 12.

⁹⁴ I vividly recall the pleasant surprise (while composing this section) on discovering just how well and ‘organic’ this specific combination would fit, most certainly not constraining but, on the contrary, mutually enriching in both directions.

With its reappearance it is revealed that this pattern must count as a binding and structural element and therefore be recognized as ‘genetic’ and thus generative material. Its counterpart, the 4-note ‘DNA sequence’, duly makes its appearance in the coda as well, first slightly altered (to fit into a sequence) in the flute part (bar 162 ff) and then in its original form in the piccolo (bar 166). However, in this instance it acts as a ‘recessive’ genetic trait (if this comparison is permitted) whereas the time-line emerges as most dominant. In fact, the acquisition of a full musical ‘guise’ (‘Gestalt’) through the harmonic dimension in this movement emancipates it to form the structural backbone of the next, to which it attaches directly.

4. LEUCADENDRON

CONE BUSH

Greek: *leucos* – white, *dendron* – tree; translation of the vernacular ‘silver tree’ (*Leucadendron argenteum*).⁹⁵ Dioecious shrub or tree; female florets hidden in cones formed by overlapping bracts, male florets in small conical heads; fruiting cones are often conspicuously coloured and shaded and remain intact until burnt, the plant only resprouts after fire; 83 species, all Fynbos.⁹⁶

Conservation status: the red data list mentions 2 as extinct and more than 50 as threatened species.⁹⁷



Fig. 15a: *Leucadendron*, female plant

CONTINUUM

The female plants are the most noticeable members of the *Leucadendron* genus. When fruiting, they prominently display conspicuous cones: coloured, patterned, shaped and sized in endless variety. These cones – the most obvious distinguishing feature of the genus – characterize it as woody instead of flowery, and hence



Fig. 15b: *Leucadendron*, male plant (different species than 10a)

rather dull-coloured: shades of brown, grey, pale yellow, green and black prevail. Whereas the flowery species have generally inspired ‘tuneful’ musical responses (possibly because of the associative chain from *flower* and *colour* to *emotion* and thus *melodious* and *harmonious* textures), the woody ones seemed to call for an emphasis on the rhythmic elements, as though the absence of colour implied an omission of dense (i.e. harmonically structured) textures. Hence the orchestration of *Leucadendron* relies strongly on prolific use of percussion instruments, with a special emphasis on the woody colours of woodblocks and temple blocks.

Another feature of the cones, their spherical shape, decisively influences the compositional design. Translating the idea of *circular shapes* into a *musical expression* is attempted by employing circular (i.e. recurring) rhythms. Nothing seems more suited for such a purpose than the already mentioned time-line pattern: Due to its inherent asymmetry it retains a degree of unpredictability, which remains remarkably viable in spite of countless repetitions.⁹⁸



Ex. 9: time-line pattern, made up of 2+3+2+2+3 pulses

⁹⁵ Trinder-Smith., 137.

⁹⁶ Manning, *Field Guide to Fynbos*, 254.

⁹⁷ See <http://redlist.sanbi.org/genus.php?genus=794>.

18

The musical score for Ex. 10 is a full orchestral score with vocal parts. It features 18 staves. The top section includes woodwinds (Flutes, Oboes, Clarinet, Bassoons) and brass (Trumpets, Trombones, Bass Trombone, Snare, Timpani), all marked *f secco*. The bottom section includes strings (Violins I & II, Viola, Violoncello, Double Bass) and a vocal part (Contra Bn). The strings are marked with dynamics *f*, *sfz*, and *mf*. A specific rhythmic pattern in the string parts is highlighted in yellow, representing the 'time-line pattern' mentioned in the caption. The score is numbered 18 at the top.

Ex. 10: The grown-up (blown-up) Diastella march escaping momentarily from the ubiquitous time-line pattern (highlighted).

The 'rise' – more precisely, the unstoppable 'surge' – of the time-line pattern that originated in the previous movement, continues here. Bursting forth from the *chorale* – and fully discarding it in the process – it opens (into) a new musical section, not so much by *presenting* new material, but by immediately establishing the unyielding *continuity* of this material. Hence the idea of *continuum* defines the movement, consecutively and

⁹⁸ Perhaps this is the very reason for the 'African invention' of its asymmetrical structure: To express in musical terms the idea of circling, cyclic, recurring time, a device had to be found that would allow recurrent use without becoming redundant. At least to me this seems a plausible theory.

inevitably drawing ever more musical forces into its orbit, until the whole orchestra is involved, literally drawn and 'rolled' into the pattern.

In conventional terms one could offer the description that from bar 221 onwards 'the tutti orchestra plays the pattern in unison'. While this is technically correct, articulating it thus oversimplifies the process. I posit that a more appropriate description of the process (which would concurrently reveal an understanding of the notion of the 'environment acting or even in the system', as well as a thorough appreciation of a core idea of traditional African performance practice) requires an explanation that approaches the effect from exactly the opposite perspective: The continuity of the pattern has engulfed, overwhelmed the orchestra at this moment. (The orchestra cannot 'play' the pattern, just as the eddy cannot 'make' the river.)

Whenever a musical piece is structured on circling and rhythmically persuasive patterns, this is for me one of the strongest indicators of its 'African'⁹⁹ origin. Thus this device is employed here deliberately: Its defining presence in *Leucadendron* (moreover enhanced by the earthen colours) strongly speaks to the movement's African heritage.

Left to itself the pattern in the described unison passage begins to 'work' and change on itself. The notable disturbance of the previously regular sequence (of 3-2-2-2-3 pulse-units into unpredictable successions from bar 227 to 230) may be seen as vortices within a vortex. This instability momentarily dissolves the pattern and permits the reappearance of a previous feature, the *Diastella* march. Back in the second movement it was still in an embryonic state; now it manifests as an adolescent expression, utilizing the entire wind-band (bar 230-233; Fig. 12) for a happy and overtly pompous gesture. However, the 'gravitational force' of the time-line pattern remains unbroken. It immediately fills the interstice between the two phrases of the march (bar 232/233) and exerts a strong pull on the cadence (bar 233/234), causing it to accelerate, stumble forward and once again fall back into the inescapable, continuous whirl. A climactic eruption of sound – unashamedly employing the emotionally charged chorale-trope – celebrates this victorious moment, but in fact only reaffirms the hegemony of the pattern: As the noise subsides everything ebbs away into its persistent, circling, on-going continuation.

The coda of the movement, reached in bar 252, once again consists of only this feature, decreasing and sinking away into ever-lower registers (featuring the low strings, harp and bassoon and contra bassoon). Even as it becomes inaudible – spilling into the opening of the following movement, *Serruria* – its environmental 'background presence' has been established firmly, continuing to affect the musical realizations on the foreground.

The analogy here is that of the environment as 'eco-system' or ecological niche, as described above: The environment not only passively provides the space for a certain life form, but, as it is itself a result of the interaction of the beings in that niche, it must be regarded as 'one of the dimensions' of the system itself.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ See footnote 68 in Chapter 9, pg. 156.

¹⁰⁰ Morin, *Method*, 201.

5. SERRURIA

SPIDERHEAD

Named after James Serrurier, professor of botany in Utrecht in the early eighteenth century.¹⁰¹ Shrub or shrublet with needle-like or symmetrically segmented leaves; flowers usually greyish-pink or silvery. Ca. 50 species, all endemic to Cape Fynbos.¹⁰²

Conservation status: only 6 are considered not endangered.¹⁰³



Fig. 16: *Serruria*

CAVATINA

In analogy to the highly diverse and filigreed appearance of the plants on which it is modelled, this is the most complex of all the movements. It also marks the middle of the whole work and, as the fifth of eight variations it opens the second half of the work, bearing some resemblance with the first movement.

All principal material has by now been introduced. To some extent this movement relies on reshuffling, reassessing and re-assimilating previous ideas in what will appear as a somewhat fragmented or experimental form. The same may be said for the plants of this genus: They share the seemingly unordered whorls of perianths with *Mimetes*, the needle-shaped leaves with *Aulax*, the conspicuous stars of flowers of some of its species with *Diastella*, the prevailing silvery-white colours with *Paranomus*,¹⁰⁴ the spikiness with *Leucospermum*. For the first-time observer *Serruria* species might in fact seem like hybrids in which various elements of other, more familiar forms are merged – until one learns to appreciate the new combinations in their own right.

The opening of *Serruria* shows evolution at work. The initial *DNA motive* is stated repeatedly against a *pianissimo* version of the male *Aulax* theme (in the piccolo). In the process of this DNA replication various excerpts from its note sequence stay behind as a certain motivic residue and begin to take on a life of their own. From dense interactions and dissonant clashes between four high registered woodwind instruments (piccolo, flute, oboe, clarinet), which open the movement, a first upsurge ‘escapes’ (oboe, bar 285). Even though it subsides again, the syncopated accents from the *Aulax* theme act like obstacles in the texture, causing the turbulence to spread. An eddy arises in a low register (bass clarinet & viola, bar 294), quickens (bar 296), escapes in a whorl (bar 298) and calls forth simultaneous reactions from all available forces (bar 300) to appease the situation and redirect the proceedings into a moderate and balanced flow (bar 302). However, the rather frantic reaction from all sides actually reinforces the unrest and the next upsurge (bar 303) is immediately countered by an equally energetic suppressive gesture (downward line first in flute and oboe, then in piccolo and violins). The pressure between these two antagonistic forces builds up and the energy gradient increases sufficiently to force all material into the shape of the initial oboe-upsurge (of bar 285 repeated in bar 309). This incidental motivic figure is thus reinforced (or eroded into the surrounding texture), offering a preferential gateway¹⁰⁵ and thereby ordering and thus formalizing the musical idea. A new motif is born.

PARENTHESIS X: REFLECTIONS ON THE COMPLEX NATURE OF ORDERED STRUCTURE

The aforementioned explication based on the metaphors of ‘constraining forces’, ‘energy gradients’ and ‘preferential gateways’ is derived from a reflection on structure in complex systems by Tim Allen.¹⁰⁶ In order to

¹⁰¹ Trinder-Smith, *The Levyns Guide to the Plant Genera*, 136.

¹⁰² Manning, *Field Guide to Fynbos*, 268.

¹⁰³ See <http://redlist.sanbi.org/genus.php?genus=807>.

¹⁰⁴ This is another South African genus, which does not feature in the composition.

¹⁰⁵ See Parenthesis IX for an explication of this metaphoric terminology.

¹⁰⁶ Tim Allen, Joseph Tainter, & Et AL, ‘Dragnet Ecology – “Just the Facts, Ma’am”D: The Privileged of Science in a Postmodern World’, *Bioscience* vol. 51, no. 6, (2001).

underpin my argument and to once again suggest a way of linking musical considerations to complexity theory, it warrants unpacking Allen's line of thought:

In a somewhat complex, but highly insightful argument that reveals the non-linear relation between complexity (organization) and structure (order), Allen describes complex phenomena as 'highly organized systems exist[ing] far from equilibrium' as they receive (and rely) on 'significant energy inputs that are then dissipated to achieve order.'¹⁰⁷ All three factors – high levels of energy, steep gradients of energy dissipation and the generation of structure – are intrinsically and recursively linked to each other:

'Complexification ... depends on energy that is newly available. Without energy to support them, complexifying positive feedbacks languish as potentialities.'¹⁰⁸ However, raw energy alone is not sufficient to generate complexity, this 'quality' only arises in the conjunctive node where energy is dissipated or differentiated by constraints.

'Steep [energy] gradients generate structure' in the following manner: 'With the large flux on the gradient, positive feedbacks emerge until negative feedbacks generate constraints.'¹⁰⁹ The stronger the flux, the stronger the constraints and the higher the probability that 'the system's parts [are] reliably pinned against those constraints by the powerful flux down the gradient, making the system behave simply and predictably.'¹¹⁰

The counterintuitive insight here is that complex systems display simple behaviour: 'Complexification simplifies behaviour because the new, steep gradient forces energy to flow always in one direction... This process can be seen for instance ... in the emergence of whirlpools...'¹¹¹

Following this metaphor a *waterfall* (usually embodying the idea of completely free fall) is a highly constrained and highly ordered system (the steepest possible gradient forces energy to discharge in only one direction). Against this, water in a *dam* (generally understood as the ultimate constriction of free flow) is not constrained in a systemic sense and 'behaves' unordered (vague, unpredictable): it is not forced into a clearly determined 'behaviour' with respect to its immediate environment.

In contrast to this meandering, processual development, the following passage (bar 318 ff) seemingly appears out of the blue. Fully new material is presented in an entirely new texture (high, muted solo strings, with lightly punctuated interjections from selected percussion instruments). But then the 'mother and father' – female / African (bars 332-333, bar 336, bars 338-339) and male / European (bars 334-335) – themes appear in quick succession as in a dialogue. The close interaction with the new voice (bar 337, bar 340 ff) suggests that it could belong to a child. The theme has, in fact, 'inherited' traits from both sides: The syncopation is still prominent, yet without the sharp accents, the tension is now nimble, the highly-strung energy embedded into a swing, extrovert (bar 318) and introvert (bar 320) gestures balanced. But there are also new features, such as the idiosyncratic combination of very fast and suddenly very long notes. Most importantly, the theme is dynamic and forward moving and does not close in on itself as happens with both 'parent' themes. It possesses an openness requiring, perhaps necessitating, its continuation and development. It is a young theme.

This will not prevent it from sometimes repeating genealogically embedded patterns (bars 349-354 was already explored in the first movement and here and there runs into a dead-end cadence, in which the DNA material manifests prominently phenotypically as in the falling semiquavers pairs, bars 352-253). From bar 355 onwards it even seems as though a full recapitulation of the movement will be unavoidable. There is even greater – quasi universal – unanimity in placating the renewed viola and bass clarinet upsurge (this time the full *tutti* participates, bars 375-377). Fortunately, just as normality threatens to solidify well-established 'family traits' (bars 379-387), the child runs off (bars 389-391), straight into the maelstrom of:

¹⁰⁷ Allen et al, 482.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 480.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

6. LEUCOSPERMUM

PINCUSHION

Greek: *leucos* – white, *spermum* – seed. Shrub or tree boasting some of the most beautiful ‘Protea’ species; ‘entire’ (not fragmented) leaves with glandular teeth towards tips; busy-looking, clustered flowers far more conspicuous than bracts usually coloured brightly yellow or red, sporting profusely many distinctly protruding styles (like needles sticking in a pincushion). 48 species, all but 3 endemic to Cape Fynbos.¹¹²

Conservation status: only 8 species are not considered endangered.¹¹³



Fig. 17: *Leucospermum*

COILS AND CURLS

Leucospermum feature highly attractive, brightly coloured flowers, presenting themselves as indecipherable yet luring whorls of styles and perianths. The opening of the movement attempts to depict the dramatic experience of being drawn into such a spiralling gyre. As ever more instruments are pulled towards the centre of the whirl the DNA sequence of sixth intervals unravels ever faster (*Example 11*) until all sound plunges into a boiling, amorphous mass (bar 404).

As though bobbing on the roiling waters of a river down-stream of the rapids, the amassed forces of the orchestra jounce along in irregular swells; two- and three-pulse units derived from the time-line pattern are strung together in asymmetric bars (bars 409-419). The second vortex (bars 420-433) pulls the sound into a disappearing *piano*, after which the forces only very gradually regather. In what might appear once again as a broadly streaming sound, the underlying time-line pattern has been transformed into a lushly harmonized flow from which only specifically orchestrated ‘blocks’, emphasizing specific colours, occasionally stand out (bar 464 ff).

Whereas the time-line pattern was rigorously applied in *Leucadendron* in its woody, dry ‘African’ guise, it is transformed in this instance. As was already mentioned earlier, in this work colourful inflorescences have generally induced harmonically (rather than rhythmically) orientated musical responses. Thus *Leucospermum*, in recognition of its apparent appeal (not least to the European cut-flower market) accordingly receives a ‘colourful’ version of the pattern. However, its erstwhile quality of effectively conveying the expression of circling (cyclic) musical time is thereby suspended here.

I am always intrigued by the observation that harmonized patterns create the impression of a compelling ‘forward flow’. Seemingly the presence of an implied ‘vertical’ musical dimension capacitates the perception of (harmonic) progression.¹¹⁴ Even though any rhythmical pattern obviously equally ‘progresses’ chronologically, the impression of ‘gaining’ spatial and not only temporal ground, of transiting ‘through’ a formal configuration, seems somehow reserved to harmonically structured music. Conversely, the propensity to evoke the perception of ‘lingering time’ (procrastinating, dwelling in the moment) seems to be the preserve of musical designs relying for the most part on rhythmical structuring. The respective musical textures of *Leucadendron* and *Leucospermum* exemplify these two fully different musical domains.

¹¹² Manning, *Field Guide to Fynbos*, 268.

¹¹³ See <http://redlist.sanbi.org/genus.php?genus=795>.

¹¹⁴ See footnotes 67 and 68 of Chapter 9, pg. 156.

7. OROTHAMNUS

MARSH ROSE / PHOENIX ROSE¹¹⁵

Greek: *Oros* – mountain, *thamnus* – bush; very tall, erect plant with single stems, densely leaved when young, but baring its leaves with age; inflorescences hidden by rose-hued bracts. Only a single species exists in this family, which is confined to a few colonies on high altitude zones of the Kogelberg and Kleinrivier Mountains.¹¹⁶

Conservation status: vulnerable.¹¹⁷



Fig. 18: *Orothamnus*

PARENTHESIS XI: THE DRAMA OF THE MARSH ROSE

The history regarding the discovery, near extinction and conservation of the plant to which this music alludes, is dramatic and is equally dramatically recounted by Gerald McCann, a forestry officer in the Kogelberg, who became involved with the species' 'rescue'.¹¹⁸ It was first recorded in 1847, when Karl Zeyher¹¹⁹ (a German gardener and plant collector) received a specimen picked in the Overberg, which he pressed and sent to Germany.¹²⁰ Throughout the nineteenth century sensational finds such as this one inspired a veritable rage in Europe for exotic plants gathered from all over the world. Also amongst Cape Town's high society it became fashionable to boast with special flower arrangements of exotic local blooms.¹²¹ This demand created a profitable market for local flower pickers, typically descendants from run-away slaves, who had found refuge in the mountainous hinterland and thus became knowledgeable of remote picking sites. When, in 1913, a street vendor on Adderly Street offered some *Orothamnus* branches for the first time, this caused a sensation. Avid flower lovers were prepared to pay any price for the 'rare roses',¹²² and pickers soon realized they had struck a veritable goldmine. Even though they were occasionally stalked by boat from False Bay, those in the know kept the sites of the flower stands in the Overberg a highly-guarded secret.¹²³

It was not until 1928 that T.P. Stokoe (a British emigrant and self-taught botanist of fame) managed to persuade a flower picker to guide him to his secret colony in the Kogelberg.¹²⁴ He took the first photograph of a Marsh Rose in the wild, but was never able to retrieve that exact location again.¹²⁵ However, his subsequent 'expeditions' into the then still unexplored Overberg, during which he discovered further *Orothamnus* colonies, marks the beginning of scientific recordings of and research on the plant. It gradually became clear that *Orothamnus* occurred only in very confined colonies (typically numbering only a few individual plants) and was restricted to remote and hardly accessible marshy patches. As time passed, flower pickers would continue to appease the demand for wild flowers until the market started to disappear as the supply dwindled.¹²⁶

In 1967 a critical moment was reached when officials of the Forestry Research Institute (under which auspices the Overberg area had been placed) noticed that in spite of various conservation initiatives, the few remaining colonies were wilting and dying. As a desperate measure one of the sites (approximately the size of a

¹¹⁵ Recently added name, acknowledging the now confirmed finding that the plant's seeds *only* germinate after being stimulated by fire. Amida Jones in <http://fernkloof.com/articles/marsh-rose.pdf> [accessed on 7.7.13].

¹¹⁶ Trinder-Smith, *The Levyns Guide to the Plant Genera*, 136.

¹¹⁷ See <http://redlist.sanbi.org/species.php?species=809-1>.

¹¹⁸ Gerald McCann, *The Kogelberg. Mountains of the Marsh Rose* (Gerald McCann, Botrivier 2004).

¹¹⁹ In his honour the single species of this family is named *Orothamnus zeyherii*.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

tennis court) was enclosed with a high security fence.¹²⁷ Positioned on a mountain peak, its high visibility unfortunately attracted inadvertent attention, effectively counteracting the intention of granting the plants a respite from destructive intrusions, besides scarring the pristine area.¹²⁸ When most of these now captive plants also died, matters looked very bleak.

Desperate to avert the looming extinction of the species, Stokoe's reports on the remarkable resprouting of some *Orothamnus* sites after a disastrous natural fire in 1944, were carefully studied by officials. A courageous decision was made: to burn a large area of the Overberg in the first-ever controlled block-burn.¹²⁹ Amongst raging controversy the burn was conducted on 10 July 1968.¹³⁰ It proved to become a major breakthrough in Fynbos conservation. Within days rare flowers began to sprout and the first *Orothamnus* seedlings were duly recorded just six months later.

Since then the role of fire as one of the crucial elements in the life-cycles of many Proteas and Fynbos as a whole, has firmly been established. The Overberg is now formally protected in the UNESCO accredited *Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve*¹³¹ managed by CapeNature. For the time being it seems that the immediate plight of the March Rose is over. However, notwithstanding all conservation efforts, it remains a critically vulnerable species restricted to a single natural habitat, where even under ideal conditions only a few colonies carve their existence from the ecological niche of high-altitude, wind-protected, well-soaked perennially marshy terrain.

I have once trespassed into the core protective zone of the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve in search of one of the famed colonies. And what a find it was! Confined to a patch of perhaps the size of two ordinary suburban plots just beneath a mountain peak and nearly hidden by extremely dense Fynbos overgrowth, suddenly the characteristic elongated, single stems elegantly protruded from the mass of shrubs, elevating their sideways-drooping pair of flowers several metres high. It felt like stepping into a cathedral or some sacred grove: Humbled by the knowledge that these were about the only and very last individual representatives of a millennia-old lineage, hovering on the edge of extinction, but at the same time elated by the serenity of the scene and the graciousness of the plants, this was a sensational experience, which is vividly and unforgettably inscribed in my memory. It has decisively influenced this composition.

CANZONA

This is the longest, the most pensive and most sustained variation. It constitutes a homage to one of the rarest of all Proteas, with only a single species to the genus and only very few individual plants extant in a handful of restricted mountainous locations.

The music starts off with a two-part version of the slightly varied chorale theme from *Mimetes* (clarinet and bass-clarinet in bars 493-494). The first phrase lasts only two bars, after which all thematic proceedings are suspended for two bars before being resumed another two bars later. These interruptions become a consistent feature of the music, rendering any musical thought always together with an immediate reflection or reconsideration of the same. It conveys the sentiment of hesitant and very careful process, first always testing the ground before the next step. After the third thematic entry (bar 502) the music rushes to what immediately afterwards proves a premature conclusion, as once again the point of resolution (bar 506) is held in abeyance by another prolonged 'suspension phrase' (bars 506-525), at first consisting of the two alternating notes first sounded in the male *Aulax* theme at the very opening of the work and eventually tapering out and pausing aimlessly.

¹²⁷ McCann, *The Kogelberg*, 49.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 54. (I note that I am writing this on July 9th, 2013 – exactly 45 years after the event!)

¹³¹ See www.kogelbergbiospherereserve.co.za/.

Matters are resumed with the entry of new, yet closely related material (bar 526) – another solemn, chorale-like two-bar phrase, complete with conventional cadential suspension – this time, however, in full four-part harmonization. Once again the musical flow is withheld by a four bar long suspension (bars 528-531), before a little upsurge results in a prolonged thematic elaboration – which similarly fades away.

Ex. 12: The Orothamnus theme is but a singly remaining, vulnerable strand limited to a most restricted habitat.

A re-entry of the first theme (545, see Figure 17) introduces some new features. First, the idea of suspension has permeated the theme itself: Its cadential resolution is delayed for a whole bar at its first appearance. Second, the interspersed bars no longer only interrupt (and implicitly question), but occasionally rather resonate with (and confirm) the preceding proposal. The difference between suspension and resonance bars might not immediately be evident from the score alone (although it is harmonically motivated), but is hugely important for the performance: in the first case the energy and momentum drops, and has to be re-gathered with the onset of a new thematic entrance; in the second case it is sustained, possibly even amplified, allowing for a subsequent thematic resumption with the previous momentum intact.

The first instance of the resonating intermission is the interjection in bar 553. Two ‘deferral’ bars of the suspension sort follow (bars 555-556), but the ensuing thematic entry nevertheless musters another upsurge (bars 557-561), this time more successfully, as the point of resolution now evokes resonance where, in bars 561-563, the sounds linger and carry over. Resonating and delaying bars alternate so that in this instance the section comes to an end in a gentle reverberation (bars 569-573).

Bar 575 marks the second entry of the second theme (analogous to bar 545). The first interspersion (bars 578-579) is of the resonant kind, reinforcing the proffered material and raising it to a *forte* level. Two ensuing ‘suspension’ bars (bars 580-581) do not affect the growing momentum. The theme now musters a phrase of

seven bars (bars 582-588) before it is interrupted for the last time (bars 589-594). The resumed elaboration of thematic material leads without any interruption into a recapitulation of the initial chorale, this time in its varied form of the repeat in *Mimetes* (compare bars 603-605 with bars 140-141). Undisturbed by any interruption it gathers sufficient momentum for an immediate upsurge (bar 608 *ff*), the third of its kind, which now finally reaches the threshold to activate all forces (bar 614 *ff*) and thereby elevate proceedings to a new level of energy.

Whereas up to this point the texture of the music was fragmented and defined by the disparate colours of frequently alternating solo instruments, broad unison (and octave) lines now prevail. The hesitancy gives way to highly purposeful activity and the resonating bars become a thunderous acclamation from massed brass and percussion sections. After the lengthy preceding metamorphosis, unison horns present the thematic material in its final guise (bar 629) in which it sweeps to its climax (bar 643) ultimately to subside in a prolonged, ever-diminishing reverberation.

In an ensuing coda the two solely remaining violin sections reflect the outstanding aspects of the thematic material (bar 661-670). This leads them back to a recapitulation of sorts of the very first (native) thematic statement at the beginning of the work (compare bars 670-676 with bars 1-4) and even back to the 'genetic' ingredient (bar 677) discussed in the *Aulax* variation.

The last word, finally, is reserved for the 'instigators' of the movement: The two clarinets render the final clause (bars 685-686), which may now be understood as a summary of the whole variation. It consists of the slightly suspended opening phrase and a sudden cadential close reminiscent of its similar appearance in *Diastella* (*viz.* bars 89 and 100). This moment allows a glimpse of the intended *Cavatina*, a song of great simplicity, had it not been obscured and disturbed by persistent complications, intrusions, threats and interruptions. Against all odds (true for the plant as well as the music) a critical element will survive and succeed to express its persevering existence.

The reiteration of the 'alternate note' initial seed-motif, which remains 'hanging' even after the final cadence, is of no immediate concern anymore. It is dormant and overlaps into the last movement to germinate at a later stage.

8. PROTEA

SUGARBUSH

Greek: *protea* – first prize or rank (from *protos* – first); ‘prime’ species of South African Proteaceae (most varied and widespread), hence also officially the ‘National Flower’.

Its exceptional variety justifies a repeated reference to *Proteus*, the polymorphic demigod. From stemless ground-flowering species to large trees the variety of the genus already manifests in the scope of species’ sizes; elliptical to elongated leaves, leathery, sometimes hairy; colourful bracts – ranging from all shades of red, through orange, brown, yellow to white, often with ‘bearded’ tips – generally far more conspicuous than florets; 115 species, 70 endemic to the Cape Fynbos.¹³²

Conservation status of the genus fairly secure, with more than 40 species listed under ‘least concern’.¹³³



Fig. 19: *Protea cynaroides* (King Protea)

CAPE CHACONNE

In complete contrast to the previous movement this finale is loud, open, direct, urban and blandly public. It takes its cue from the most ‘extrovert’ of all Proteas, the King Protea, which is also South Africa’s national flower. The image of its huge, stable, perfectly round and ‘convincing’ flowerhead is translated musically in two ways: the regular pattern of alternating fifths in the timpani imitate the evenly spaced bracts surrounding the flower, and the symmetrical four-bar brass theme (two bars rising, two bars descending), while indicating a circumnavigation of the flower’s sphere in its perfect symmetry, also pronounces its showy exuberance (Figure 19). No introduction is required; a single, unambiguous statement suffices.

Ex. 13: The royal theme trumpeted out in unison.

With the timpani indicating the regular intervals of the flower bracts, an antiphonal derivative of the ‘child theme’ from *Serruria* is introduced (bar 706) as a first digression. Passed along between different woodwind instrument sections in ever shorter phrases, this device once again¹³⁴ wishes to emulate an acceleration such as would result from speeding along in ever diminishing circumferences while being drawn into the centre of a spiral. Once the focal point is reached (bar 711), the main ‘flower theme’ kicks off again, this time in fourfold canon. After a short transition the proper ‘child theme’ returns (bar 720) in the form of an episode (more edgy than in *Serruria*, as all lilting triplets have now been replaced by semiquavers), before the third *ritornello* of the flower theme (bar 728). This time, however, the regularity of the timpani pattern is somewhat disturbed by jazzy bass *pizzicati*, gently announcing an incipient transformation. Simultaneously the ever-present but dormant seed material from the initial male *Aulax* theme (syncopated interjections of the alternate-note motive), now germinates. Stringed into a consecutive sequence it assumes the character of a counter theme (bar 733), forcing the main theme into a new guise.

¹³² Manning, *Field Guide to Fynbos*, 246.

¹³³ See <http://redlist.sanbi.org/genus.php?genus=799>.

¹³⁴ Compare with similar passages in ‘*Leucospermum*’, e.g. bars 398-403 and 426-432.

What used to be canonic entrances of the theme now emerge to be slight modifications setting in from bar 735 onwards. The erstwhile clear-cut fanfaronade gradually thaws into an ever-gentler but increasingly expressive and eventually pleading Coon motive¹³⁵ (bar 744). For a moment the music assumes the nonchalance of a Cape Coon carnival procession (Figure 20) before it is once again subjected to the carousel acceleration by means of truncated phrases (bar 736 ff) and diminishing note values (bar 754) until all momentum is sucked into the centre of the churning vortex.

poco a poco acc.

Ex. 14: Thematic transition - from King to Coon.

The resultant imploding climax is reached in bar 756, at which moment a Xhosa folk melody is quoted in the first trumpet: 'N'di lambile, n'di lambile n'di funa utya'.¹³⁶ Thus a transition from natural to cultural references has finally been made. While the repeated renditions of 'n'di lambile' are still interspersed with a rigorously abridged version of the spherical flower theme (bars 758, 762, 765, then accelerating: bar 766, appearing twice in bar 769), this is momentarily silenced by the urban 'call for food'. However, it reappears, concurrently in both the original and the abridged versions (bars 783 and 784), this time silencing 'di lambile' and for that matter all music (bar 794). In a final build-up the characteristic accumulative *accelerando* device is once more employed, absorbing at least three strands of material (the child and flower motifs, as well as the Xhosa song) in a cataclysmic whirl. Natural and cultural forces become inseparably entangled, yet remain at odds as the prominent tritone in the final chord suggests.

N'di lam-bi-le, n'di lam-bile n'di fu-na u-tya

Ex. 15: Cultural transition -
from flowers to people.

¹³⁵ During the annual Cape Town Coon Carnival so called Christmas Bands (made up of wind instruments, *ghoema* and tambourines) take to the roads. Their performance style may be described as lively, highly expressive but also overtly sentimental.

¹³⁶ Personal comm. Latozi Mpahleni (Madosini): 'I am hungry, I am hungry. Where is my food?'

Chapter II

NOVEL CONFIGURATION: COMPOSITION FOR A NOVEL

EISTAU TRIO

Stellenbosch, Vienna 2011. Incidental music in six movements for three players on six instruments (descant, alto and tenor saxophones, Baroque violin and viola, Baroque cello) requested by Ilija Trojanow as musical dramatization of the audiobook edition¹ of his novel *EisTau*.² Concurrently designed to be performed in conjunction with live renditions of excerpts of the novel in the format of ‘dramatized readings’, i.e. closely interacting ‘performances’ or ‘readings’ of musical and literary texts.

TITLES OF MOVEMENTS

- I. (Aufbruch ins Eis)
- II. (Eis)
- III. (Sturm)
- IV. (Kreisen)
- V. (Zenos Klage)
- VI. (Letzte Reise)

SYNOPSIS

The opportunity for this composition arose from the offer of the publishing house *Hörbuch Hamburg* to release an audiobook version together with the conventional book format of Ilija Trojanow’s novel *EisTau*, published in 2011. Trojanow accepted the offer, requesting that alongside his rendition of the text, a tailor-made musical composition, interspersed throughout the narration, should be recorded.

Commissioned and conceived as a musical dramatization of a novel to be performed and heard in close conjunction with the spoken text, the composition closely follows the dramaturgy of its literary model. From the twelve chapters of the book two consecutive chapters at a time are ‘summarized’ musically, leading to the overall musical form of a Trio in six movements, in which each movement represents a dramatic stage or decisive moment in the unfolding of the novel’s plot.

1. THE STORY

The novel is related from the perspective of Zeno, a retired glaciologist. The reason for his retirement is not so much his age, but the tragic fact that the Alpine glacier, the decline of which he had been studying for years, had finally melted and shrunk to insignificant remnants of fragmented ice shards. In order to visit and engage with ice – his favourite element – he now works as an accompanying scientist (‘expedition leader’) on a Norwegian cruise ship offering instructive touristic trips to Antarctica. What is for most passengers nothing but an exclusive form of edification, is for Zeno a particularly significant journey, a personal refuge into ‘Terra Nullius’: the last region on the planet that has by and large escaped immediate degradation from human inhabitation and exploitation.

¹ Ilija Trojanow & Hans Huyssen, *EisTau: Ungekürzte Lesung* (Hörbuch Hamburg, Hamburg 2011).

² Ilija Trojanow, *EisTau* (Hanser, München 2011).

Departing from Ushuaia, the *MS Hansen* passes the Falkland Islands, Grytviken, King George Island, Deception Island, Half Moon Island and Neko Harbour on its course to Port Lockroy. It never reaches its destination though, as Zeno's growing desperation drives him to a drastic intervention. At a moment when all passengers and crew are ashore and assembled in the form of a large SOS on an ice shelf for the purpose of an aerial photograph for a sensationalist public relations stunt, he decides to lend the occasion a measure of authenticity by activating the ship's track steering and abducting the vessel. When it is eventually recovered there is no trace of him. Only his diary is found.

Reflections on episodes from Zeno's life and career are interspersed into the account of the journey. These reveal him as an erstwhile enthusiastic naturalist and ecologist who, in the face of mounting evidence of human induced ecological destruction, becomes a misanthropic cynic and gradually withdraws from society. Grappling with the disconcerting and inescapable knowledge that, despite his ecological sensibility, he will always remain part of the blindly destructive human species, evokes in him a sense of ultimate hopelessness. Far worse than being tired of living, he feels 'tired of being a human'.³ Not even his suicide – usually a final 'solution' – will resolve this dilemma.

The novel powerfully evokes the intricately complex circumstances that lurk behind the deceitfully simply (and merely symptomatically) named phenomenon of 'global warming'. All the more poignant for its highly poetic imagery and narrative qualities, the text becomes a stark metaphor reflecting the apparent inability of current civilizational forces to face and effectively address the demise of our planetary habitat. It traces repercussions of the global crisis where they are rarely recognized: in the disintegration of an individual character, whose wellbeing is intricately linked to that of his environment, and whose perception of a well-lived life necessarily includes the dimension of such an existence being non-destructive and ecologically integrated. However, put to a choice by the growing realization of the incommensurability of these two aspects, Zeno opts to destroy his life rather than to continue unwillingly to partake in the gross environmental destruction immanent to the behaviour of modern civilization.

2. THE MUSIC

The brief for the musical design was to reimagine the novel's narrative musically, rather than to 'illustrate' the literary text. Hence neither the operatic idea (the full 'musicalization' of text), nor the film score convention (of music functioning primarily as emotional canvas or backdrop) could serve as models. Whereas these two genres utilize definite hierarchies (the first based on the absolute supremacy of the music over the libretto, the second on its complete subservience to the screenplay), the aim in this case was to present the textual narration and musical performance on equal levels.

Both media (music and language) are understood and employed as sufficient and autonomous forms of expression, bound together 'con-textually' ('with' and 'through' the narrative), with which they both engage on their own terms. Both media are thus self-ruling but structurally related, so that in this case 'autonomy' does not imply (complete) 'independence'. Even though language and music could function perfectly well independently, a certain dimension of each is vested in the other – or rather in the expressive means unique to the other's medium. A certain 'third dimension' is thus implied when they are performed conjunctively. This intangible quality is not immediately evident in either form of expression, but emerges from the organizational (systemic) relatedness and the interaction resulting from a combined (mutual) performance. It may perhaps best be described as facilitating a 'deep understanding', activating a 'harmonic' dimension in the language and a 'semantic' dimension in the music.

Systems theory offers another means of explaining the relationship. Two autarkic components interact organisationally in such a manner as to appear and function as a systemic whole, which expresses more than just the sum of its components and in which the specific contribution of each component cannot finally be

³ Trojanow, *EisTau*, 154; 'Ich bin es müde Mensch zu sein.'

delineated. Moreover, the independence of each contributing component is constrained to a certain degree. However, by ‘stepping back’ to accommodate the presence and radius of the other constituent, each gains more potential momentum, thrust and (almost paradoxically) more operational effectuality.

On a technical or practical level it was agreed that the composition would be a purely instrumental piece and no text would be set to music. It was also mutually decided to restrict the work to small forces, so as to make performances (specifically ones in conjunction with book presentations and therefore limited budgets) feasible and affordable.⁴

BACKGROUND

The composition resulted from a set of multiple circumstances, all of which will be further discussed below. First, from a biographical and historical perspective, my friendship and previous collaborations with the author of the novel played a significant role. Second, from a technical point of view, the publication of the audio book presented the opportunity and challenge to investigate a novel manner of relating musical and literary modes or forms of expression. Third, the spectre of a looming global catastrophe indicated by the phenomenon of global warming, as well as the controversy surrounding the interpretation of the meteorological data, present the relevant socio-political context to which the work responds. Finally the discourse on ‘Neue Einfachheit’⁵ should be considered in order to assess the aesthetic position of the work.

In an attempt to provide a sufficiently comprehensive overview of these various backgrounds, it will be necessary briefly to touch on each of these aspects before turning to the work itself.

1. ILIJA TROJANOW – AUTHOR, FACILITATOR, NARRATOR

Ilija Trojanow is a Bulgarian-born, German-speaking novelist, journalist, translator and publisher.⁶ In 1971, when he was six years old, his family fled from communist Bulgaria and obtained political asylum in Germany. Another relocation followed a year later, this time to Nairobi, where his father was posted as an engineer and the family lived from 1972 to 1984. Apart from a three-year period during which he attended a boarding school in South Germany, Trojanow thus grew up in Kenya.⁷ I posit that these early and repeated relocations and adaptations to different cultural contexts have decisively shaped a worldview remarkably perceptive of cultural and intercultural differentiations. It is also a perspective that has secured for Trojanow a preeminent position in Germany as an author of astute cultural observations and – in the context of xenophobic tendencies – made of him a firm advocate of a historically grounded appreciation for the beneficial effects of cultural confluence.⁸

After a Parisian sojourn he moved to Munich in 1989, where he studied law and ethnology. In the same year he founded the Marino publishing house, which translated African literature into German. In the early nineties he undertook extended journeys throughout Africa, during which an initial ‘alienation turned to interest and affection’⁹ for the continent and resulted in his first book, *In Afrika. Mythos und Alltag Ostafrikas*.¹⁰ Another African publication, *Guardians of the Soil*,¹¹ co-authored with the Zimbabwean novelist Chenjerai Hove, preceded his first novel, *Die Welt ist groß und Rettung lauert überall*.¹²

⁴ This ‘calculation’ has in fact ‘worked out’, having allowed for 15 performances of the work to date.

⁵ ‘New Simplicity’: Term coined by Aribert Reimann in the 1970s, with which he described a group of composers (such as Rihm, Trojahn, von Bose) and their compositional approach.

⁶ <http://www.ilija-trojanow.de/biografie.cfm> [accessed on 13.8.13].

⁷ Personal communication, 15.7.2013.

⁸ Ilija Trojanow, & Ranjit Hoskote, *Kampfabsage: Kulturen bekämpfen sich nicht, sie fließen zusammen* (Karl Blessing Verlag, München 2007).

⁹ Personal communication.

¹⁰ Ilija Trojanow, *In Afrika: Mythos und Alltag* (Marino Verlag, München 1993) (Myth and Everyday Life in East Africa)

¹¹ Ilija Trojanow, & Chenjerai Hove, *Guardians of the Soil. Meeting Zimbabwe’s Elders* (Baobab Books, Harare 1996)

¹² Ilija Trojanow, *Die Welt ist gross und Rettung lauert überall* (Hanser, München 1996) (English title: *It’s A big World and Salvation lurks everywhere.*)

Extensive travels, notably in India, Arabia and Africa lead to a continuous outpour of travelogues, reportage and essays for leading German-language newspapers and magazines. Many of these travels were conducted as arduous *in situ* research, quite literally following in the footsteps of the English explorer and Orientalist Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821-1890), whose adventurous biography and insatiable cultural curiosity is the subject of Trojanow's second novel *Der Weltensammler*.¹³ Published in 2006, the book became a best seller¹⁴ and marks Trojanow's breakthrough, not only as eminent German novelist, but more importantly, as an acknowledged and actively practicing proponent of (and role model for) the complex endeavour of 'intercultural dialogue'.¹⁵

This idea – the necessity, the challenges, the art, the intricacies of conducting and upholding a dialogue across cultural differences – is a persistent thread in Trojanow's writing. The prerequisite attitude for attentively listening to 'different' and 'other' voices and views was already patently evident in the *Marino* projects as well as in his first two books on African culture. It is also the reason for our acquaintance and point of departure of our initial collaboration. When (after the completion of my studies in Munich in 1996) I was contemplating the idea of an African opera, I attended the Munich book launch of Hove and Trojanow's *Guardians of the Soil* in the hope of finding a suitable libretto. While I didn't find my libretto then, I found my librettist and – much more importantly – a like-minded author who became a close friend during the lengthy peregrinations into which the creation and finally the production of our opera *Masque*¹⁶ turned.

The complexity of the working relation between librettist and composer has received considerable attention through the extant correspondence between famous protagonists of successful collaborations, such as those of Mozart and da Ponte,¹⁷ Verdi and Boito,¹⁸ Strauss and von Hofmannsthal,¹⁹ Britten and Duncan²⁰ etc. Any such relationship is principally complicated by the conventionally accepted predominance of the musical over the literary text. While any successful opera will rely just as much on an effectively dramatic plot as on a convincing musical dramatization, the opera libretto is hardly perceived as a noteworthy literary genre, whereas opera as a musical genre enjoys the highest esteem. While the formal and dramatic structure of any opera will largely and crucially depend on the libretto's design, this is nevertheless generally perceived as a mere vehicle and catalyst for the musical processes, which – by their very nature – effectively devour, internalize, subsume and overshadow their supporting literary skeleton.

My collaboration with Trojanow was no exception to the tensions characterizing the relationship of composer and librettist. We had the usual negotiations about textual adaptations for specific musical requirements, i.e. cutting down of lengthy text passages to concise pronouncements more conducive to musical settings, requests for rhythmical emphases, evocative images, rhyming verses etc. Nevertheless, ours was an enriching collaboration, as the expressive possibilities resulting from the interdisciplinary nature of the operatic genre ultimately exerted a sufficiently strong fascination to overcome our differences. I hope to speak for both of us in claiming that what resulted in *Masque* was a synthesised, mutualistic outcome that both parties could underwrite.

¹³ Ilija Trojanow, *Der Weltensammler* (Hanser, München 2006), English translation: Ilija Trojanow, *The Collector of Worlds: A Novel of Sir Richard Francis Burton* (Ecco Press, New York 2009).

¹⁴ 400.000 copies of *Der Weltensammler* have been sold only in Germany and the book has moreover been translated into ca. 20 languages.

¹⁵ Antje Büssgen, *Der Autor als „Weltensammler“: Kulturelle Differenz und Multilingualität im Werk Ilija Trojanows – Mit einem Ausblick auf die Konzeption Des Interkulturellen Dialogs Bei Régis Debray*, http://www.kas.de/upload/themen/deutschesprache/Vortrag_Buessgen_2011.pdf [accessed on 29.7.13 , 7 [accessed 29.7.13].

¹⁶ Hans Huyssen, & Ilija Trojanow, 'Masque. An African Opera', (2005).

¹⁷ Andrew Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte Operas: The Cultural and Musical Background to 'Le Nozze di Figaro', 'Don Giovanni' and 'Cosi Fan Tutte'* (Clarendon Press, Oxford 1988).

¹⁸ Marcello Conati, & Mario Medici, *The Verdi-Boito Correspondence* trans. William Weaver (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994).

¹⁹ *Richard Strauss und Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Briefwechsel* eds. Franz & Alice Strauss, & Willi Schuh, (Atlantis Verlag, Zürich 1952).

²⁰ Ronald Duncan, *Working with Britten: A Personal Memoir* (Rebel Press, Wiltshire 1981).

Against the backdrop of the large-scale collaboration on *Masque*, I consider Trojanow's invitation to create music for *EisTau* as a friendly 'revenge' – a call to continue our collaboration, but this time on his terms; an offer further to investigate means of 'affiliating' linguistic and musical expression away from operatic or filmic conventions. Apart from writing a daring book on a highly discomfiting and controversial topic,²¹ it was Trojanow who instigated a side-project with the musical versions of *EisTau* (the audio book as well as the live 'lecture-performances'). This project explores an interaction between literature and music in an unprecedented manner: Reclaiming the literary ground he had previously lost as librettist, our new collaboration would safeguard the supremacy (or at least the full autonomy) of the literary text at all times. Sidestepping the hierarchic conventions of both opera and film, the multimedia combination of the *EisTau* text and the *EisTau-Trio* emanates as a yet-to-be-named genre based on the idea of a 'narrative performance'; one that allows for a much more convivial and conducive collaboration between novelist and composer.

Apart from acknowledging Trojanow's primary authorship of this project, it is appropriate to commend him for providing the opportunity and posing the musical challenge, without which this composition would not have come into existence.²²

2. MUSIC FOR A NEW MEDIUM – EXPLORING THE AUDIOBOOK AS ARTISTIC FORMAT

The decision to publish the novel as a recorded narration (the transferral of the written text into a temporal performance, subsequently captured and presented as the commodity of an audiobook) instigated the composition. It is important to note this initial relationship of cause and effect, effectively leading to the origination of a new musical work, but – as will be shown – just as effectively prohibiting it from reaching its full potential.

The 'performance space' offered by the medium of the audiobook and its potential interpretative scope appeared as an unusual opportunity to escape from existing hierarchies between music and text as perpetuated in conventional genres. It seemed to suggest the possibility of creating a compound form in which verbal and musical articulation could interact on an equal level. The intended collaborative design was based on an understanding that the act of narrating a text may amount to an interpretive and expressive performance and the rendition of a musical score may assume the qualities of a rhetorically articulate (albeit abstract) narration. Understood against the background of our previous collaborations, Trojanow would not only be re-instated as *author* from the subservient previous role of *librettist*, but moreover be elevated to *performer* in this new arrangement.

During a week-long planning session in Vienna in March 2011, we discussed the dramaturgy of the envisioned 'composite composition' of amalgamated textual and musical expressions. By then the novel had been completed and even copy-edited; with regard to the ensuing collaboration it was clearly the defining, primary text. The next step was to decide how to link it to music. From a careful reading with this question in

²¹ It should be noted that – given Trojanow's renown as author – *EisTau* as literary event (i.e. the novel published as conventional book) must be perceived as an independent project, fully separate from the musical version published under the same name. Not only did the novel precede and in that way facilitate the musical version; it has also had the far greater impact as book than as audio book with sales of the first by far exceeding those of the latter. While my discussion here is only concerned with the musical version of the project for obvious reasons, it should be noted that this was only an outflow of an ordinary book publication, in the wake of which the musical considerations, the composition in its specific format as well as its performances, found their niche.

²² I hold that 'commissioning agents', initiators and patrons should generally receive greater acknowledgement for the factual origination of art works. While such works obviously owe their artistry to no one other than their creators, their very existence – a far more primary condition than that of their artistry – is often directly owed to someone other than the author. This idea is succinctly expressed in the last verse of Bertold Brecht's *Legende von der Entstehung des Buches Taoteking auf dem Weg des Laotse in die Emigration*:

Aber rühmen wir nicht nur den Weisen
 dessen Name auf dem Buche prangt!
 Denn man muß dem Weisen seine Weisheit erst entreißen.
 Darum sei der Zöllner auch bedankt:
 Er hat sie ihm abverlangt.

mind, three different categories for possible ‘connections’ soon emerged: Certain moments in the novel ‘needed’ music, some could well accommodate music providing links of varying ‘depth’ or interpretative scope and, finally, on occasion the narration would pause, leaving an ‘opening’ that would not only provide sufficient expanse for music to unfold in its own right, but actually ‘allow’ (permit and sanction, but also request and entreat) the music to expand on what had been left unsaid and open a dimension of musical reflection.

Examples of the first type are instances where dramatic situations would call for dynamic musical ‘illustrations’, such as the storm (described in Chapter V) or the comical scene of Mrs. Morgenthau’s mishap with the penguin’s egg (in Chapter X). Instances of the second type often arise through images or implications arising from the text, but not fully exploited therein. Examples are the notion of ‘describing ice’²³ (in Chapter III), which inspired the second movement of the Trio, or the multiply evoked metaphor of ‘circling’ (in Chapter VII), finding yet a further expression in the ostinato form of the fourth movement. The most pronounced example of the third kind of interaction is exemplified by the sixth movement (*Letzte Reise*), which follows on Zeno’s last thoughts and – instead of confronting the reader with his imminent suicide – expands the calm and peacefulness of the moment and reinterprets the moment as an expanded and gentle, albeit vanishing, farewell gesture.

On a technical level it was agreed that the composition should be designed in such a way as to function autonomously, as well as in conjunction with the text. This implied that it would consist of closed, self-sufficient units (movements) and not only of musical appendices to the text. However, the music also had to be structured in such a way as to allow for specific material to be taken from the complete movements and be used additionally in variously fragmented forms. Such musical fragments could then be thrown into the narration occasionally as comments, emphases, illustrations or indicators of underlying assumptions or associations. They could even act as ‘leitmotifs’, not so much in the sense of highlighting recurrent themes, but more importantly, by substantiating and reinforcing the intentional links between music and text through their recurrence (and thus the repeated exemplification of the reciprocal associations). In this sense they would fulfil the crucial role of establishing direct, punctual links on a micro level, which would form the base for the apprehension of the more indirect and associative links on a macro level. This consistent stream of small-scale interactions between text and music – establishing and gaining meaning from the ‘play of difference’ between the two media – would eventually ‘provide’ the space for the meaningful emanation of the complete musical movements, firmly embedded into the narration, but without need of any further textual scaffolding.

These agreements thus clearly demarcated the compositional task.²⁴ Six decisive points of connecting the parallel musical design to that of the unfolding of the novel were soon found. Within the overarching movements many musical details were crafted in analogy to specific motives, images or thoughts from the novel. For the dramatization of the recorded narration, a selection of musical snippets from the completed composition was allocated to certain text passages.

At this moment a transition in the discussion of the *composition* of the work to that of its *realization* is necessary. In the case of this multi-layered ‘text’ (or work with a duple text) various realizations were possible and envisaged. They encompassed the formats of an amalgamated recording for the purpose of an audiobook, live performances with and without narration and, conversely, live narrations with or without music. Each option will be highlighted shortly.

A set date for the audiobook production served as deadline for the completion of the composition and its recording in South Africa. The edited tracks of the six movements – together with all pertaining instructions

²³ ‘Eis zu erklären, das war es, was mich von Anfang an für diese Aufgabe eingenommen hat...’ Trojanow, *EisTau*, 30.

²⁴ I confess that I generally prefer delimited conditions and find it enabling – as it were – to compose within a clearly circumscribed ambit. It usually expedites the difficult process of decision-making, which is of course not surprising, as many decisions have obviously been eliminated in the initial demarcation.

about where and how to insert the complete takes as well as the fragmented extracts into the recording of the narration – were subsequently sent to the production company in Hamburg. Ironically the producers of the audiobook – as initiators and instigators of the endeavour – cut the process short at this point.

Unfortunately I could not be present in Hamburg to oversee the final edits and was deeply disillusioned when I listened to the edited material returned to me as final mix. The producers had ignored most of the instructions and instead had simply followed preconceived ideas, treating the music as a mere ornamental background to the narration, limiting its function to creating a pleasant atmosphere, but denying it the propensity of exerting any dramaturgical or narrative potency.

The narration had been recorded in extreme close-up, sounding clear, direct and engaging. In stark contrast, the musical tracks had been inserted as acoustic backdrops, their dynamic range limited to a barely audible level. They sounded as though emanating from a completely different acoustical space, remote and muted. Moreover, only two or three of the additional interlacements (excerpts of selected musical material to be synchronized with complementary text passages) had been created, and even in those few attempts the music was out of sync or the wrong material had been used. Apparently there had not been enough time to insert all suggested links and the process had simply been abandoned half-done.

My appeal to be given the responsibility for the compilation and oversight of the originally envisioned mix in South Africa was categorically declined by the publishing house. All that my protestations could finally achieve was that the levels of the musical tracks were raised to that of the narration and that the occasional, nonsensical attempts at interweaving music and spoken text were removed altogether.

In the end the audiobook was released with only the recordings of the complete movements chronologically inserted somewhere into the narration. Published on four CDs containing three and a half hours of narration interspersed with six five-minute-long musical tracks, the music appears somewhat forlorn and unrelated. Although lavishly produced (employing more than 20 different narrators to impersonate the multitude of voices in the ‘cacophony’ chapters), the pivotal aspect of closely relating language and music through occasional but consistent interlacements of both media had been forfeited. The product duly fulfils all expectations of a conventional audiobook, as the narration is superbly and captivatingly rendered. However, from the musical perspective I regard the release as a failed project.²⁵

Fortunately the prospects concerning the ‘live’ performances of the work have come to full fruition. All performances to date²⁶ have always included both narration and music and thus incorporated the narrator as a fourth performer. In German-speaking countries their format would usually be described as ‘konzertante Lesung’ or ‘Lesung mit Musik’, which is probably best (but not adequately) translated as ‘dramatized narration’ (literally ‘musicalized reading’).

Even without a satisfactory genre description for the performance format, in these events we could pursue our original aims and facilitate various kinds of ‘musico-lingual’ interactions, as described above. Moreover, interlacing and linking music and narration proved to ‘function’ exceedingly well, i.e. the response to the concurrent streams of musical and linguistic communication was generally very positive.

These observations lead to a consideration of the work’s reception. Although I consider musical reception an inherent aspect of a composition’s full manifestation, remarks made as *composer* in this respect will not be useful, as they will inevitably be biased and less insightful than perceptions made by external recipients. However, a few observations made as *performer* – and primarily concerning differences between conventional

²⁵ For this reason I include only the score of the composition (without the book) and only the musical recording (not the complete audiobook) in the attached portfolio. While these documents do not embody the full scope of the project they represent an aspect of it that may well be perceived independently. Accordingly I also limit the ensuing discussion of ‘the work’ to that of ‘the musical composition’.

²⁶ Performances of *EisTau*: Vienna, 6.9.11; Berlin, 7.9.11; Schloß Elmau, 11.9.11; Stuttgart, 12.9.11; Osnabrück, 13.9.11; Neustadt, 14.9.11; Munich, 15.9.11; Hamburg, 16.9.11; Innsbruck, 25.10.11; Tübingen 26.10.11; Zürich, 27.10.11; Hausach, 13.7.12; Kandern, 28.7.12; Villach, 27.2.13; Lubljana, 28.2.13.

concert arrangements as opposed to those in literary circles where all the *EisTau* performances took place – warrant to be reported here.

Literary events, such as book presentations, readings, discussions – and in our case the somewhat unusual format of ‘dramatized lecture-performance’ – attract a bibliophile audience which, contrary to the stereotype concert-goer, deliberately and curiously seeks what is current and novel. Other significant differences in comparison to typical experiences surrounding ‘New Music’ events became equally conspicuous: Each performance was characterized by great anticipation and a focussed interest on the content of the presentation, yet accompanied by remarkably little external hype. The sheer number of performance invitations was also remarkable: It was possible to present the composition eleven times in a row in performances attended by an apprehensive and interested audience – a luxury one would not even dare to dream of in New Music circles.

I posit that the combined and synchronized presentation of literature and music significantly enhances an audience’s receptive susceptibility and the communicative efficacy of the artistic expression. From the musician’s point of view the concurrent narration – as an expressive, dramatic, but moreover also as a semantic, informative and directly communicative medium – certainly resolves the ‘baffled audience’ syndrome. The remarkable experience is that in the proximate environment of a spoken component, even a fairly complex musical idiom communicates effortlessly. Through this experience I gained a glimpse of music’s unquestionable rhetoric potential, provided the composer and his audience share a common (communal, communicational) idiom. Conversely the experience stressed the realization that contemporary music unfortunately rarely enjoys this reflexive attunement in ‘ordinary’ concerts.

Post Scriptum:

EisTau was later produced in yet another format: In May 2014 some of the original ideas regarding a dense interaction between music and narration could be realized in a production by the Austrian radio (ORF) of *EisTau* as radio play (Hörspiel). Limited to 57 minutes in length, neither the complete novel, nor the complete composition could be accommodated. Yet most key scenes were included, with music and narration frequently closely interlaced. Despite its condensed form, I believe that we have been able to realize our original ideas best within this format.

PARENTHESIS XII: THE ‘CLIMATE CHANGE’ DILEMMA

Trojanow’s novel *EisTau* contains a decisively ‘political’ dimension in a similar way as described for *The Songs of Madosini*.²⁷ It is a literary response to the plethora of environmental crises that are perceived as being related to the phenomenon of changing climate and, more specifically, to anthropogenic ‘global warming’. Before reflecting on the scope of this socio-political ‘cultural response’, the inconvenient topic of climate change should be framed briefly.

While many scientists (and politicians) have until recently disputed indications of unusual increases in global temperatures and climatic singularities, or would at least deny that these events were human-induced, there is growing evidence and wide consensus now that all of the above can no longer be disputed nor denied. A few findings from a recent Synthesis Report of the IPCC²⁸ are quoted to support this statement:²⁹

²⁷ See Chapter 9.2. d): ‘individual versus political strategy’, pg. 167.

²⁸ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is a collaborative, scientific body endorsed by the UN General Assembly. It is commissioned ‘to assess on a comprehensive, objective, open and transparent basis the scientific, technical and socio-economic information relevant to understanding the scientific basis of risk of human-induced climate change, its potential impacts and options for adaptation and mitigation.’ www.ipcc.ch/pdf/ipcc-principles/ipcc-principles.pdf [accessed on 14.8.13] Having received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 it is regarded to be the most authoritative source of scientific data on climate-related questions.

²⁹ IPCC, *Climate Change 2007: Synthesis Report. Summary for Policymakers*, 2007, http://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar4/syr/ar4_syr_spm.pdf [accessed on 6.6.13]. This report ‘is based on the assessment carried out by the three

Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level.³⁰

Observed decreases in snow and ice extent are also consistent with warming... Mountain glaciers and snow cover on average have declined in both hemispheres.³¹

Observational evidence from all continents and most oceans shows that many natural systems are being affected by regional climate changes, particularly temperature increases.³²

Changes in snow, ice and frozen ground have with *high confidence* increased the number and size of glacial lakes, increased ground instability in mountain and other permafrost regions and led to changes in some Arctic and Antarctic ecosystems.³³

Of the more than 29,000 observational data series, from 75 studies that show significant change in many physical and biological systems, more than 89% are consistent with the direction of change expected as a response to warming.³⁴

Global GHG³⁵ emissions due to human activities have grown since pre-industrial times, with an increase of 70% between 1970 and 2004. Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is the most important anthropogenic GHG. Its annual emissions grew by about 80% between 1970 and 2004.³⁶

There is *very high confidence* that the net effect of human activities since 1750 has been one of warming.³⁷

Most of the observed increase in global average temperatures since the mid-20th century is very likely due to the observed increase in anthropogenic GHG concentrations. It is likely that there has been significant anthropogenic warming over the past 50 years averaged over each continent (except Antarctica).³⁸

While this is not the space to elaborate on the merit or accuracy of the data, it would seem foolish *not* to accept these findings as sufficient evidence for on-going and pending environmental changes on a significant scale. But even while most informed governments and citizens today arguably recognize the evidence and fear potentially catastrophic consequences, there is no consensus on to how to act, how to avert the crisis, how to remediate anthropogenic forcings,³⁹ how to change those aspects of human behaviour that lie at the root of unsustainable demands and exploitations of the environmental supply. Furthermore it is not at all clear what the consequences of current environmental developments will be, and with which of the many speculatively anticipated scenarios the global population will eventually be confronted.

As 'climate change' potentially affects the very conditions for life on this planet, it has become a very emotional topic. While it features high on the international political agenda (as may be gauged from high-profile preoccupation and activity, such as the international climate conferences⁴⁰ and numerous treaties),

Working Groups of the IPCC. It provides an integrated view of climate change as the final part of the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report (AR4). An update on these findings, the AR5, will only be published in 2014. www.ipcc.ch/ [accessed on 14.8.13].

³⁰ IPCC, *Climate Change 2007*, 2.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. original emphasis.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ GHG: greenhouse gases, notably carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O).

³⁶ Ibid., 5.

³⁷ Ibid. original emphasis.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Factors that drive or change ('force') the climate.

⁴⁰ The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), set up following the so called 'Earth Summit' (Rio de Janeiro, 1992) has been signed by 154 nations, whose governments have thereby committed to 'reduce atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases' with the goal of 'preventing dangerous anthropogenic interference with Earth's climate system'. The signatory states of the conventions are called 'Parties' as reflected in the term 'Conferences of the Parties' – COP. http://unfccc.int/essential_background/items/6031.php [accessed on 15.8.13].

To date 18 such conferences took place beginning with COP 1 (Berlin 1995) through to COP 18 (Doha, 2013). COP 3 (Kyoto, 1997, where the Kyoto Protocol formally adopted) and COP 15 (Copenhagen, 2009, widely perceived as a failed event), were especially prominently covered by the international press.

http://unfccc.int/meetings/unfccc_calendar/items/2655.php [accessed on 15.8.13].

Countless smaller conferences, meetings and workshops and initiatives are far too numerous to even attempt an overview.

even on this level the debate is fraught with irrationalities, contesting perceptions and interests. Most conspicuous is the discrepancy between extravagant expenditure and apparent inability to implement agreements, even if they have been ratified.⁴¹

Mostly for this reason it has been suggested that the perception of climate change as the singular overwhelming problem may be misguided, as it detracts from other, more immediately pressing issues that already directly affect many millions of people, and which could be alleviated effectively if funds were diverted from (arguably ineffective or even futile) climate mitigation projects.⁴²

This, in turn, has infuriated climate activists, who fear that such initiatives would destroy the arduously reached but continuously fragile consensus on taking climate-related action at all.

Among many other contested questions, this may serve as one example of how, in addition to real and potentially threatening natural events, significant degrees of societal dissent and related phenomena like anxiety, potential hysteria and stress, severely aggravate the situation and must by now be recognized as part of the problem complex.

The 'climate change' debate is suspended between these parameters: compelling evidence, helplessness against ingrained (survivalist and consumerist) behaviour and uncertainty as to immediate and long-term remedial actions, policy implementation, mitigation strategies, etc. It has hence become a very contentious issue and – considering the host of related difficulties, increasing complications and nested questions – proves to be a truly 'wicked problem'.⁴³

PRINCIPAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. MUSIC AND THAWING ICE – A SOCIO-POLITICAL RESPONSE TO AN ECOLOGICAL CRISIS

Despite the fact that the novel *EisTau* is a poetic and fictional account, it is nonetheless a political book. It is a literary response to the ever-increasing loss of intact natural environments and the corresponding psychological dimensions triggered by these empirically measurable degradations. Even though Trojanow's writing was preceded by substantial scientific research as well as two journeys undertaken on the route described in the novel, it hardly confronts the reader on environmental data, assuming that the facts are by now well-known. Instead it focuses on portraying the effects of these facts on the human soul – an implication of environmental destruction rarely contemplated – in considerable detail.

EisTau tells the story of Zeno, a retired scientist who, being acutely aware of the advanced degree of environmental destruction, is infuriated by the prevailing blindness and ignorance of the affluent society of which he is part and which, in spite of knowing better, perseveres in its destructive behaviour. Having experienced environmental beauty, fragility and vulnerability intensely, society's grossly disrespectful attitude nauseates him. In return, society scorns him for his frustration and alarmist attitude, trying to mollify him with clichéd and self-righteous consolations. This only deepens his disdain and leads to his complete social withdrawal. The subsequent isolation adds a personal crisis to that of the perceived environmental catastrophe. Any strategy to escape from either of the two can only amount to the worsening of the other. For an uncompromising person, such as Zeno, there is no escape from this vicious circle.

⁴¹ A case in point is the failure of compliant states to decrease their carbon emissions. For a succinct summary of the state of affairs, see: The History of Climate Change Negotiations in 83 seconds (<http://youtu.be/B11kASPFyXy>), an animated short film posted by the Norwegian 'Centre for International Climate and Environmental Research – Oslo' (CICERO).

⁴² Findings of international scientific panels working under the auspices of the Copenhagen Consensus Centre (www.copenhagenconsensus.com) suggest that hunger, health, sanitation, clean water, education and social inequality deserve more urgent attention than climate, especially in the light of 20 years of almost fruitless climate negotiations.

⁴³ Term formalized by Rittel and Webber for problems that tenaciously resist a solution, as – in a potentially infinitely recursive row – they prove to be symptoms of other problems. Horst Rittel, 'Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning', *Policy Sciences* (1973) quoted at www.wickedproblems.com/1_wicked_problems.php [accessed on 15.8.13].

The absolute confinement of Zeno's hopelessness imbues the novel with a sombre austerity that arguably conveys the threat to our biosphere much better than a reiteration of environmental data could have achieved. What is especially haunting is Zeno's despondence, as he realizes that in spite of life-long efforts to contribute to remedial actions to gather data, formulate scenarios, warn and raise the alarm, his awareness and dedication could not facilitate any significant change. Each and every single human being becomes guilty of the destruction by virtue of belonging to the collective of humankind. One of Zeno's last thoughts expresses this aptly: 'The individual human being is a riddle, several billion people organized in a parasitic system are a catastrophe. I'm weary of being a human under these circumstances.'⁴⁴ From this fate there is indeed no escape for anyone.

In this way the novel is a politically charged utterance, even though it contains no overt political statements. It is so by virtue of Bateson's notion of the extended 'survival unit'. Environmentalism is not a remote discipline that is only of concern to specialized scientists; environmentalism is the sum total of humankind's relationship to its environment. We humans are not entitled to ignore this contextual aspect of our existence, as modernist life-style options have seduced us to think. This is no negotiable question of virtue, ethics, politics or culture; it is an existential question. If we nevertheless opt to consider the environment as external, irrelevant or remote, we do so at our own peril. It warrants repeating Bateson in this regard: 'If an organism or aggregate of organisms sets to work with a focus on its own survival and thinks that that is the way to select its adaptive moves, its "progress" ends up with a destroyed environment.'⁴⁵ And: 'If the organism ends up destroying its environment, it has in fact destroyed itself.'⁴⁶

Trojanow directs our gaze away from all the well-known 'environmental issues' to arguably the most important and at the same time most neglected single 'environmental issue': the human being. Personified by Zeno, the human being is cast here as intrinsically part of the environment, its well-being just as direly affected by the environmental degradation as that of the glaciers, its propensity of meaningfully embedded living diminishing at the same rate as the thawing ice, its soul infested with anxieties, its sanity at odds, its very survival at stake. As things stand currently, Zeno's fate predicts no happy end to this story.

In the reflections on *The Songs of Madosini* I stated that while art can principally not be subsumed politically, it nevertheless always contains a political dimension.⁴⁷ Elaborated further, this tenet claims that art can politicize topics (itself included), which are not usually considered primarily political. Stated differently, art pursues a kind of politics of *uttering the soulful*, exemplifying, making visible and public what otherwise remains inarticulate, as it cannot be captured empirically, intellectually or scientifically.

Art is eminently suited to chart the repercussions of environmental degradations on the human soul, highlighting the human plight of confusion, vulnerability, helplessness as a result of improvidence, blindness, carelessness, culpability. Although art is in my opinion not suited to suggest concrete, remedial intervention, it may well be an intervention itself, giving voice to aspects of the human condition immediately affected by the environmental crisis. Instead of indicting (others), I embrace its capacity to lament (for its own sake) as arguably a more effective manner of raising an awareness of our precarious situation. Art is arguably not suited to effectuate political change, yet its existence in itself already constitutes a significant change of a kind that political interventions cannot fathom. Art cannot in any way 'save' the world or make it a 'better place', but it can at any moment make it an *artful* world, which perhaps indicates the opposite of a *careless* world.

⁴⁴ 'Der einzelne Mensch ist ein Rätsel, einige Milliarden Menschen organisiert in einem parasitären System sind eine Katastrophe. Ich bin es leid unter diesen Umständen Mensch zu sein.' Trojanow, *EisTau*, 167.

⁴⁵ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1972), 457; see also Chapter 3, pg. 70 ff.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 9.2. d), pg. 167.

In all of these ways art can thus exist and function politically in the widest sense of the term: ‘presence’ (in the sense of ‘publicise’), ‘express’ (in a nuanced way as only art can do), ‘utter’ (verbalize, vocalize, visualize, enunciate, but also cry and decree) and ‘mediate’ (communicate, translate, bring home) what is of concern to humans. Integral to these reflections on art is its *potential* to function politically, for it may well be ‘misappropriated’ and achieve nothing of the aforementioned. Arguably the ideology of art as ‘mere’ entertainment, distraction, background appeasement, commodity, but also its anachronistic practices as simulacrum, canonical ritual or fake representation significantly weaken its propensity to function politically, i.e. meaningfully, forcefully, compellingly.

Political art, I hold, does not hinge on the (inherent) quality of art, nor on certain styles, techniques or idioms. Instead it relies on the complex of artistic conception and perception – whether artists and recipients grant art the importance (propensity, predisposition) to play a meaningful role in society, to engage with significant issues, to act out decisively on all IAP’s⁴⁸ behalf, to possess the agency of effectively representing what is at stake. This is not a question of artistic intent alone: if such *intent* is not matched by a corresponding *will to perceive* it will remain inconsequential. Similarly, if there is no artistic intent of this nature, this will disappoint the perceptively expectant recipient.

To the previous elaborations on the mutual constituency of *giving and receiving* (artistic conception only being conceivable by the possibility of its reception) the notion of the *gift* must now be added. Artistic expression that deliberately transgresses beyond its immanence could be defined as concerning itself with *the political* (the ‘real’, something of relevant, immediate, human concern). Without this political dimension, I believe, art is ultimately meaningless or at most reduced to mere pastime and play in which the transactional exchange remains an empty gesture. Taking the political dimension of art seriously does not prohibit art from *also* functioning as pastime and play, but potentially elevates these two notions from a trivial to a sublime realm. In this case the transactional exchange gains value by integrating notions beyond the merely personal.

I posit that both Trojanow and I conceived *EisTau* in a political sense as understood above. This is not a guarantee that our individual and combined works will be received as such, nor that they will have any appreciable impact in respect of a broader ‘climate-change-awareness’. Yet, the utterances have been made and disseminated (published, performed and broadcast). In a systemically connected world it is improbable that nothing at all should come of this.

2. STYLE AND AESTHETICS

I have delayed reflecting on my own stylistic and aesthetic position in the previous two chapters, as other topics seemed more pertinent to those contexts. The *EisTau-Trio* – the only composition in the portfolio not employing references to indigenous African musical idioms and therefore stylistically the most homogeneously structured work of the four – presents the opportunity to do so.

As a broad descriptive label I propose to categorize the work’s style as *narrative music*. Four principal considerations inform the aesthetics of the composition and thus determine its ‘narrative’ style. First it engages with musical means in an ‘expressive’ manner, contrary to an avant-garde aesthetic that principally denies such a possibility having replaced the notion of *musical expression* with that of *predisposed* (*serial, parametrical, aleatoric, spectral, etc.*) *structural procedures*.⁴⁹ Second, it upholds (reintroduces, reinvigorates) some of the imperatives that were first introduced into musical thinking as part of the *seconda prattica* in the seventeenth century. Third, the music accepts and integrates a decisive cue from an extra-musical, literary source. Points two and three both concern notions of language, narration and semantics, thereby directly leading to the fourth consideration: the composition embarks on a quest of finding (exploring, formulating,

⁴⁸ Acronym for ‘interested & affected parties’ commonly used in development planning procedures.

⁴⁹ Nonnenmann, ‘Geliehenes Pathos’, 215.

applying) an inherently ‘speaking’ (semantic, deictic, communicative) musical idiom. Each of the four considerations will be explicated in some detail with appropriate musical references.

a) AN AESTHETIC OF SUBJECTIVE MUSICAL EXPRESSION

In my reflections on the *Neue Einfachheit* movement⁵⁰ I have already touched on the *restitution of the categories of ‘expressivity’ and ‘artwork’* as one of the central compositional claims of a group of composers who deliberately opposed avant-garde conventions of the 1970s. Their claim was directed against the dogmatically proclaimed and widely accepted ‘*historical and objective necessity of innovation on the level of musical material*’.⁵¹ Countering this tenet – arguably Adorno’s most influential legacy – the argument was advanced that with the forfeiture of the notion of artistic progress and the subsequent liberation of a huge diversity of compositional approaches, individual subjectivity⁵² was reinstated (by implication: individual preference, responsibility, integrity and skill).

While I believe the claim to have been valid, I have showed how a Modernist understanding of subjectivity ultimately jeopardized the endeavour, eventually leading to relativist (unrelated and hence isolated) individual positions with accordingly little artistic impact and public reception – hardly distinguishable from those of avant-garde composers. In outlining an aesthetic of subjective musical expression I thus principally endorse the claim raised by my teacher generation, but wish to qualify the notion of ‘subjectivity’ somewhat by unpacking it from a complexity perspective.

As has been elaborated in my initial reflections on subjectivity,⁵³ the complexity perspective frees the notion of ‘subjective action’ from the fate (or curse) of relativism and randomness by integrating and embedding the subject into a dense web of relations. Constitutively tied into multiple relationships, no *absolute* subjectivity is possible but, instead, a much more constructive *directed* and dedicated subjectivity perhaps most aptly described as ‘in-volvement’.⁵⁴ While the claim for subjective operational space in the 1970s was primarily motivated by the need to escape from stifling conventions, the ‘absolute’ freedom gained from ‘absolute’ subjectivity proved to be impoverishing, as it was constituted ultimately by a state of relational deprivation.

Artistically-speaking, a relational (complex) subjectivity not only accepts being involved and constrained, but espouses this condition in view of the generativity of interactions and the paradoxically enabling propensities of constraints.⁵⁵ Subjectivity cannot afford⁵⁶ an escape, nor does an escape seem a desirable option at all. Subjectivity is no elevation beyond all obligations. The subject – including the subjective artist – is not ‘free to do as it likes’; at most it is ‘free to frame as it chooses’. The notion of ‘framing’ limits the scope of action somewhat but, more importantly, acknowledges an external reality in conjunction with a given commonsensical normativity, relationality, even functionality between the subject and its environment. The act of framing still affords a multitude of possibilities, but in the form of given ‘options’ to be chosen and subsequent consequences to be faced. In effect it is only this interaction – partly free, partly inescapable – that imbues subjectivity with its esteemed ‘subjective’ qualities: individuality, authority, distinctiveness, irreducibility, responsibility, ‘gravitas’, etc.

⁵⁰ See Chapter 8, pg 134.

⁵¹ ‘An die Stelle der als *historisch objektiv proklamierten Materialinnovation* sollte wieder die künstlerische Subjektivität als maßgebliche Entscheidungsinstanz treten.’ Nonnenmann, ‘Geliehenes Pathos’, 215.

⁵² Nonnenmann, 216.

⁵³ Chapter 2, section 12, pg. 52: Complexity necessitates (and strengthens) subjectivity.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 53; In all these instances the quality of ‘subjective expressivity’ does not denote ‘absolute freedom’, but is derived from a play between the expected and the unexpected, the former establishing a matrix against which the latter may be gauged. ‘Subjectivity’ as well as ‘expressivity’ operate with but also depart from well-known material, much in the way as systemic ‘emergence’ emanates from clear-cut, limited components.

⁵⁵ See arguments put forth in Chapter 2, pg. 37, 39 etc.

⁵⁶ In the double sense of the word: neither provide, nor being able to bear the expense of (an escape).

The notion of framing reveals the contextuality of any subjective observation. As elaborated earlier,⁵⁷ the act of framing implies ‘cutting out’ a certain chosen context. As the choice is fully subjective, the act of contextualizing is one of the instances in which subjectivity emerges most clearly.⁵⁸ With regard to any artistic activity it is important to stress the reciprocity of this interaction: While the subject may freely choose how to frame its perception, action or intervention, it cannot choose *not* to frame it. By implication it may well choose a certain context, but cannot choose to ignore ‘context’ *per se*. In this respect, the assumption that a matter may be perceived (investigated, approached, understood) *in isolation* is principally flawed. It amounts to an impossibility, not because the subjective wish of applying the utmost focus on a single task and cutting out ‘everything else’ should be denied, but because the very notion of subjectivity hinges on the notion of (subjectively chosen) context. Banning either inevitably annihilates the other. Failing to recognize this constitutive relationship is arguably one of the biggest Modernist ‘mistakes’, which has hugely compromised the possibility of ‘living out’ subjective responsibility and relatedness in Modernist contexts.

A further thought to be recapitulated in these reflections on subjectivity or subjective positions is contained in the image of ‘middle ground’ mentioned in Chapter 8.⁵⁹ As delineated there, the metaphor is not meant as a ‘diplomatic position’ (a little bit of everything, averaged out), but as *the only viable position on a continuum between extremes*, which – often in the guise of conventions, fashions and dogmas – define the field by means of border conditions (limits) and not habitats. Arguably the concept of a fixed ‘subjective position’ is a contradiction of terms and should more appositely be described as (propensity for) ‘subjective *change of position*’. In fact, this dynamic is subjectivity’s very strength, whence it needs operational ‘middle’ space, allowing for adjustments in all directions. In this sense, a subjective grounding somewhere in the tension field between extremes (e.g. ideological, stylistic, methodological) is the only viable kind of orientation available, all the more valuable if it is genuinely subjective.

To elucidate this position with respect to the compositional aesthetic of *EisTau*, I posit that the work claims its middle ground (and, by implication, its subjective expressivity) in the following ways:

- It acknowledges the phenomenon of tonal relations, not as the stylistically determined historical convention that has been superseded, but instead as an inherent quality (property) of musical structures based on musical pitch derived from their indwelling overtones. Concurrently the composition resists any rules derived from *tonality understood as stylistically determinate system*. Instead it endeavours to develop its own idiomatic conventions acknowledging *tonal relationality as basic, systemically constitutive musical property*, pliable towards the ends of largely differing stylistic and functional requirements.⁶⁰
- Consequently the composition takes the liberty of employing ‘concrete’ material devices principally linked to ‘tonal musical’ (such as melodies, motives, functional harmonic progressions) just as much as using tonally neutral means (such as characteristic textures, colours, articulations and all kinds of material variability).

⁵⁷ See e.g. Chapter 2, pg. 53.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 8 pg. 137.

⁶⁰ What is commonly defined as ‘tonal’ music usually refers to a musical style in which tonality must at all times be adhered to, remain audible and may at most be stretched a little, by carefully endorsed degrees of dissonance. Tonality is not only acknowledged structurally, but its explicit obedience is considered an essential condition for meaningful musical processes. Conversely, ‘atonal’ music refers to a style, which does not acknowledge music to be structured tonally but, instead, perceives (and decries) this as mere cultural convention. My ‘middle’ position is to acknowledge tonality as structurally ingrained musical quality, but not as a binding nor forbidden convention. If the somewhat brazen comparison is permitted: Being forced to stay at home (the tonic chord is often referred to as home key) all the time or not having a home at all, both seem to misunderstand the notion of ‘home’ and would result in equally unbearable conditions. Instead, having a home and being able to depart and return at liberty seems the appropriate way of doing justice to the concept of ‘home’.

- It utilizes conventional instruments in the well-established chamber combination of a Trio, yet the seeming compliance with accepted norms (of forces and genre) is countered by an unprecedented coalition (of Baroque strings and saxophone).
- It functions as autonomous composition, yet is conceived as re-narration of an extra-musical text, borrowing and concurrently emphasising or fortifying images and ideas from a literary source.

To summarize: A subjective artistic approach informed by complexity thinking differs from what, in the 1970s under the same name, would have been the liberation from stifling objectified dogmatism. Today it will rather pursue the opposite: the reintegration of dissociate artistic expressions into an intelligible compositional field, to be shared as a communicative realm with a perceptive audience.

b) SECONDA PRATTICA

Monteverdi's formulation of a 'second' compositional style⁶¹ emerging towards the end of the sixteenth century has become a key concept in today's perception of Baroque music. Although never decisively defined in historical sources,⁶² it is commonly accepted that the defining trait of this style hinges on the primacy of text (over purely musical considerations), the emancipation of word painting (paving the way for the subsequent development of the *doctrine of affects*) and thus, generally speaking, the pursuit of an enhanced musical expressiveness. Sometimes specific musical means, such as monodic melody lines accompanied solely by *basso continuo*, early experiments with schematic musical forms or features like the '*stile concitato*' are considered as distinguishing traits, but there seems to be consensus that the approach should not be limited to isolated technical or material innovations. Instead its scope is that of an overarching project of compositional *investigations into the possibilities of introducing drama into music*. Arguably the 'intrinsic nexus'⁶³ between *seconda prattica* and opera provides the apposite framework for interpreting the aims of musical innovations at the turn of the seventeenth century.

In popular perception the *seconda prattica* gains its special historical significance in hindsight; from having laid the musical foundations for opera. Considering the lasting fascination that this genre has continuously exerted for more than 400 years, the musical considerations leading to its foundations must indeed be acknowledged as remarkably robust. However, I posit that these considerations – usually merely viewed as developments of the concept of dramatic music – should be framed even wider. They should be recognized as an early instance of systemic and contextual musical thinking, of approaching music not in disciplinary isolation, but linking it to extra-musical means of expression. Seen from a broader, humanistic perspective, the *seconda prattica* was the attempt of incorporating music into the unified enunciation of human emotions (*affects*). Under its theoretical (humanistic, philosophical, dramaturgical) auspices, music was deliberately crafted to significantly enhance such expressions.

Perceived on this level I have found the *seconda prattica* approach to offer an enduringly constructive musical model, especially as growing insights gained from HIP investigations have deciphered pertaining compositional elements or conventions. As a practicing Baroque cellist who frequently performs music in this style, the 'translation' of the expressive means coded in conventions of the 'second practice' into a form of current expression has become an intuitive procedure. In a similar vein, *seconda prattica* conventions have to a certain extent become a kind of basic grammar in my compositional thinking.

⁶¹ Monteverdi uses the term for the first time in a letter published in 1605 as foreword to his fifth book of madrigals, in which he claims to have written a response to Artusi's critique, titled: *Seconda prattica, overo perfettione della moderna musica* ('Second practice, or the perfection of modern music') Bernd Kuwalik. 'Seconda Prattica. Stilistische Vielfalt im Italienischen Madrigal um 1600', Music M.Mus, Dept. Music, T.U. Berlin (Berlin 1996), 36.

⁶² For a comprehensive delineation of the term see Massimo Ossi, *Divining the Oracle: Monteverdi's Seconda Prattica* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2003) as well as Kuwalik, *Seconda Prattica*.

⁶³ Ossi, *Divining the Oracle*, 8.

By way of illustration I will list a few instances of applied *seconda prattica* principles in the *EisTau* score. It should be stressed that their application today results from a purely subjective approach and does not aim or claim to follow any historical school. I also have no intention of writing Neo-Baroque music. However, through my HIP experience I have found certain aspects of Baroque music's technique of contextual configuration to mediate so effectively between music as *abstract axiom* and music as *communicative medium*, that I have chosen to apply them in my own work.

I. Aufbruch ins Eis

With respect to the dramatic situation (Zeno's imminent departure on what will turn out to be his final voyage) various musical features contribute to the *dramatic element* at the outset of the work:

- the *juxtaposition* of contrasting, potentially conflicting material: sharp *pizzicato* chords against sustained lines in the saxophone (1-54),⁶⁴ as well as loud and accentuated textures against soft, melodic passages (1-8 against 9-10)
- multiple *suspensions* in a principally tonal main-theme (10-13, 86-93, 212-214)
- *chromaticism* 'distorting' a functional organ point by orbiting semitones (*pizzicato* figure accompanying main theme (e.g. 9-13 in vn)
- homophonic, irregular *syncopations* (55-63, 95-98).

II. Eis

Representing and symbolizing a cold, crisp, harsh, 'icy' texture, the movement contains

- extended (cold and dry) *pizzicato* passages
- interlocking (latticed) textures (80-94)
- high, bright, even sharp instrumental registers
- 6/4 time signature throughout (courtesy to the hexagonal ice lattice)
- a restricted set of notes, principally limited to 6 different pitches (D, E, G#, Bb, G, F)
- somewhat 'impersonal' music, void of emotional associations (such as harmonic progressions, melodic material).

III. Sturm

Musical features supporting the 'storm trope' are the following:

- *harsh*, recurring alarm signal (1, 22, 88)
- 'stile concitato' (vc: 2-3, 89, tutti: 33-37, 80-86)
- *sweeping* triplet passages in unison (10, 12, 14, etc.)
- fast tempo throughout, gusted, *fragmented* textures (9-21, 74-86).

IV. Kreisen

The notion of circling is picked up musically in various ways:

- by *ostinato* figures / repetitive motives indicating cyclic structure (3-bar phrases in the Introduction and from figure 5)
- by corresponding rising and falling phrases; departing, returning (1-9 build-up, 10-18 relaxation, 19-21 build-up, 22 ff relaxation)
- by the recurring *Passacaglia* variations (at figures 1, 2, 3, 7, 8).

⁶⁴ Arabic figures indicate bar numbers.

V. Zeno's Klage

The trope of the 'lament' is called up by means of

- the chorale (1-38, 171-187), more specifically by the reference to the opening phrase of *O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden* (1-2, 19-20, 171-172) and its dramatic recapitulation (171)
- the 'forlorn' initial solo rendition
- scoring for viola, instead of violin
- a poignant harmonic language (e.g. 27-39, 63-66)
- deliberately sustained dissonances (e.g. 57, 61).

VI. Letzte Reise

Here an ephemeral 'farewell trope' may be discerned in

- the constant use of apoggiaturas in the manner of little sobs
- in an initial sighing gesture (va, vc, 2-3)
- a nostalgic farewell tune (va, I ff)
- numerous *ritardandi* and lingering pauses (6, 14, 22, 29, 30, etc.)
- recapitulation of the first movement's main theme (figure 4)
- a fleetingly, disappearing end.

c) ...CHE L'ORATIONE SIA PADRONA DEL ARMONIA E NON SERVA⁶⁵

This oft-quoted statement about *music serving the oration* (of a text) 'epitomizes the relationships between text and music in the style of *seconda prattica*'.⁶⁶ More specifically, it summarizes Monteverdi's approach when determining ways of setting texts to music and thereby reinforcing their expressivity through 'musico-rhetorical' means. Arguably most of Monteverdi's significant musical contributions can be related to the inversion of the relationship between text and music, contravening earlier (Renaissance and *prima prattica*) conventions in which musical rules applied foremost, thereby subjugating all textual considerations.

It was in defence of these conventions that Artusi formulated his famous critique about the 'Imperfections of Modern Music'.⁶⁷ While not explicitly mentioning Monteverdi, he nevertheless clearly implicated him by objecting strongly to the employment of unprepared dissonances, for which he saw no justification. He substantiated his criticism of 'turns of phrase' that are 'harsh and little pleasing to the ear', since they are set 'contrary to what is good and beautiful in the harmonic institutions'⁶⁸ by reprinting musical excerpts from selected madrigals by Monteverdi, indicating how they violated traditional harmonic rules.⁶⁹

Apparently Monteverdi was not bothered much by the objections as he only responded to a second attack by Artusi⁷⁰ by way of a letter printed as preface to his fifth book of madrigals.⁷¹ Even so he clearly tried to avoid a direct confrontation by suggesting that two fully different practices were in existence, effectively eliminating the possibility of a common discourse.⁷² He also admitted the 'need for a theoretical justification of

⁶⁵ (It is his intention...) 'that the oration is the mistress of the harmony and should not serve it.' Giulio Cesare Monteverdi's statement about his brother Claudio's compositional approach, contained in an appendix to Claudio Monteverdi's *Scherzi musicali* (1607) titled: *Dichiaratione delle lettera stampata nel V libro de suoi Madrigali*.

⁶⁶ Mauro Calgagno, 'Monteverdi's Parole Sceniche', *Journal for Seventeenth-Century Music (JSCM)* vol. 9, no. 1, (2003), par. 1.1.

⁶⁷ Giovanni Maria Artusi, *L'Artusi, ovvero delle imperfettioni della moderna musica* (Bologna 1600).

⁶⁸ Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (W W Norton, New York 1950), 409.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 410.

⁷⁰ L'Artusi: *Della imperfettione della moderna musica, parte seconda*. (1603).

⁷¹ Claudio Monteverdi, *Il quinto libro de madrigali a cinque voci* (Mantua 1605).

⁷² Ilias Chrissochoidis, *The 'Artusi-Monteverdi' Controversy: Background, Content and Modern Interpretations* (King's College, London, undated), <http://web.archive.org/web/20130622214203/http://www.bpmonline.org.uk/bpm6-artusi.htm#f> [accessed on 23.7.14].

the new practice' and promised duly to supply a treatise titled *Seconda pratica, ovvero, Perfezioni della Moderna Musica*.⁷³ This project, however, never materialized and Claudio's brother Giulio Cesare Monteverdi must be credited for having produced the only comprehensive response⁷⁴ to Artusi's criticism, a document considered by some as 'one of the most important manifestos in the history of music'.⁷⁵

In it he states: 'Artusi takes certain details, or, as he calls them "passages" from my brother's madrigal *Cruda Amarilli*, paying no attention to the words, but neglecting them as though they had nothing to do with the music, later showing the said "passages" deprived of their words, of all their harmony and of their rhythm.'⁷⁶ Thus the point was raised that Artusi had ignored a crucial element of the musical system. Outside this context – indicated by the text as complementary extra-musical element – the musical progressions were admittedly crude. Within it, conversely, Artusi's criticism would become insubstantial.

Obviously Claudio Monteverdi had placed the dissonances under discussion quite deliberately, motivated by the will musically to replicate the affect of the words to be sung. He thereby followed a Platonic tradition (thus an ancient conviction, not a 'new fancy' as Artusi would have it) whereby a song should be 'composed of three things: the words, the harmony, and the rhythm' in such a manner that 'the rhythm and the harmony follow the words, and not the words these.'⁷⁷ This approach rested on the conviction that 'the manner of the diction and the words follow and conform to the disposition of the soul'.⁷⁸ As the notion of 'musical expression' (i.e. musical utterances reflecting 'the disposition of the soul') had become the primary musical objective of the *seconda prattica*, the notion of 'diction' obtained absolute priority: 'Indeed, all the rest follows and conforms to the diction.'⁷⁹

In view of the arguments made in respect of the constitutive nature of 'context' in Chapter 3, Artusi's criticism (besides being reactionary and narrow-minded) evidently appears as a case of isolated analysis of a single aspect of music, arriving at a judgement of 'wrong', 'false' and 'ugly' of what subsequent reception history (assisted by historically informed performances) has since learnt to appreciate as the strong, significant and enduringly compelling aspects of Monteverdi's music. Moreover, he clearly failed to estimate the reach and scope of developments that would evolve from the trajectory of the *seconda prattica*: Arguably the advocates of this approach (Monteverdi, Gesualdo, Luzzaschi, de Rore, Caccini, Strozzi, etc.), by intrinsically integrating all facets of the textual realm (oration, rhetoric, deictics, semantics, syntax) into the musical domain, conceived the notion of 'expressive music'. This idea of music as deliberate carrier of expressivity, content and meaning, determines the common understanding of music to this very day.

During the course of subsequent historical and stylistic developments the relationship between music and text would be a topic of continuous reconsiderations. However, broadly speaking, the basic tenet of a unified artistic expressivity towards which music and text would both contribute complementarily, held fast until the twentieth century when it was first questioned by expressionist composers and finally discarded by radical, avant-garde approaches.

In *EisTau* I have opted to return to the position of the Monteverdi brothers arguing that if a (literary) text is decisive for the conception of a musical work, it must essentially be considered an 'ingredient' (aspect, component) of that work, not to be omitted from its reception or analysis. Evidently this is the case if the text is actually present in score and performance (e.g. in the form of lyrics to be sung). But, I wish to argue, it holds equally if the text is not expressly mentioned.

⁷³ Chrissochoidis, *The 'Artusi-Monteverdi' Controversy*

⁷⁴ Giulio Cesare Monteverdi, 'Dichiaratione Della Lettera Stampata Nel Quinto Libro De Suoi Madregali' in: Monteverdi, Claudio *Scherzi Musicali a tre voci* (Venezia 1607).

⁷⁵ Claude Palisca quoted in Chrissochoidis, *The 'Artusi-Monteverdi' Controversy*.

⁷⁶ Ibid., my emphasis. As can be corroborated by Strunk's reprint of the musical examples, the lyrics are omitted.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

This tenet is corroborated by historical evidence: The sudden seventeenth century rise of instrumental music as self-sufficient musical genre is a consequence of *seconda prattica* developments: Once ‘affects’ (emotions, images, ideas) had been transferred into musico-rhetorical figures, these could in turn be translated into instrument-specific idiomatic material, concurrently providing technically feasible opportunities for instrumentalists as well as satisfying the formal (structural, grammatical, communicative) demands of musical construction. Clearly the origins of modern instrumental music (other than ‘primordially’ functional genres accompanying activities such as dance, battle or spirit invocation) must be acknowledged as *abstractions of ‘literary’ musical expressions*.

The tenet can also be supported etymologically and structurally. Western descriptors of ‘musical form’ are clearly based on linguistic models. Their principle elements (e.g. phrase, motive, theme, exposition, recapitulation) as well as aspects of performance (articulation, diction, phrasing, emphasis, expression) are not inherently musical ideas, but have all been borrowed from linguistics. The conception of larger musical forms – a pivotal pre-requisite for purely instrumental music to ‘carry’ – rests on rhetorical principles: the exposition of an argument, its investigation, contradiction, and eventual corroboration and conclusion. The classical characterizations of musical movements refer to physical and (human) emotional, not musical, states: *allegro* – cheerful, *adagio* – at ease, *vivace* – lively, *presto* – hurried, *andante* – ‘easy going’, etc.

In the case of the *EisTau-Trio* the compositional proposition is the following: Ideally, the work is performed in conjunction with a reading of (part of) the novel so that the listener is familiar with the plot or story. In this case the music latches onto the narrative, ‘retelling’ it as it were in its own medium and expanding the perceptive dimension as described earlier.⁸⁰ Yet, even if the work is performed without its corresponding literary counterpart and the listener is therefore not familiar with the immediate semantic content, its dramatic and syntactic structure, borrowed from the novel, is still evident. Aided by the titles (which should be considered embedded musical components), the dramatic situation, as well as types of affect, gesture and energy, are clearly defined for each movement.

Aufbruch (‘departure’, but also ‘setting out’ in the sense of ‘embarking’, ‘endeavouring’, ‘beginning’) is marked by dramatic juxtapositions (as described in section 2.b of this chapter), a general restlessness indicated by irregular syncopations (e.g. 55 ff) or syncopated emphases (64-67, 72-76, 79-83, etc.). The repeated statement of overtly melodic material – by implication emotional, thus portraying the human protagonist (the ‘Zeno theme’ 9-13, 87-93, 213-221) – stands relatively isolated in an otherwise texture-determined movement; confronting, as it were, the human agent (the main character) with environmental and contextual challenges awaiting him on his journey. Without being intended as literal illustrations, the textures may well invoke immediate associations based on archetypal analogies, e.g. crisp, harsh *pizzicato* (opening passage) – ice; rising and falling runs (64 ff) as well as tumbling, descending figures (101ff) – waves; motionless homophonic repose (117ff, 203ff) – pristine, untouched, snowbound landscape; runs combined with sustained lines (179ff) – the protagonist’s observation of our entry into the forbidding environment; sequences alluding to functional harmonic progressions (152ff) – emotional upheaval, pain, longing.

Eis refrains from any harmonic progressions, that is, emotive musical procedures and by implication soulful, ‘human’ reference – save perhaps for the four exclamations (136-140, 141-143, 144, 145-148) just before the end of the movement. Instead it unfolds in a ‘crystal syntax’ (see detailed description in section 3.III) that reimagines a landscape by reiterating natural processes following from given circumstantial laws (e.g. ice freezing at a certain temperature). From a dramaturgical point of view, it portrays the environment into which the journey ventures.

The aforementioned ‘storm trope’ to which *Sturm* obliges, indicates a climactic moment of being in the midst of things, but also a dangerous, threatening, critically decisive situation of exposure and violation. Inserted into the overtly motoric re-enactment are two reflective moments (39 ff and 95 ff), which – following

⁸⁰ See synopsis of ‘The Music’ at the beginning of this chapter, pg. 207 ff.

the model of the first movement – clearly indicate a shift of level from external turmoil to inner reflection, indicating the subject's vulnerability at the mercy of encroaching forces.

Two different types of cycles constitute the form of *Kreisen* – a fast-swirling (narrow, somewhat frenzied, exhausting, particular) type, completing one rotation in three fast-paced 3/4 bars (1-27, 69-95) and a slow-churning (calm, steady, unerring, comforting, generically lawful, encompassing) variety, which requires at least 10 bars of slow 3/2 bars. The former is obviously embedded in the latter, the individual life-cycle dissolves into the larger cycle of nature or existence. A possible reading implies Zeno's fate as contained in that of all existence, as those of individual concerns and troubles irrelevant in the bigger picture. Independent of any specific interpretation, this movement amounts to a caesura within the drama.

Its title, *Zeno's Klage*, already indicates this movement as belonging to the genre of *lamento* compositions.⁸¹ In addition, the chorale variations linking it to the realm of sacred music clearly signify the protagonist's arrival at an existential crossroads. Two chorale verses opening the movement and one closing it frame a middle section which, once again, juxtaposes an 'emotional' (harmonically determined) passage (43-91) with a 'motoric' (gestural) episode (92-170). Formally speaking, the conflict between the two worlds depicted herewith is contained in the lament, which at the same time functions as spiritual invocation.

Letzte Reise unmistakably signifies death. The nostalgic melodiousness denotes an emotional state of great sadness, yet the overall gentleness of the movement heralds the acceptance of an inevitable passage. Short bouts of syncopated protestations (1, 4-5, 9-10, etc.) are all immediately appeased and yield to the inescapable flow and seeming inevitability of events. A short middle section returns to the first movement's 'Zeno theme' (45-51). Linked to a harmonically poignant reference to the 'emotional' music of the 5th movement (62-68) after which the 'Zeno theme' is recapitulated (71-76), there can be no doubt as to who's suffering and farewell the listener is witnessing.

The sketched relationality between music and 'dramatic plot' above is more than the idiosyncratic reference to an external 'programme'. I consent that it is subjective, and therefore dependent on a certain framing. But it is concurrently 'structurally coupled', in other words, *manifests in structural features, not merely in an interpretational sphere*. Without wanting to force the listener into a single 'intentional' perception, it nevertheless endeavours 'to say something quite specific' and aligns a number of syntactic and deictic devices to this specific end. *Dramaturgical* considerations are far more important than *material* musical processes. Adapting Monteverdi's initial quote, the *narration* (understood as passage through various dramatic stages) is the master of musical processes; the *material* serves this end.

In effect the notion of *musical material* becomes secondary, essentially even unimportant, just as individual letters (and even words) do not play a significant role in the conception of a literary work *per se*, even if such a work is composed of nothing but letters and words. Once again the systems view of constraints and emergences offers a clear insight where an avant-garde 'fetishization of material' has shrouded constitutive relations: Musical material is but a component in a musical whole, loosing its component identity and gaining a different organizational identity in a systemic context (like a brick in a wall, a wall in a house, a house in a city, etc.). Very little insight on the nature of a city will be gained from an isolated scrutiny of its bricks (unless such an investigation is framed contextually and it might be discerned that the city's atmosphere is decisively influenced by a certain hue in the colour of the clay from which its bricks have been burnt). The absurdity of the proposition that the viability of a city depends on the novelty of its bricks is evident.

⁸¹ A substantial *lamento* (usually that of the heroine) at the dramatic climax is a fixed convention in *opera seria*, applied without exception in the Baroque period, and even frequently occurring in later periods as well. Given the universality of the experience expressed herein and the emotional impact of such compositions an independent genre of dirges, complaints, elegies, threnodies and requiems emerged.

An important aspect of the musical lament is that it affords the expression of pain as well as the assertion of dignity, affording its protagonist emotional release and the regaining of strength. Thereby the genre displays a remarkably close complementarity between psychologically necessary processing and musical propensity of quasi-ritualistic quality, perhaps explaining the cathartic effect.

Recapitulating the argument from a slightly different angle, the relevance (or even primacy) of a text with regard to the composition can also be elucidated with reference to the concept of ‘framing’. As has been expounded in connection with the reflections on subjective observation,⁸² what is implicitly or explicitly part of any perception does not only pertain to the object or phenomenon under scrutiny, but just as much to the framing of the observer. Therefore it requires no vague contextual references, nor any laboured metaphysical explanations to claim that an external narrative is intrinsically part of a composition, even if no physical traces of the narration (neither spoken words nor printed text) can be evinced. It suffices that it exists, that it has been part of the conceptualization of the composition and that the listener is made aware of its constitutive presence.

While I have previously described framing as an act of ‘cutting out’, it can equally well be characterized as ‘embedding in’ or ‘relating to’ a certain context. From this perspective the act of composing – framed as ‘subjective presentation’ is symmetrically complementary to the act of perception as ‘subjective observation’. In both instances the manner of ‘framing’ cannot be prescribed, but remains individual. At the same time it is not random, but structurally related (structurally coupled).⁸³ Yet, there is sufficient ‘clearance’ between intention and interpretation to grant both sender and receiver the freedom and dignity of remaining subjective, not being coerced in any way: As the composition is concurrently autonomous and dependent on the text the listener remains free to include or exclude the narration from his or her framing. Both manners of perception are adequate.

d) SEMANTIC MUSIC

The debate about musical semantics – the question whether music can convey meaning – is arguably just as old as music itself. In spite of countless investigations from linguistic, neurological, psychological, cognitive sociological and musicological angles, the findings proposed in this domain remain diverse and ambivalent. Any evidence that music can indeed convey meaning is concurrently relativized by the restrictions that such meaning is vague, highly subjective and possibly partly conveyed by extra-musical associations in conjunction with a musical experience.

Besides exceeding the scope of this investigation, it would be pointless to engage with this debate on the level of its somewhat essentialist and materialist premises, which have been perpetuating the rather unsatisfactory ‘yes-but’ results. Instead, by way of concluding these reflections of the music-text relationship, I wish to highlight two final ideas that suggest approaching the underlying question from a perspective of relational thinking and thereby framing it altogether differently.

The first follows Stefan Koelsch in his critique of the oppositional juxtaposition of music and language. Conventional discussions of the topic generally uphold a dichotomous distinction between ‘linguistic’ and ‘musical’ semantics, for example allocating notions of specific, propositional meaning and functional communication⁸⁴ to the former, the emotional ‘expression’ (of intra-world experiences) to the latter domain. Not surprisingly, a methodology based on the principal assumption of essentially distinct domains and comparisons describing the one in terms of the other will hardly be able to determine more than partial overlaps and instances of coincidental congruencies. Conversely Koelsch suggests a fundamentally different premise from which to conduct the investigations, that of a ‘*music-language continuum*’.⁸⁵ The arguments for the assumption of a single domain are compelling, as an overview of its rationale will demonstrate.

⁸² See Chapter 2, 12. pg. 52.

⁸³ See pg. 49 and 70 ff.

⁸⁴ Robert Slevc, & Aniruddh Patel, ‘Meaning in Music and Language: Three Key Differences Comment on ‘Towards a Neural Basis of Processing Musical Semantics’ By Stefan Koelsch’, *Physics of Life Reviews* vol. 8, (2011), 111.

⁸⁵ Stefan Koelsch, *Brain and Music* (Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester 2012), 244.

PARANTHESIS XIII – THE MUSIC-LANGUAGE CONTINUUM

From a neurological perspective, both music and speech (enacted language) ‘require decoding of acoustic information’,⁸⁶ in other words, auditory cognition and processing. In many cases musical and linguistic perceptions thus rely on the same or similar neurological processes. For example, the identification of *phonemes* (in language) and *timbre* (in music) both rely on an acoustical analysis of ‘spectrum envelope and amplitude envelope’ respectively.⁸⁷ Other examples of neurological processing involved in both the perception of music and language are ‘auditory scene analysis’, ‘auditory stream segregation’, ‘Gestalt formation’, as well as ‘interval analysis’.⁸⁸ Of interest with regard to the latter is its role with regard to the determination of syntactic properties in both music and language: Koelsch suggests a parallel between the neurological processes determining a ‘chord function’ (assessing the root of a musical chord) or a ‘lexeme’ (determining the stem or root of a word), as an initial step in assessing the syntactic or even semantic properties implied by the auditory signal.

Syntactic structure building in musical and linguistic contexts interact at neurological levels of ‘morpho-syntactic processing, phrase-structure processing and possibly word-category information.’⁸⁹ Finding that ‘cognitive and neural resources are shared’ in processes of ‘syntactic re-analysis, integration and revision’ applicable in both music and language has resulted in the formulation of a ‘*shared syntactic integration resource hypothesis* (SSIRH)’⁹⁰

On a phenomenological level music and spoken language each have characteristic ‘design features’.⁹¹ Some of these are fully shared by both domains, others ‘are typical for either “music” at one end of the continuum, or “language” at the other, but ... overlap between language and music in *transitional zones*, rather than being clear-cut distinctive features for “music” or “language” in general.’⁹²

Phenomenological features unequivocally common to both domains are their *complexity* (exceeding ‘innate vocalizations available to our species [such as] groans, sobs, laughter, shouts’),⁹³ *generativity* (syntactic structuring, context-free grammar) and *transposability* (within boundaries musical and linguistic figures remain recognizable in different pitch registers.) The ‘intimate connection between music and speech is [further] corroborated by the findings of overlapping and shared neural resources for music and language processing... suggesting ‘that the human brain, particularly at an early age, does not treat language and music as strictly separate domains, but rather treats language as a special case of music ... Infants acquire information about word and phrase boundaries ... in part through different types of prosodic cues such a speech melody, metre rhythm and timbre (that is, through musical aspects of speech).’⁹⁴ To this can be added cultural observations such as the *universality* of both phenomena (in all human cultures – without exception – language and music occur) revealing both an *innate human capacity* with respect to both domains (the natural ability to acquire musical and linguistic skills) as well as their *cultural conditionality*, referring to a certain cultural environment that is a prerequisite for practicing (experiencing, learning, transmitting and developing) music and language.

On closer scrutiny of ‘design features’ that are commonly perceived clearly to distinguish music from language, such as ‘discrete pitch, isochrony and propositional semantics’,⁹⁵ these features reveal many overlapping and shared aspects, thus further corroborating the continuum concept.

⁸⁶ Koelsch, *Brain and Music*, 241.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 243.

⁹¹ Fitch and Hockett quoted in Koelsch, 244.

⁹² Koelsch, 245.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 245.

Absolute or *definite pitches* are usually not linked to linguistic expression. However, it is worth considering that absolute pitches were foreign to musical practice before the advent of the twelve-tone equal temperament and standardized tuning pitches (e.g. A = 440Hz) and; earlier tuning systems relied on a variety of systems of relational pitches and locally varying ‘concert pitches’. The notion of ‘definite pitches’ should thus properly be recognized as modern convention, rather than innate musical property. On the other hand, tone languages attach semantic meaning, lexical itemization as well as grammatical distinctions to the pronunciation at specific pitch levels or with distinct pitch inflections. Moreover, languages universally employ pitch for the purpose of phrase bounding, formulating questions or imperatives or in the case of emphatic speech. A clear distinction between music and language along the criterion of pitch is thus impossible.

Meter, rhythm and isochrony arguably reside at the musical end of the continuum; they are, however, not exclusive to music considering their constitutive roles in poetry, emphatic or ritualistic speech. Conversely, *propositional semantics*, although more prominent on the language-end of the continuum, can in fact also be discerned in musical contexts. Research measuring the neurological effect of ‘semantic priming’ shows ‘that music cannot only influence the processing of words, but it can also prime representations of meaningful concepts ... independent of the emotional content of these concepts ... [showing that] music transfers considerably more semantic information than previously believed.’⁹⁶

Meaning specificity with regard to the *extra-individual world* is arguably a linguistic characteristic, even though it may be pointed out that ‘the symbolic sign quality of music is, by definition, just as specific as the symbolic sign quality of words.’⁹⁷ More significantly, ‘music can communicate states of the *intra-individual world* (that is, states that cannot be perceived by different individuals, and whose existence of qualities can thus not be falsified by others).’⁹⁸ Here, music even has the advantage of operating ‘prior to the reconfiguration of sensations into words’ and – since information about sensations is often problematic to express with words – can, in a sense, communicate ‘more specifically’ in this domain. Affective prosody borrows this kind of ‘immediate’ specificity from the corresponding quality in the musical domain for its extraordinary impact and grip on any listener.

Often *translatability* is mentioned as a language-specific feature. Yet, considering the varying degrees of fidelity, no clear boundary can be drawn between ‘translatable’ and ‘non-translatable’. Moreover, extra-musical meaning can very well be conveyed by different styles of music – hence *translatability* is no singular linguistic propensity. Finally, even ‘*performative contexts and repertoire*’⁹⁹ – although more readily associated with music – can be found in both domains. Linguistic examples in this respect are theatrical performances, traditional storytelling, ritual pronunciations (as in prayers or blessings) and ‘phatic’ phrases (as in greetings).

In the light of this catalogue of musico-linguistic phenomena, a strict separation of music and language can only rest on an artificial construct. A scientific understanding of the terms ‘music’ and ‘language’ must henceforth assume a continuum of transitions along which aspects of both phenomena are distributed.¹⁰⁰

Koelsch’s theory of a *music-language continuum* provides a strong neurological and linguistic argument for the recognition of the ‘transitional nature of the design features of music language.’¹⁰¹ It thereby corroborates the ‘HIP argument’, perhaps best summarized by Harnoncourt’s definition of ‘Musik als Klangrede’ (music being a language of sounds) and the ‘complexity argument’, whereby music is perceived as systemic interaction

⁹⁶ Stefan Koelsch, & Elisabeth Kasper et al. ‘Music, Language and Meaning: Brain Signatures of Semantic Processing’, *Nature Neuroscience* vol. 7, no. 3, (2004).

⁹⁷ Koelsch, *Brain and Music*, 247.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 248.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 249.

always simultaneously straddling the domains of expression and communication, informed by axiomatic and contextual considerations and thereby linking ‘*intra-individual and extra-individual worlds*’.¹⁰²

I posit that this accumulative evidence necessitates a fundamental reassessment of musical perceptions, consequently also entailing (and enabling) a reassessment of the task of composing. The final point in this section will therefore consist of summarizing reflections on a compositional approach that, following all preceding arguments, considers *musical design as specific case of linguistic expression*.

Principally distinguishing such an approach from conventional methods is the assumption that any and every form of *composition is always a form of speaking*. It therefore entails all aspects involved in this activity – including the notions of expression, communication, human interaction, cultural conditionality, communal experience, semantic transmission and syntactic logic. Arguably a composer may choose to emphasize any one of these aspects to a certain degree, but he or she is not free to neglect or completely ignore the others. Even if such neglects or omissions are assumedly motivated or justified by artistic or ideological reasons, doing so will simply result in a less effective composition.

Embedding the act of composition in the linguistic realm thus *relativizes the notion of absolute aesthetic freedom* with respect to an inescapable (almost mechanistic, systemic) functionality that may only be ignored at the peril of jeopardizing the final artistic and aesthetic goals. Obviously this embedment does not imply the subjugation of artistic and aesthetic qualities under functional or even pragmatic considerations. To the contrary, the advocacy of the importance of these qualities precisely seeks to caution that they may unwittingly be lost altogether if they are not negotiated to the necessary extent with pragmatic and syntactic conditions, on the basis of which they can only be conveyed. Should the consideration of pragmatically functional aspects of language as a consensual and normative system appear as unreasonable or even unacceptable artistic constraint, the generativity of constraints as constitutive to the emergence of creative solutions should be recalled.¹⁰³

3. INSTRUMENTATION

Besides the principal decision to work with a very small cast, the choice of instrumentation was motivated dramaturgically. One of the initial questions concerned a ‘fitting sound colour’ to depict and represent ice – the novel’s central feature. Both Trojanow and I considered the saxophone most aptly suited sonically to capture ice’s characteristic qualities of being hard, bright, edgy, cold, slippery, shimmering and glittering and to ‘translate’ these notions into musical expressions. Furthermore, the possibility of employing the instrument’s colour in different registers by changing from descant- to alto- and finally to tenor-saxophone in the course of the work – departing from energetic, high and piercing reverberations to increasingly low, mellow and dissolving ones – would inherently encapsulate another central notion: that of thawing ice.

Against this cold, material, ‘objective’ representation of ice as the contextual backdrop, string instruments with their potentially more rounded, gentle and warm sound seemed appropriate to portray the human protagonist. While the cello consistently lends its voice to Zeno’s narration, the violin is only used in the first three movements and replaced with a viola for the last three, underlining the musical depiction of a process of continuous thawing.

All in all the work is scored for six different instruments, which are used in four different combinations.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless it is a ‘trio’, as the score is consistently written in three parts and only three (albeit somewhat versatile) performers are required. The instrumentation is thus largely motivated by extra-musical considerations. Put differently, it may be ‘read’ as semantically motivated, i.e. already functionally ‘meaningful’ with regard to the topic of its expression; not merely technically providing a vessel for its musical content, but fulfilling a ‘rhetorical’ function in its own right from the very outset.

¹⁰² Koelsch, *Brain and Music*, 247.

¹⁰³ See Chapter 9.3: ‘Constraints as transformative forces’, pg. 167.

¹⁰⁴ 1. descant-sax, vn, vc (I.+II.); 2. alto-sax, vn, vc (III.); 3. alto-sax, va, vc (IV.) 4. ten-sax, va, vc (V.+VI.).

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPOSITION

The following description and discussion of the *EisTau-Trio* partially incorporates and closely follows the dramaturgy of the novel, thereby demonstrating and emphasising its related, parallel design. Instead of offering an analysis of the composition as a closed and self-sufficient entity, the approach followed here understands and treats the composition as one component of a systemic whole, which essentially encompasses both the book and the score. I argue that the composition structurally relies on the subtext of the novel. This does not necessarily mean that it cannot be performed on its own, nor that it is 'incomprehensible' without the novel. Yet, cognizance of the novel will arguably greatly benefit a hearing. Certainly, a meaningful explication of the composition's structure needs to take the novel's design, images, metaphors and overall dramaturgy into account.

As in any complex system, the notion of strict and unambiguous 'analysis' or (objective) description has to be replaced with that of 'interpretation'. While I readily admit to the subjectivity of the following description, which thus inevitably becomes an interpretation, I hold that it nevertheless remains sufficiently close to the text to convey principally pertinent information. This statement has two implications: First, it implies that this will not be an exhaustive description; others are possible and might be equally valid. Second, the interpretive approach is no 'easy way out', avoiding a more precise analytical method. Arguably it is the best possible approach, amounting to a close reading based on meticulous observation *and* acknowledging the subjectivity of this process.

Finally, I should indicate in advance that, as the compositional design of the second movement differs slightly from the rest, its discussion accordingly follows a different approach.¹⁰⁵ It is the only movement that is 'static' (as it is preoccupied solely with the description/depiction of ice) and does not dynamically engage with the dramatic unfolding of the plot. Since there is no dramaturgical component to expound here, my discussion focuses instead on structural aspects, which in this specific case emulate certain features of ice crystal growth.

I. AUFBRUCH INS EIS

*Morgen brechen wir auf. Eine weitere Tour. Mein viertes Jahr. Es steht geschrieben.*¹⁰⁶

Two sets of primary material initiate the movement and 'inaugurate' the work. Figures of harsh ('breaking', 'cracking') pizzicato chords (strings, bars 1-8, 14-26, etc.), representing the world of ice, evoke energetic exclamations from the saxophone (bars 3-9, 16-26), which may be heard as Zeno's exuberant response in anticipation of once again revisiting his treasured world of ice. These short 'cries' eventually agglomerate into the first appearance (bars 27-30) of what will later fully manifest as the 'Zeno theme' (bars 87-94, 212-221); but for the time being Zeno has not yet fully returned from his withdrawal, (not yet fully stepped into the picture, not yet arrived in his favourite environment).

The renewed appearance of the pizzicato figure calls forth more pronounced responses from the saxophone (bar 33 ff), which in turn now elicit some resonance from the violin (bar 35 ff). Zeno's voice becomes increasingly more prominent, until even in the cello part the (environmental) 'ice motive' is dropped in favour of a full focus on the human protagonist. This results in a homophonic, three-part passage based on the opening material of Zeno's initial exclamations (bars 55-63).

The kinetic energy of the forward surging, sweeping, wavelike phrase starting in bar 64 may indicate the beginning of the journey proper. The phrase is rendered three times, allowing for three permutations in which each instrument plays each of the three parts once. Always ending with an open crescendo, urging further forward movement, the third round leads to the first full emanation of the 'Zeno-theme' (bar 86 ff). Zeno is now in his element, and the design of the theme portrays his personality in this condition: The music

¹⁰⁵ The necessity of a purposeful correlation between *object* and *method* of study has been an interesting discovery in this regard.

¹⁰⁶ Trojanow, *EisTau*, 18.

is characterised by consecutive suspensions and resolutions and hence appears to be tonal and emotionally laden. The presence of ‘ice-*pizzicati*’ as structuring counterpoint is an intrinsic part of the man’s disposition.

In a first development section the separate sets of primary material (the initial ice calls and Zeno’s exclamations) are merged (bars 95-100). Tumbling versions of the wave passage (bars 101-105, 108-113) lead to a very quiet moment (bars 117-125), which might represent the stillness of a pristine, undisturbed (hence *senza vibrato*) ice surface. Another three-fold permutation of the surging wave-phrase (bars 126-136) and another ice-shield (137-151) indicate that the journey is well underway. Zeno’s excitement mounts and the passage from bar 152-170 captures his fervent admiration (the sequence of rising, if not soaring fifths in the violin part) of the icy environment (the unchanging organ point in the cello part). The blend of both elements and their harmonic congruence might indicate Zeno’s attitude of fully embracing what he sees here or, conversely (and concurrently), how this specific landscape accommodates, supports, inspires his urge to live in accord with his surroundings. More breaking of ice (bars 175-178) interrupts the serene moment. Now an undercurrent (perhaps a threatening undertone, melting, gushing water?) accompanies the recapitulation of Zeno’s erstwhile unperturbed exclamations (bar 179 ff). However, they continue to elicit a strong resonance (perhaps Paulina’s understanding?) indicated by the close interaction between saxophone and violin (bars 181-194). A tumbling wave (bar 195 ff) acts as transition from active response to contemplative, final gaze onto a now inanimate, empty ‘ice-scape’ (bars 203-210).

From here on, the music focuses on the human protagonist. In its third appearance and subsequent development (bars 212 to end) the Zeno-theme is passed from violin to cello and further to saxophone, before leading to a sequence of cadences of which the last one is ‘as perfect as it can be’ under the circumstance – an affirmative gesture evolved from the initial exclamation, which has hereby reached its final guise. Yet – as the three final cello *pizzicati* indicate – the ice has the last say.

To summarize: The music dramatizes – and to a certain measure ‘depicts’ by means of musical figures and gestures – the notions of departure, anticipation and awakening. It traces the re-emergence of Zeno’s ‘other self’ – the enthusiastic, assertive naturalist – as well as his response to the unfolding Antarctic landscape. It endeavours to express the congruity between person and environment and finally introduces undertones indicative of the imminent disaster.

II. EIS

*Eis erklären zu dürfen, versöhnt mich, vorübergehend, mit dem Sterben meines Gletschers.*¹⁰⁷

Zeno is obsessed with ice. His fascination dates back to a moment as a young boy, when his father first introduced him to the world of Alpine glaciers.¹⁰⁸ He subsequently made their study his profession. Tragically, this amounted to little more than charting and documenting their deathly illness and ultimate demise.¹⁰⁹ The invitation to work on the cruise comes as a godsend, which he eagerly embraces as an opportunity to escape the inescapable evidence of destruction and once again engage with his beloved ice, where it is still preserved. In his lectures on board he is in his element [sic] and is soon attributed a new nickname – *Mr. Iceberger*.¹¹⁰ His audience is spellbound as he easily conveys his passion for a natural phenomenon that generally attracts little detailed attention but, on closer scrutiny, becomes a truly fascinating topic.

Ice occurs in a great variety of forms, all of which are fragile and caught up in constant processes of transformation. In this sense it is a fleetingly elusive substance that either presents itself in pristine conditions of awe-inspiring perfection and beauty, or not at all. This might explain why ice has become such an evocative

¹⁰⁷ Trojanow, *EisTau*, 37.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 50-52.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

metaphor for our planet's wellbeing. Through its precariously short-lived existence it appositely symbolizes life's dependence on a delicate ecological balance. The notion of a threatening 'tipping point' becomes demonstrably tangible: a rise of temperature beyond a given threshold becomes synonymous with a breakdown of finely tuned ecological interactions. The ominous messages about pending ecological disasters, which have remained elusively distant for so long, finally come home in the form of melting ice.

Apart from its role in the novel, ice is a fascinating and complex substance from a purely scientific point of view. According to the physicist Kenneth Libbrecht,¹¹¹ many of the fundamental physical processes leading to its formation are not yet fully understood. The seemingly straightforward process of 'water molecules condensing into a crystalline lattice' is riddled with complexities pertaining to temperature, pressure, electrical and chemical effects, water impurities, 'attachment kinetics', supersaturation, growth rate and surface melting, particle diffusion, growth instabilities, etc.¹¹² Even the well-documented changes in 'snow crystal morphology' (different shapes of snow precipitation depending on temperature, humidity and supersaturation) cannot be explained satisfactorily.¹¹³ The very 'growth of plain hexagonal ice prisms remains ... puzzling ... in spite of its apparent simplicity.'¹¹⁴

In spite of all uncertainties, the principal mechanism of water molecules forming a 'hexagonal lattice' in ice crystals is of course well known. The 'six-fold symmetry' readily perceivable in snowflakes or on frozen surfaces 'ultimately derives from the hexagonal geometry of the ice crystal lattice.'¹¹⁵ However, as such a lattice has only molecular dimensions, it is 'not trivial how this nano-scale symmetry is transferred to the structure of a large snow crystal.'¹¹⁶ The common explanation is that this occurs through two different processes – faceting and branching¹¹⁷ – neither of which require 'long-range forces' to exert their structuring blueprint. Typically crystal growth is initiated by faceting: the repeated 'hooking up' of similar molecular structures to each other. When such a growing structure reaches a certain size it becomes unstable. Fissures or fractures along 'fault lines' may then catalyse independent branching¹¹⁸ which, under suitable conditions, leads to the well-known star-shaped appearance of snow crystals. (Figure 20)

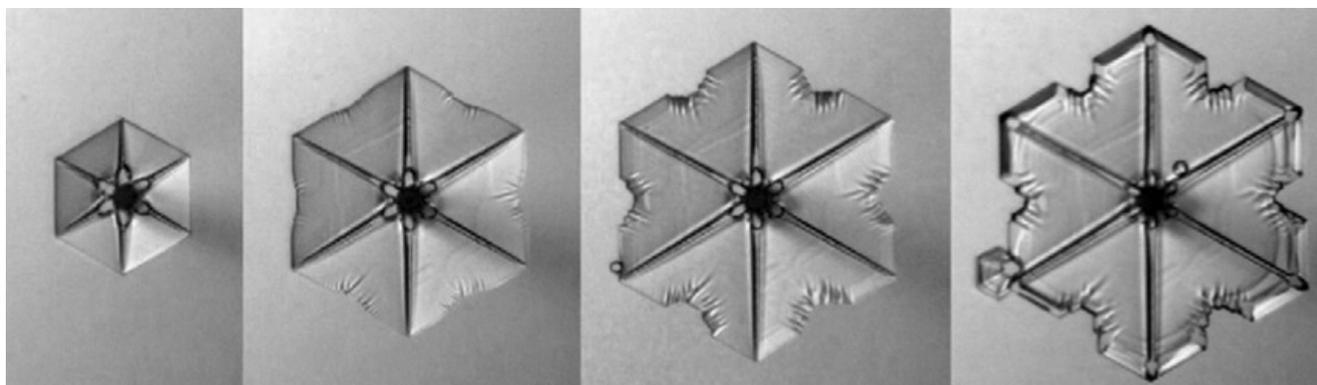


Fig. 20: Initial growth pattern of snow crystal showing chronology of faceted and branched growth. Branches arise because of instabilities in the facets. © Kenneth Libbrecht. Reproduced with kind permission.

This short excursion into the realm of crystallography, as well as the ecologically motivated reflections on ice in the context of the novel, have been purposefully placed here to open the discussion and perception of this musical movement from an 'external' (scientific, objective, ecological) vantage point. While Zeno's very subjective passion for his topic (as well as my subjective proposition of re-enacting this scene musically)

¹¹¹ Libbrecht is professor of Physics at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech) in Pasadena with a research focus on the physics of crystal growth and pattern formation in ice. See <http://www.its.caltech.edu/~atomic/>.

¹¹² Kenneth Libbrecht, 'The Physics of Snow Crystals', *Reports on Progress in Physics* vol. 68, (2005), 891.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Kenneth Libbrecht, *Snowcrystals.com*, www.its.caltech.edu/~atomic/snowcrystals/faqs/faqs.htm [accessed on 2.8.13].

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Libbrecht, 'The Physics of Snow Crystals', 884.

cannot be omitted from the situation, there is nevertheless a strong urge in both these subjective approaches to open a view on the icy element *per se*, for its own sake and that of its existential conditions and not in anthropocentric terms.

The argument that this is impossible (as the awareness for an object can only exist in subjective consciousness) should not *a priori* disqualify such an attempt. On the contrary, it makes the venture to escape from the subjectivity trap with its stifling relativism all the more urgent. As has been shown in Parenthesis III¹¹⁹ the subjectivity- or constructivist-argument does not escape its own relativism and is therefore not fully watertight. To say that we can never objectively know an outside world is no conclusive argument that such an outside world does not exist. Even this, we need to admit, can never be known. However, the fact that our consciousness exists and thus must be part of whatever outside world there is, is itself strong evidence of an 'outside'. In this sense subjectivity may be understood as ultimate evidence for the possibility of an objective dimension.

While the depth of this debate by far exceeds the scope of this investigation, I nevertheless wish to make a claim for the artistic (and hence fully subjective) quest of 'reaching for the external'. While it may well be 'intangible', it can very well be imagined. This is, after all, the very realm of all artistic work.

In the novel, Zeno impersonates this idea as an ecological imperative: unless the human species learns to turn around current perceptions of its own existence placed centrally in a mere 'global environment' to that of understanding human existence and activity as a peripheral phenomenon on a 'life-supporting planet', there can be no hope of curbing ill-advised or even destructive behaviour; hence the importance of ice and its pure ('purposeless') appreciation and Zeno's zeal for conveying its significance.

The composition, re-enacting Zeno's 'description of ice', attempts a similarly externalized, objective depiction: unemotional, cold, crisp, clear, forbidding, unapproachable, eco-centric. It is certainly the most 'objective' of all six movements and might thus best be approached and understood on a structural, almost mathematical level, rather than by an investigation of its emotional or expressive content.

The musical design derives in several ways from the famous hexagonal structure associated with ice crystals. The movement features a 6/4 meter throughout (with only three very short 'mutational' deviations) and in its first version even sported a duration of exactly 6 minutes.¹²⁰ But besides these merely playful references, more decisively formative and characteristic 'crystal-derived' laws pertain.

In a hexagonal division of the circle of fifths (or for that matter a chromatic scale of all 12 notes) the rays of the snowflake point at the pitches of a whole-tone scale, as *Figure 21* illustrates¹²¹. But little would be gained by linking this selection of pitches to the geometrical shape of the crystal: arguably the expressive means of whole tone music have been thoroughly exploited (and exhausted) by impressionistic composers early on in the twentieth century. However, determining from the crystal division the three primary intervals corresponding to the angles of its axes (whole tone, major third and tritone) seemed to supply a sufficiently attractive and restricted (enabling!) selection of 'musical material'¹²² with which to work. To a large extent the material of this movement is thus built up from the intervals of a second, a major third and a tritone. Indicated by the letters x, y and z respectively, *Figure 21* indicates the deduction of the intervals. *Example 16* illustrates the method of their compositional application.

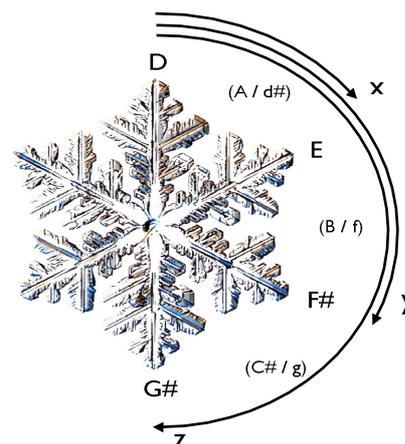


Fig. 21 Hexagonal snowflake inserted into circle of fifths to depict deduction of pitches and intervals in 'Eis.'

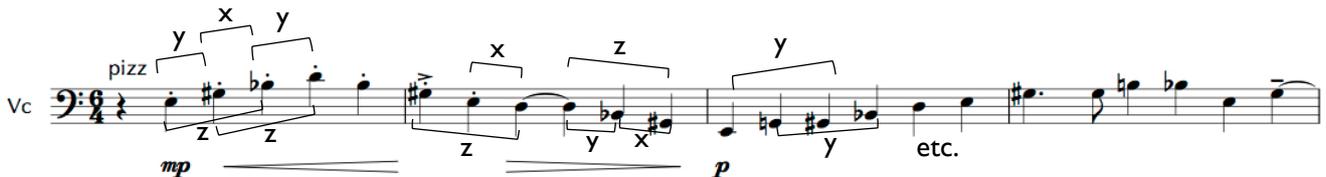
¹¹⁹ See pg. 42.

¹²⁰ This proved to be far too long.

¹²¹ Snowflake image © Kenneth Libbrecht. Reproduced with kind permission.

¹²² Material is meant here in the sense of the German 'Tonvorrat', a qualitatively limited selection.

As may be seen from this example, the constructional method assumes no fully *determining function* in any way comparable to a serialist approach, but only a sufficiently *characterising influence*. Thereby a potential problem of the serialist method – of mechanistically and rigidly overruling all other considerations – is avoided and replaced by a much more organic, but nevertheless adequately and consequentially structuring routine. In a way this may be seen as a certain ‘correction’ of an aspect in which serialism ‘went too far’, wishing as it did to control all musical events in a rather totalitarian way. Once again the distinction between phenotype and genotype (made in the context of the Proteus Variations)¹²³ springs to mind. In this case the serialist approach would correspond with the notion of ‘phenotype’, with the series always being fully and physically present, immediately ‘showing’¹²⁴ morphologically. Conversely, the method applied here relates more to the notion of ‘genotype’: inherited or inherent instructions do act out, but with a measure of freedom allowing for modifications according to circumstantial conditions.



Ex. 16: Opening bars of the cello part of 'Eis' indicating the free but consistent use of the primary intervals deduced from the ice crystal geometry.

I wish to propose assimilating the two terms widely used to describe crystal growth into the musical vocabulary, which is notoriously limited with respect to formal and structural descriptions. In this regard, the notions of ‘faceting’ and ‘branching’ seem to permit the drawing of conducive analogies in the quest to appropriately describe natural, universal and organic¹²⁵ structuring processes.

It is immediately evident that the two terms should appear in conjunction, as (only) in this manner do they address the essential formal problem: the dichotomy of *coherence* and *variation*, i.e. the balance of *adequate reliable coherence* as weighed against *sufficiently interesting variation*. In fact, I posit that the notion of ‘form’ – in all realms of existence, the physical, organic, ideal, artistic – may universally be understood as the realization of a functional (circumstantial, effectual, sustainable) trade-off of opposing demands. ‘Form’ is the result of a precarious process that determines ‘what may go together’. It is a phenomenon that safeguards *unity* as well as *interest*, *substance* as well as *articulation*, the *general* and the *specific*, the *reliable* and the *experimental*, the *historical* and the *current*, the *continuous* and the *unpredictable*, etc. Needless to say, ‘formation’ in this sense is an unending quest, its principal (paradoxical) impossibility spurring its continuous ‘reformation’.

Arguably some of the oldest, most reliable and persistent ‘forms’ have originated from the realm of crystals. The notion of ‘faceting’ provides the stable, similar, predictable, continuous growth pattern, whereas ‘branching’ – which incidentally chronologically always follows faceting¹²⁶ – is responsible for the more daring (unstable), deviant, unpredictable, sporadic, erratic evolutions. It should come as no surprise that the mineral world follows such conservative structural principles. Yet it should be noted that even here the reliable, stable designs have a limited life span – physically as well as temporally – after which a transition into the complementary branching phase inevitably occurs. This is strikingly elucidated in *Figure 20* which clearly reveals how the second phase is catalysed by instabilities occurring in previously stable structures, whose rigidity becomes overstretched or dated. Branching often displays features of fractal iteration, thus producing self-similar structures, but on a smaller scale.¹²⁷ In this dimension faceting may once again be feasible for a while until another transformation is due.

¹²³ See section on *Diastella*, Chapter 10, pg. 189.

¹²⁴ *phainein*, Greek: ‘to show’

¹²⁵ Although the terminology stems from crystallography, hence *anorganic* chemistry, I hold that *organic* is nevertheless appropriate in this case, as it also refers to a natural and *organizational* aspect applicable in both the animate and inanimate realm.

¹²⁶ Libbrecht, ‘The Physics of Snow Crystals’, 884.

¹²⁷ This may be observed on the snowflake in *Fig. 1*, where the shape of a whole arm resembles that of one of its branches, etc.

Finally I wish to demonstrate how these two concepts may be applied musically, how they may assist in the formal analysis of music, or – put differently – how they might help trace and highlight musical ‘growth procedures’.

The opening of *Eis* (bars 1-19)¹²⁸ clearly features faceting: iterations of sufficiently similar material provide a coherent introductory section that determines a recognizable formal characterization. At a certain point the iterations are unable to hold (the attention) anymore and so a first instance of branching occurs (clarinet entrance, upbeat to bar 20). The new structural feature is echoed by the violin and passed to and fro several times until it, in turn, displays a degree of predictable stability that urges a change. This is provided by a short general pause, after which the initial faceting (varied in its detail, but amounting to the same gesture) is taken up again (bar 30). Branching occurs much earlier this time round (clarinet entrance bar 31) and persists concurrently to undisturbed faceting in the two lower parts. A symmetric 4-bar phrase emerges from the randomly iterated facets (violin, bars 34-37) bringing the first section to a close by a (dynamically, metrically, texturally) contrasting and reflective section (*meno mosso*, bars 40-45).

The following section once again departs with the self-same initial facet (bar 46), into which, however, now the previously developed branch is integrated. From this rather more complex material a secondary branch develops (new figure in clarinet, bar 49 ff), which soon becomes a prominent feature elsewhere (cello, bar 63 ff; violin, bar 67 ff). The basic faceting procedure (the iteration of similar patterns) continues throughout, yet by now so many instabilities, ruptures, and departures have occurred that mutually stimulated responses and interactions generally replace predictably stable growth patterns. Yet a more or less balanced fluctuation between sections in which faceting prevails (bars 77-88, 110-125, 150 to end) and others with predominant branching (bars 89-109, 126-149) may still be discerned, although often elements of both processes occur.

Admittedly, this reference to growth depicting metaphors is no replacement for an exact and detailed musical analysis. Instead it has the advantage of enabling initial and summative assessments of pivotal procedural events and changes. I further hold that by virtue of its broad concept it is able to accommodate a wide range of fluctuations and circumstantially adapting, unpredictable and contingent processes. Complementing classical analysis, these metaphors offer a methodology eminently suited for musical purposes.

III. STURM

*Sturmvögel tanzen durch die Böen, die Ekstase ihres Emporsteigens und Stürzens ist meine flügge gewordene Sehnsucht ...*¹²⁹

Any decent seafaring story will contain an account of a storm and *EisTau* is no exception. In this instance it is an event that Zeno seeks to experience eyeball to eyeball. While it rages and everybody else keeps snugly indoors, Zeno deliberately stays on deck, wishing to escape from the comfort – civilisation’s default objective – and instead experience man’s principal exposedness to nature’s immense forces.

In this context I confess a foible for ‘affective’ music, and its overtly expressive element introduced by the *seconda pratica* advocates into Baroque aesthetic. More specifically I should mention the ‘genere concitato’, the ‘agitated style’ as first described and possibly invented by Monteverdi.¹³⁰ Under this paradigm a dramatic event (such as a storm) deserves to be portrayed by means of equally dramatic music. This movement is such an instance. Given the music’s narrative concern there didn’t seem to be any other reasonable way of responding musically to the universal storm-trope.

¹²⁸ Huyssen, *EisTau* score, pg. 9.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 64.

¹³⁰ *Genere concitato* is generally translated as ‘agitated style’. The term originates from Monteverdi’s preface to his eighth book of Madrigals, where he directs the readers attention to the fact of having invented and introduced a novel style to make his music ‘more perfect’ in imitating real life situations.

The movement is initiated by an urgent alarm call of sorts (bar 1), which is evidently justified by an immediately following intrusive swell that in turn leads to more frantic scuffling and signalling. There remain but eight bars of a very short introduction to ‘clear the decks and close all shutters’ before the storm breaks loose.

The storm is understood as a process following a high-energy gradient, ‘forcing’ (constraining) all components into ‘clearly perceivable’ (unambiguous, inescapable) ‘order’ (structure).¹³¹ This ‘clearly constrained structure’ is represented musically by means of a forward-urging unison passage (bar 9 ff), which sweeps any potential differences (obstructions) along its own pathway (eg. bars 10,12,14).

A moment of repose allows for a second alarm call (bar 22), which is interrupted – even sooner than the first time – by a renewed gust of wind. This time the squall is met by more resistance (bars 28 ff), which leads to an open-ended ‘stalemate’ (bar 37). An introspective session follows. It is an anticipation of how it will feel once the storm is over when both the forces of the storm and those fighting it will be exhausted and the clash between nature and the ship will have passed again with only the memory thereof remaining.

The ensuing section (bars 53-73) incorporates the unerring forward thrust from the previous ‘storm-passage’, yet adds to it a certain calculatedness, as though a response to the storm is being worked out on its own terms. It might be interpreted as a sort of reckoning, or assessment of the course of events, a counting of losses, the planning of strategy. This controlled scenario is interrupted when somewhere a window flies open (bar 74), once more exposing the scene to the full force of the elements.

With the final alarm call (bar 88) the storm subsides; the anticipated reflective moment has arrived. Perhaps captain and crew inspect the ship, assess the damage, tie up what has been torn off, find they have gotten off lightly, imagine that it could have been far worse, etc. Suddenly there is no need to act anymore. Instead there is time for the luxury of musing that not long ago it was necessary to raise the alarm (bar 117). This seems hardly imaginable, now that everything is so quiet again.

IV. KREISEN

*Um mich herum kreisen die Gewässer um die Antarktis, der Ozean und ein Aufgeweckter drehen ihre Runden... ich drehe mich mit dem Zirkumpolarstrom, der in jedem Augenblick einhundertfünfzig Millionen Tonnen Wasser herumwirbelt.*¹³²

This movement amounts to yet another dramatization of a natural event, this time less overtly audible, but structurally integrated and therefore all the more incessant. From now on the violin is replaced with the viola, the employment of ever darker colours in itself amounting to a rhetorical device, indicating that the musical topics and dramaturgical associations become increasingly internal, introvert, intimate.

On jogging his daily laps around the ship’s deck, Zeno reflects that not only he is moving in circles, but that he does this in conjunction with 150 million tons of water in the circumpolar current, as well as with the seagulls whom he watches flying their arches. The situation clearly evokes the universal phenomenon of ‘circling’ as underlying principle of all natural cycles, which hence also acts as the principal organizing force in this movement.

Structured in a compound binary form, the music at first depicts Zeno’s small rounds – four consecutive, upward surging three-bar phrases (bars 1-12), followed by two relaxing ones (bars 13-18), and finally a pair complementarily rising and falling phrases (bars 19-27), the final descent being extended to six bars and gently flowing into the much bigger oceanic undercurrent. At the confluence in bar 28 the time signature changes to 3/2, at which point a passacaglia (for me the quintessential device of capturing the notion of circling musically) commences.

¹³¹ This double description once again references Tim Allen’s explication of the complexity of structuring forces, mentioned in Parenthesis X, pg. 196 ff.

¹³² Trojanow, *EisTau*, 95.

After four ‘rounds’ of the passacaglia pattern (bars 28-68), the focus shifts back from nature to man and his smaller circles. The resumption of the initial three-bar phrases, varied and in the dominant key, indicates the beginning of the second part of the binary movement (bar 69 ff). This time all phrases are complementarily paired and each time the descending one is expanded, entailing a development and densification of material that reaches its climax in an agitated passage (bars 96-109) from where it subsides once again to ebb into the undeterred circumpolar passacaglia (bar 110). Two more cycles of this material follow – mesmerizingly slow. Accordingly the observer’s attention slips in the course of the second cycle (bar 128). It may be assumed that the circling continues, though no one can focus on it all the time. It may equally be assumed that the circling will continue when no one is around anymore to observe it at all ...

V. ZENOS KLAGE

*Ich bin es leid unter diesen Umständen Mensch zu sein.*¹³³

The last two movements turn their gaze away from the environment and towards the subject of Zeno’s emotions and state of mind. Both are scored for the final permutation of instruments. By default, this combination – viola, tenor saxophone and cello – sounds in the frequency range more or less resembling that of the human voice. Against the much higher tessitura of the first movements, this in itself becomes an intentional rhetorical device.

The fifth is the most extended and arguably the most complex of all the movements. In an extended dirge, Zeno’s personality finds a detailed portrayal through an analysis of his pain. The movement’s outer layer is a chorale that frames it with an explicit reference to spiritual music in the protestant Baroque tradition. On another level, a second layer as it were, it reveals some of the more concealed aspects of Zeno’s personality: those of a sensitive, loving, vulnerable but ultimately disappointed human being, saddened by irreplaceable losses. Finally, there is a tumultuous inner section in which vivid memories of decisive experiences pass before his inner eye.

The first chorale verse is scored for solo viola. Even though it contains occasional diminutions and chords to fill the texture, it manifests as a most exposed and undefended emanation, but gains its depth of expression precisely from its defencelessness. Its first section paraphrases the opening of the famous melody of ‘O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden’.¹³⁴ Through this chorale’s prominent position in Bach’s St. Matthew’s Passion it may be assumed to have become a universally understood signifier of suffering and redemption. Confirming and strongly supporting the initial viola statement, all instruments enter for the second verse, contributing a dense harmonization and thereby a highly emotional variant of the bleak opening.

The music of the second layer (bar 43 ff) distantly resembles the ‘Zeno-theme’ from the first movement. Both instances feature long phrases of sustained notes in 6/4 time, but the ‘icy’ pizzicato accompaniment in the first instance have now been replaced by a ‘watery’ figure in the saxophone. Accordingly the music is much more gently flowing, portraying a tender side of Zeno’s character. The sweetness of this extended passage with its lingering pauses (e.g. bars 48, 58, 62, 69ff) evokes an erotic dimension, thereby including the love affair with Paulina in these reminiscences. The stillness of the section may refer to their very last moments together. Their relationship will not come to an end; it will simply cease to exist, as Zeno has already decided to remove himself and leave everything behind.

The dreamy atmosphere in which the final measures of the chorale momentarily appear (bar 84 ff) is harshly interrupted by another alarm call. This time it’s a genuine SOS (bar 92-94, etc.; three short – three long – three short notes), which makes him anxious and confused (bar 100-114). Out of this disturbance other recollections emerge, including those of the beginning of the voyage (bar 119 ff) and the storm (126 ff). Once more Zeno is jerked from his musings by Dan Quentin’s staging of his PR-stunt. All passengers and

¹³³ Trojanow, *EisTau*, 167.

¹³⁴ Original melody by Hans Leo Haßler, 1601.

crew are to be arranged in the form of a super-sized SOS on an ice shelf for the purpose of a sensationalist aerial photograph. The fake alarm in the form of a designer SOS (bars 150-162) and the presumptuous helicopter rise to document the event (bars 167-170), at long last prove to be too much for him. The moment of his final withdrawal from this world has come, indicated by the recapitulation of the chorale (bar 171 ff). In stark contrast to its initial serenity, its reappearance here is highly dramatic, its flow now disrupted and the texture pierced by the continuation of asymmetric reiterations that have stuck from the persistent Morse code. In-between agitatedly interlocking code the melody is tossed around between saxophone and viola, barely audible at times.

With its close Zeno lets everything go. A short coda brings the movement to an inconspicuous ending. All has been said, the last decision already taken, a silent farewell is imminent.

VI. LETZTE REISE

*Ich werde hinausgehen, wenn es dunkelt, ich werde fliegen...*¹³⁵

Zeno has abducted the ship. He knows there will be no return for him, but he has seen very clearly that there is no point in staying any longer. He finds it unbearable to be forced unwillingly to partake in the ongoing ecological destruction any longer. He has made up his mind and found his peace. There is no more anger, desperation or anxiety. He will just exit and fly.

The music interprets this moment in a most gentle manner. It is fully tonal and its affect may be described as that of a charming Cavatina. Its lilt lends it an uplifting quality, not at all sad, at the most a little nostalgic and weary. The melody spins long extended phrases and is fully 'immune' against recurring, momentary 'disturbances' (syncopated accents answered by a restless semi-quaver figure, e.g. bars 4-5, 9-10, 21-22, etc.), which now simply pass without afflicting the musical flow in the least. Instead, an ever-expanding melodic structure unfolds, seemingly interpreting the imminent departure as a dream of flying.

A short middle section (bars 45-76) is framed by two final appearances of Zeno's theme (bars 45-52, 71-76), which has lost nothing of its strength. However, the reminiscences of the storm have lost their forcefulness (bar 52-54), as have the enthusiastic cries at the opening of the first movement (at the base of the material in bars 55-58). The memories of Paulina remain sweet as ever (bars and 62-68).

Upon returning to the (varied and much shortened) A'-section, the music now hastens to its end and gently disappears.

¹³⁵ Trojanow, *EisTau*, 167.

CHAPTER 12

DEPARTURE AND HOMECOMING: JOURNEY THROUGH OTHER TO SELF

CONCERTO FOR AN AFRICAN CELLIST

Stellenbosch, 2012 / Munich, 2013. Chamber concerto requested by Heleen du Plessis and subsequently commissioned by SAMRO¹ for du Plessis's *Cello for Africa* project. The commission determined that the work should be written for chamber orchestra (of conventional Western instruments) and solo cello and moreover called for the deliberate engagement with forms of indigenous African music as well as the incorporation of selected indigenous instruments into the score. Premiered and recorded in March 2013 by the augmented Odeion Camerata, the student orchestra of the Odeion School of Music of the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, it was subsequently commercially released on the New Zealand label Ode Records.

TITLES OF MOVEMENTS

- I. Partida
- II. Passacamino
- III. Mahororo
- IV. Mapfachapfacha muMhembero

SYNOPSIS

On the surface the work 'complies' with most expectations of a conventional instrumental concerto: challenging the soloist with a more or less virtuoso part, elevating her role by means of juxtaposing *tutti* and *solo* passages, employing the solo instrument's technical and sonic propensities in a specific musical context, etc. In this case, however, the conventional concerto idea is subordinated to a narrative that effectively reverses the conventional role of the soloist as accomplished virtuoso and assertive representative of an established musical genre to that of an unorthodox, curiosity-driven adventurer, explorer or traveller who is embarked on a journey into unknown territory.

'Enacting' this metaphorical narrative the orchestra assumes various roles. At first it is a homogenous collective, providing a backdrop of richly harmonious music, thereby identifying the musical point of departure (hence *Partida*) as essentially western. Supporting the soloist in this manner at the same time effectively binds her to this particular musical idiom. Accordingly, the soloist-cum-explorer's urge to diverge from this idiom while the collective is holding on to it, causes the relationship to become increasingly tense. What initially appeared to be musical *support* becomes more and more of a *constraint* in the course of the first movement. This leads to several conflicting situations and overt clashes. Even so the soloist remains 'enthralled' stylistically and does not yet succeed in escaping from this identifying (stylistically defining and binding) context.

Only with the second movement does the journey proper begin. Taking the lead once again, the explorer-cellist sets off with an energetic ostinato pattern in the style of a Baroque *Passacaglia*.² As there are no 'roads' to pass through in the metaphorical 'bush', this can only be a '*Passacamino*',³ by means of which she is advancing

¹ South African Music Rights Organization.

² pseudo-Italian spelling of *passacalle* from Spanish *pasacalle* – 'to step (i.e., dance) in the street' (*pasa* third singular present of *pasar* – 'to step, to pace' or *pasear* – 'to go for a walk' plus *calle* 'street') *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/passacaglia> [accessed on 20.8.14].

³ Wordplay on *passacalle*, replacing the established *calle* – 'urban street' with the informal *camino* – 'path, track', figuratively 'journey' www.spanishdict.com/translate/camino [accessed on 20.8.2014]. Machado's '*Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar*', i.e. the notion of making a way by walking is further implied. (See Chapter I, pg. 24, footnote 209).

into 'unknown territory'. Initially all 'western' strategies are still in place as the expedition embarks on the arduous task of manoeuvring itself through the jungle, bogged down with ill-suited equipment and excessive baggage.⁴

The relation between soloist and orchestra remains tense. It is characterized by high energy on the part of the cellist and considerable inertia on the side of the collective. Accordingly the former – curious, fired up, and exhilarated – has to drag the latter – reluctant and sluggish – along. The episodically changing colours and textures of the orchestra in the successive variations represent gradually changing vistas as they might appear to someone travelling through an unknown landscape. At a certain moment all familiar signs have finally been left behind and the explorer is confronted (or welcomed) by an altogether 'different' music, a kind of stylized 'birdsong'. Engaging with this new idiom, which represents an altogether new set of circumstances, amounts to the traversal of a threshold after which no return to the initial western idiom as predominant musical expression will be possible anymore.

Once this line has been crossed, more discoveries can be expected as a result of a principal readiness to explore new, different and even foreign relationships. This is demonstrated in the next movement by the cellist's interaction with indigenous African music. The integrated performance of *Mahororo*⁵ – the 'transcription' of an idiomatic Shona song into the composition of the concerto – introduces an entirely different musical, stylistic and cultural identity to the work and its narrative. This does not merely take place on a representational or symbolical level, but 'actually', through the physical presence and performance participation of a Karanga *mbira* player. In this way the composition demands an extra-musical component of societal interaction: The enactment of the inter-cultural musical dialogue in the performance of the work will necessarily require some preceding inter-personal negotiations in order to facilitate a meaningful musical collaboration.

Motivated by the unexpected synergy between both musical styles, members of the collective (the orchestra) awaken to this possibility as well. At first only a few woodwinds join into the conversation by latching onto the harmonic progression that can be discerned in the *mbira* pattern. The congruent ensemble playing and rich harmonic texture resulting from this interaction prompt the remaining orchestral members to respond with a reflective version of the main melodic motive of the first movement. Yet in its immediate juxtaposition to the preceding African music, an underlying emotional proximity and even stylistic relatedness becomes apparent, which – after a last hesitant moment of reminiscing about the separate idioms now left behind – allows for all finally to take the plunge and enter into an altogether different but mutually shared musical realm.

According to Martin Shumba,⁶ *Mapfachapfacha* used as noun means 'the sudden arrival of many'⁷ in Zezuru (Shona). According to Tinashe Chidanyika the word is more commonly used as pronoun or adjective meaning 'a lot of', 'a great deal of' or 'many'. In that sense, *Mapfachapfacha muMhembero*⁸ refers to a big party or celebration, a great buzz with much bustling and many people. Apart from the ostensibly happy mood of this movement, the title wishes to draw the attention to an important aspect of a successful transformation – that of 'things coming together', working in synchronicity, having found their proper place (at least for the time being).

⁴ I have always been baffled by the extreme unwieldiness of equipment and forces employed on early expeditions. One reads, for example, that Richard Burton and Hanning Speke's expedition, setting off from Bagamoyo into the then uncharted African interior in June 1857, numbered 132 porters at one stage. The party was headed by a ceremonial guide carrying the flag of the sultan of Zanzibar followed by a drummer, cloth and bead porters, men carrying camp equipment, their women, children and cattle. Armed guards were deployed along the whole line of the caravan, some accompanied by their personal slaves and women. Such a procession would be a highly disordered and raucous affair, which could barely cover some 10 miles in the morning hours, before the rest of the day had to be spent setting up a new campsite. Alan Moorehead, *The White Nile* (Dell, New York 1972), 36-37.

⁵ Shona *mbira* song by Tinashe Chidanyika.

⁶ Martin Shumba's Shona online dictionary: <http://mashumba.com/shnenglish070308.aspx>.

⁷ As opposed to *gwikwiti* – 'arrival one after the other'.

⁸ Composite title suggested by Tinashe Chidanyika.

The movement overtly celebrates musical elements borrowed from indigenous African traditions (such as the transcription of a *Dagomba Jenjili* song pattern⁹ determining the movement's cyclically repeated four-bar pattern, a lilting groove driven by African percussion, improvisatory sections), but presents these within a structure derived from western formal thinking (casting them into the overarching form of a Rondo with contrasting episodes). The African 'theme' (pattern, basic material) thus serves as *ritornello*, while the episodic passages in between allow for elaborations of this material as well as references to the previous movements.

At the end of the journey the whole ensemble has significantly expanded its expressive range through 'discovering' (in the sense of 'unravelling') ever more layers of its complex identity through a process of reflecting their 'own' presumed position in relation to that of supposed 'others'. Starting off from idiomatically perceived 'Western' and 'African' approaches and styles, which might at first seem wholly unrelated and incongruous, the musical process unfolding in the work gradually reveals similarities and shared communalities beyond the obvious contrasts, illuminating the respective ('African' and 'Western') identities as relational, emerging – even effectively resulting – from reciprocal interactions.

BACKGROUND

EXILE AS MEANS OF DISCOVERING AFRICAN MUSIC

The concerto was commissioned by the South African cellist Heleen du Plessis¹⁰ who requested a work in which she could musically engage in a discourse about Africa. In this context 'Africa' was to signify 'place' as well as 'cultural diaspora' – a frame of mind or condition for a certain cultural expression. The enquiry was to be conducted from her unique vantage point, considering her native roots and cultural identity informed by her prolonged absence from her home country and strained by issues of detachment and dissociation coloured by a longing to cultivate a principally inseverable relationship and to continue contributing music in an 'African spirit' in spite of living in a very distant place.

Du Plessis has lived abroad for considerably periods of time while accompanying her husband on diplomatic postings to Geneva and Washington DC respectively. On both occasions she made use of the opportunity of furthering her studies¹¹ while continuing her career as chamber musician and soloist. In 2010 the family immigrated permanently to New Zealand where she is now the Williams Evans Executant lecturer for cello at the University of Otago.¹²

In spite of her prolonged absences – but, as will be shown, also because of these¹³ – she maintains strong bonds with her native country, not only visiting and performing locally, but also continuously reflecting on the question of what kind of musical qualities make out the 'Africanness' of African music, what lends it its unique and spirited flair to the extent that it distinguishes her from other musicians and what exactly it is that she misses in her self-exposed exile.

These abiding interests have prompted her to dedicate her doctorate to an auto-ethnographical enquiry into these questions. As an integrated study this work entails the publication of a CD¹⁴ with three new South African compositions for cello, as well as an academic reflection on the strategy of selecting and commissioning such

⁹ John Miller Chernoff, *African Rhythm and African Sensibility: Aesthetics and Social Action in African Musical Idioms* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1979), CD track 15.

¹⁰ With the support of the SAMRO Foundation.

¹¹ Most notably with Daniel Grosгурin at the Conservatoy of Geneva and Amit Peled at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore.

¹² www.heleenduplessis.com [accessed on 24.8.14].

¹³ 'Finding myself removed from my African surroundings, my curiosity and desire to enrich my musical experience by collaborating with African musicians and engaging in African and contemporary music was triggered. I was attracted to African music for its rich, colourful nature, connectedness and integration with social, religious and cultural aspects of life and the role it plays in mental and physical health.' Heleen du Plessis, personal communication, 26.4.2014.

¹⁴ Cello for Africa, © Ode Records, New Zealand, 2013; www.marbecksclassical.co.nz/detail/528489/Cello-For-Africa. [accessed on 21.8.14].

works, engaging with their contexts and finally performing and recording them in South Africa. The *Concerto for an African Cellist* serves as one of three case studies in her investigation.

In her literature review Du Plessis reveals that ‘the psychological effects of emigration formed the context in which identity, belonging, rootedness and notions of home came to the fore’ for her.¹⁵ She and her family belong to a large number of South African emigrants now living in New Zealand, which – against their wish to participate in rebuilding the post-1994 ‘rainbow’ nation – eventually left the country ‘involuntarily because of fear of pandemonic violence, soft target crime and governmental corruption.’ According to a study by MacAulay¹⁶ a high number of emigrants from this group consider themselves living in self-imposed or voluntary exile even though not ‘officially banned or restricted by political legislation from [their native] country.’¹⁷

Of course exile adds to the already traumatic experience of emigration the sting of preventing the possibility of returning home. If it is accepted that ‘a sense of belonging, historical continuity and need to be rooted, are basic psychological needs closely linked to the concept and meaning of *home*’, it will easily be understood that many expatriates – du Plessis included – describe this experience as ‘an overwhelming feeling of being at large in the world, dislocated and displaced.’¹⁸ She further reports that only due to this ‘existential distress’ her identity struggle emerged: ‘Finding myself in a space in-between leaving and arriving, the desire to connect to my roots and identify with my ‘Africanness’ surfaced ... Comparable to South African bass player Johnny Dyani, I discovered whom I was in the social context of being far away from home, and like him, wanted to promote and keep South African music alive.’¹⁹

Even though, clearly, the circumstances under which Dyani and du Plessis respectively left the country must be considered fundamentally different, it is interesting to note the similar subjective experience. Arguably an involuntary relocation for lack of better opportunities can be experienced equally traumatic than forced exile.

I share du Plessis’s experience of having lived abroad for a prolonged period of time and understand the intangible sense of loss, randomness and forlornness that accompanies forced or voluntary exile. Contrary to her, I made a deliberate choice of returning to South Africa in order to engage with the notion of coming ‘home’. I therefore believe to have understood what du Plessis wanted when she asked for a musical work in which she could express what she cannot be where she is now; where she could sing and cry about what she loves and has lost, but ultimately also celebrate what she still is, irrespective of where she now lives. This was the motivation for and the intention of the work.

PARENTHESIS XIV: TOPOPHILIA – FRAMING THE RELATION BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PLACES

Apart from its psychological dimension of belonging – by virtue of being acquainted with a continuous history and familiar environment – the notion of physical or geographical ‘home’ is difficult to define and therefore remains vague and in many ways ambivalent. As it is invariably related to territorial and, by implication, nationalistic questions it can very easily lead to highly contentious sentiments.

I believe that in spite of this risk it should be possible – and in fact is necessary – to arrive at an ‘unsuspicious’ appreciation of a habitable and inhabitable geographic place, to find a vocabulary for the deep encompassing connection between people and their natural and cultural environment and finally to develop an understanding for interactions in the cultural realm, synonymous to those contained in the concept of ‘biosphere’ in the natural sciences. Filling the theoretical void between reflecting on ‘home’ as mere psychological projection on the one hand or political construction on the other, it seems helpful to refer to Bachelard’s ‘image of the happy space’,²⁰ now better known by Yi-Fu Tuan’s²¹ term *topophilia*.²²

¹⁵ Heleen Du Plessis. ‘Cello for Africa’, Music D.Mus, Dept. Music, University of Otago (Dunedin 2014).

¹⁶ S. P. Macaulay, ‘Diaspora By Degree: Narrative and Performance in Interviews of Expatriates from Wanganui, New Zealand’, *Journal of American Folklore* vol. 117, no. 465, (2004) quoted in du Plessis.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Du Plessis, *Cello for Africa*.

¹⁹ Ibid., my emphasis.

²⁰ ‘l’image de l’espace heureux’ Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l’Espace* (Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1957).

Tuan describes the concept as the ‘affective bond between people and place.’²³ Other than simply denoting the comfortable familiarity with a given locality, it implies a rather deeper sense of belonging and ‘shelteredness’ (‘Geborgenheit’), which enigmatically but undeniably links psychological and cultural dimensions with geographical or geomorphological factors. It should be noted that the concept does not invoke an essentialist understanding of ‘magic of place’, but instead ‘speaks of emotional ties which are not as much bonds between people and place as between people and *the values symbolized by place*,’ thereby focussing more on ‘what a place is felt to be, and on what it symbolizes, than on what, objectively, it is.’²⁴

In stark contrast to modernist dreams and life-styles of touristic mobility, the concept’s valuing of the local (restricted, confined, singular, familiar) emphasises an apparently deep human need for rootedness and relatedness to a specific geographic locality. While Tuan admits that even though the notion is ‘diffuse as concept’, it emanates so vividly and frequently ‘as personal experience’²⁵ that it cannot simply be discarded.

A complementary term in this context is that of ‘nostalgia’,²⁶ understood in its initial eighteenth century use to describe the acute pathological condition of homesickness. Interestingly enough, Swiss mercenaries employed abroad were amongst the first to be diagnosed with this sickness – hence also called *mal du Suisse* – as though more conspicuous morphological features (such as that of the mercenaries’ native Alps) lead to more pronounced forms of ‘human attachment and love of place’²⁷ and, accordingly, to proportionally more severe feelings of loss. This is not dissimilar to my repeated personal observation that South Africans would seem to be especially prone to the ‘condition’ of longing for home; reporting that they are somehow not ‘in touch’ with foreign places, that they acutely miss certain landscapes and spaces as well as their light, smell or textures. Given their country’s remarkably diverse natural features, especially deep connections and accordingly severe sensations of loss are not surprising.

I hold that the dimension of personal experience – if only demarcated by strong and positive emotions to something’s presence and equally strong negative reactions to something’s absence – speaks clearly enough about a phenomenon and therefore deserves closer scrutiny despite its intangibility. I further posit that in spite of its vagueness, emotions connected with the notion of ‘home’ still provide a more constructive background for a reading of the compositional work presented here than the enlistment of theories like post-colonialism or purely formal approaches.

With regard to the contextual, complexly relational and interactive ecological concept of ‘biosphere’, I think it is possible to consider localized *cultural spheres* as inclusive in *ecological biospheres*, thereby establishing a framework once again to think of human activity principally embedded in natural environments and not isolated from or even set against them. Reflections on the phenomenon of *topophilia* may be a step in that direction, even though the idea may not yet be sufficiently developed to become a comprehensive theory of place. But it might pave the way for the eventual emergence of a new disciplinary approach along the line of a kind of ‘philotopology’,²⁸ providing an overarching epistemology for place-related fields [sic], such as geography, anthropology, spatial history and sociology, cultural studies, architecture, town-planning, ecology, sustainable development, organic agriculture and perhaps – last not least – ‘local musicking’.

²¹ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Columbia University Press, New York 1990).

²² ‘Love of place’ from Greek *topos* ‘place’ and *philia* ‘love’; Tuan’s book popularizes this term apparently first coined by W.H. Auden in 1948 and notably expanded by Gaston Bachelard in his *The Poetics of Space* (1958).

²³ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁴ Douglas Fleming, ‘Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes and Values’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* vol. 65(2), no. 2, (1975), 316, my emphasis.

²⁵ Tuan, *Topophilia*, 4.

²⁶ From Greek *nostos* - ‘to return home’ and *algos* - ‘pain’.

²⁷ Tuan, xii.

²⁸ Word combination in analogy to ‘philosophy’.

PRINCIPLE CONSIDERATIONS

COMPOSING IN SOUTH AFRICA – RECOMPOSING SOUTH AFRICA

Since the concerto was commissioned by a cellist for the purpose of deliberately and actively engaging with questions about her biographical and musical identity, the principle consideration was to supply her with a work that would allow her to do just that. In this sense the composition qualifies as occasional music, tailor-made for and dedicated to an individual recipient. Moreover, as the questions raised by du Plessis closely resemble my own and are therefore central to my musical contemplation, the commission came as a welcome opportunity to add another ‘musical enquiry’ to a range of similar, very specifically South African works. Finally, since the issues raised here are of general concern to South Africans, many of whom are struggling to align notions of their own identity with the rapidly changing identity of their country, it seemed appropriate to broaden the scope of the enquiry beyond the merely personal sphere. It is my hope that this work will make a contribution of some value towards reflecting on a topic of broad relevance in the public domain.

There exists a wide-spread perception that South Africa’s globally hailed asset of cultural diversity in reality amounts to a burdensome national liability of a population made up of such significantly different identities so as to make impossible any hope for a unified country grounded on mutual values and shared priorities. Clearly such a perception results from an essentialist understanding of identity as rigidly determined and culturally fixed quality. With this composition I wish to offer a musical model in which an alternative perception of the situation is explored.

Based on an understanding of identity as a complex and relational quality it definitely acknowledges differences in cultural expression and even recognizes these as more or less closed boundaries. But it engages with these boundaries on the assumption that they are *circumscribing*, rather than *separating* different identities; that they are a necessity, rather than an evil. As their dissolution would also dissolve the very identities they define, they are in fact *constitutional* to the communicative process across the boundaries, even though they concurrently complicate such interactions. However, since the ‘complications’ – the frictions, constraints, deceptions or misunderstandings – are fundamentally inevitable, they should be used as tools to sharpen, polish, hone and refine communicative interaction. Once the conditionality of difference is accepted, it may in fact contribute to the development of far more deliberate and precise forms of communication and transition than would be possible without the acknowledgement of difference.

On the surface it might appear as though this suggestion requires nothing but a mind shift to interpret differences and boundaries as constitutional (and therefore desirable) instead of problematic and therefore stifling. But beyond the realm of attitudes and phenomenological perceptions a nomological dimension concerning the relational emergence of identities demands attention as well. The main points, which have been theoretically explicated in Chapter 3,²⁹ may shortly be recapitulated as follows:

‘Identity’ should best not be conceived of as a *noun*, but rather only be used and understood as *activity*: that of ‘identifying’ oneself, others, things or meaning. Identity is *not finitely given*, but *dynamically acquired* and constructed³⁰ by constant acts of comparing, connoting, relating, distinguishing. It follows that it is *continuously provisional* and changing and always will contain a *reflexive dimension*,³¹ balancing degrees of sameness with those of difference.

From this the dichotomy of *self* and *other* gains a mutually constitutive quality³² whereby, in turn, the question arises whether the juxtaposition should be called ‘dichotomous’. Perhaps ‘polarity’ describes the relationship better as it upholds a ‘productive tension’ but discards the underlying connotation with ‘conflict’. Nevertheless, the relationship between both poles remains a complex one in which ‘identity concurrently

²⁹ Chapter 3.2, pg. 59 ff.

³⁰ Rochat, see Chapter 3.3.b) pg. 68.

³¹ Denis-Constant Martin, *ibid.*

³² Ricoeur, *ibid.*

initiates and results from differentiation,³³ at once 'inaugurating the play of difference [and being] the result of the very process.'³⁴

Perceived from such an understanding, South Africa's challenging reality presents itself somewhat differently: First, it becomes quite clear that, in fact, a base of 'common denominators' – shared values and understandings and the ability to communicate these – is not (automatically) given in South Africa. Arguably it will be a challenging process to establish agreement around this, but not a principally impossible task. Because of the difficulties involved, the attainment of a measure of success in this regard will be all the more prized and respected.

Second, it can be stated that it is *not the differences* between people or cultures in South Africa that segregate the country, it is *the perception that these differences are principally insurmountable* that creates fear and suspicion and, subsequently, separation. If a previous political dispensation essentialized the differences, and the current system purportedly ignores them, both miss the point in different ways: Differences are crucial to the character and richness of the country but must be instrumentalized (engaged and dealt with; not upheld or ignored) to facilitate their integration into the very fibre of the country's heterogenous identity.

Third, the following paradox emerges in respect of boundaries or barriers: By virtue of creating *boundaries*, differences concurrently create *portals*, potential points of contact and transition. It is only here and nowhere else – in the very heart of the differences – that connections can be made. (The 'same' is, by definition, already incorporated and therefore affords no connective opportunities.) It seems that mankind has an ingrained propensity to misread differences as (predominantly) threatening and dangerous, when in reality they are often our greatest gift to determine who we are and moreover help us to outgrow our limits.

Accordingly, the composition offers a reading of the South African situation as one endowed with an abundance of difference. The work chooses to take cognizance of this abundance, for only when one recognizes and acknowledges differences is one able to engage with them. This might be an enquiry into what they distinguish and identify whereby one may potentially begin to relate to such distinctions and identities.

As is the case with any other relationship, this one, also, is subjective. There can be no norm that prescribes what is to emerge from it. The composition chooses to facilitate a reciprocal dialogue and thereby initiate a process of familiarization as one of many other possible options. While it could have opted for a different strategy, it could not have afforded not to take a stand on the raised questions. This demonstrates my belief that it fully depends on our perceptions and actions whether we transform the given diversity into an asset or a liability. Given the choice, we would be well advised to choose wisely. It is my hope that my musical propositions point in a sensible direction.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPOSITION

CONCERTO-CUM-EXPLORATION OF OTHER AND SELF

In the synopsis I have suggested that the composition be perceived as script musically to exemplify and dramaturgically to re-enact the exploration of the realm of indigenous 'African' music, which – at least from the perspective of conventional western music – remains largely unfamiliar territory. In this narrative the soloist represents the curiosity-driven explorer, who – though inevitably burdened with excessive western baggage – is adamant to discover something new. (That the baggage and the discovery don't go together, but that the latter will eventually require the sacrifice of the former, is part of the story to be told.)

In the following, more detailed discussion I wish to broaden this concept and furthermore describe the work as metaphor or 'mechanism' of establishing mutually relational identities. In this regard it does not so much concern the acquaintance of an exotic other, but rather a journey to the self. The composition is an attempt at exemplifying the complexity consideration that difference does not threaten identity, but enables, defines and

³³ Chapter 3.3.b) pg. 68.

³⁴ Cilliers, see Chapter 3.3.b) pg 60.

deepens it.³⁵ Through the establishment of a relationship with a different musical idiom, the soloist's musical identity is not betrayed or dissolved; on the contrary it may potentially grow into a richer, more complex and (paradoxically) more pronounced identity.

I. PARTIDA

The concerto opens with a lengthy solo passage depicting an archetypal characteristic of the soloist-explorer: Evasive of conventions and anxious to escape from them, she is nevertheless thoroughly haunted by them. In fact, they soon lay claim to her: The first tutti-entrance of the orchestra almost suffocates the solo cello, which from now on constantly struggles either 'to take everything along' on the envisaged journey, or to get rid of the conventional baggage.

The first movement owes its title to the wonderfully ambiguous Spanish term *partida*, which aptly captures a multitude of facets that all apply and play out here. Connoted to *partida* are the notions of departure, excursion or, by implication, a party undertaking a journey. But it can just as well refer to an area (a section or division), a consignment, a game or an item to be accounted for. Finally, the word can also mean 'parting', as in 'dying'.³⁶

The music is motivic, melodious, essentially tonal, dramatic and densely textured. All of these attributes clearly signify a musical idiom of which the predominant stylistic principles originate from European traditions and which may hence generically be called 'western'. This 'identification' is further corroborated by virtue of the cellist's and the composer's European descent and the genre and its underlying methodology's European design. The first movement thus functions as a postulation of this specific 'identity', which – although already densely layered in its own right – here merely serves as a point of departure subsequently to reflect on a more complex, relational notion of identity.

Partida is characterized by the affect of a single melodic phrase, a kind of 'horn motive' or melancholic farewell-call, complete with its intended connotation of outdoor nostalgia. Its *Urgestalt* may be reduced to the following phrase:

81 **2** $\text{♩} = 66$

Bn *mp* *poco f* *cresc.*

Hn *mp espress.* *poco f* *cresc.*

Vc Solo *f espress.* *poco f* *cresc.* *sfz*

Ex. 19: Second (partial) appearance of the signature theme with counter motives in the woodwinds. In this instance only the first three bars of the original remain unchanged (bars 81-86), whereas the rest is varied and subsequently extended.

Derivations of the head motif prevail throughout the movement (e.g. va: 120; bn: 136; I.vn: 154-155; solo vc, I. vn, cl, bn: 244 ff). As all musical developments depart from this single source of material *Partida* is in effect a mono-thematic movement.

The decision to work with such harmonically unambiguous or predictable material was taken deliberately after careful reflection. One consideration was that the cello's expressive sound palette – arguably the instrument's most appealing feature – should be recognized and 'served' (accommodated). This would arguably best be achieved by offering it some sonorous cantabile passages (supported by sumptuously harmonious accompaniment). But the more important consideration was to provide an easily recognizable initial musical figure, which could clearly be 'identified' as 'Western' (related to conventional harmonic and melodic characteristics) and from which more differentiated musical identities could subsequently be developed, negotiated and distinguished.

This process begins with the soloist's reluctance to remain bound to only these idiomatic conventions. A first instance of irritable objection is expressed in bars 115-118 during which an angry gesture on the part of the soloist momentarily brings the orchestra to a stop. However, proceedings are taken up again swiftly (in defiance of the soloist's call for a change) by an appeasing entrance of the viola – once again with an iteration of the self-same main theme:

116 *poco rall.* **4** $\text{♩} = 60$
a tempo

Fl *p*

Cl *p* *pp*

Hn *p* *pp*

Timp *poco f* *mp* *p* *dim.*

Vc Solo *sfz*

Vn 1 *mp*

Va *1. solo p espress.*

Ex. 20: The soloist's first expression of frustration or anger, bringing the music to halt momentarily.

A second, more pronounced and intense instance of objection occurs in bars 131-135, but even now the collective (this time lead by the bassoon) proceeds as though nothing has happened. The third attempt (bars 149-152) is even less successful and immediately smothered by a decisive woodwind gesture (descending line in

unison of oboe and clarinet, bar 152) and a subsequent mollifying transition leading to an imploring conjuration of the main theme (bar 162 ff). However, the dissatisfaction has caused some restlessness and after three more *ruvido* interruptions by the cellist (bars 167, 171, 182) the message has come across that something must change. With some argumentative interaction between soloist and collective the section is brought to a close, allowing for a new proposition.

The cellist makes use of this opportunity (bar 208 ff) to probe new possibilities. Even though touching on material that will become important in the fourth movement³⁷ and supported by piccolo and solo violin, she fails to arrive at sustainable or sufficiently compelling musical alternatives and reluctantly has to submit to a kind of reprise (bar 245) brought about by the momentum of the collective joining forces again. However, in the midst of the squarely rooted Western recapitulation, an African pattern pre-empting the last movement suddenly makes its unprecedented appearance (bars 255-258), thereby relieving the weight of an all too obvious resolution that had been postponed to breaking point by forever-meandering suspensions and changing notes (bars 253-254).

The image shows a musical score for Example 21, starting at bar 251. The score is divided into two sections. The first section, from bar 251 to 254, is marked 'pesante espressivo' and 'rall.' with a tempo of ♩ = 44. The second section, from bar 255 to 258, is marked 'più mosso' with a tempo of ♩ = 66. The score includes parts for Flute (Fl), Oboe (Ob), Bassoon (Bn), Horn (Hn), Violin 1 (Vn 1), Violin 2 (Vn 2), Viola (Va), Violoncello (Vc), and Double Bass (Db). Dynamics include *mf*, *sub p*, *p*, *espress.*, and *sub f*. The key signature changes from one sharp (F#) to one flat (Bb) at the start of the second section. The time signature is 3/4.

Ex. 21: (Tortuous) European cadence resolving into (light-footed) African pattern.

Due to this interjection the 'spell' (of an autonomously closed idiom) is broken. Its momentary appearance acts like the release from an emergency valve, on the one hand relieving the orchestra from the obligation to insist on only one kind of musical idiom, on the other providing the cellist with some urgently required breathing space. With the built-up pressure thus released, no energy is left for further developments following from the recapitulation. In fact, the reprise turns out to be but a coda, bringing the movement to a natural close

³⁷ The *subito forte* passage in bars 255-258 is an unsuspected and unmediated anticipation of the fourth movement's *ostinato* figure.

as its forces gradually ebb away (bars 303-315). A short reference to the previously aborted alternative middle section serves as transition to the next movement (bars 317-319).

II. PASSACAMINO

The second movement is based on an eleven bar-long ostinato theme. Its first half is made up of three impulses followed by prolonged rests to await and accommodate whatever musical response they might have elicited. The second half wraps up these open-ended gestures, providing its own response to the fourth impulse, as it were. From here it leads back to the default position, from where the cycle can begin again.

Ex. 22: The first statement of the ostinato theme of Passacamino.

The theme is 'tonal', yet ambivalently so as it may be read as either starting off with I – IV (in the key of G), or with V – I (in the key of C), both options being equally valid. It reaches its double dominant in bar 8 and though melodically resolving (returning 'home' to the opening note), it fails fully to resolve harmonically. With the leading note and its resolution sounding concurrently, the last chord may be heard as dominant and/or double-dominant at the same time. The ambivalence actively keeps various interpretive options open (thereby allowing numerous repeats without being too predictable) and, moreover, serves an important formal function: While the *melodic resolution* satisfactorily ends the phrase, the *harmonic tension* effectively propels it into its next iteration.

As described in the context of the explorer narrative, the ostinato pattern acts as a 'driving force'. It (technically) accomplishes this 'motor' function through its *crescendo* upbeats and dotted rhythms, its harmonic ambivalence as well as through its open 'calls' that will invariably evoke 'responses'. With the help of this (loco-) 'motive', as well as the support of lightly-coloured but very strictly-timed percussion, the cellist is able to gradually instigate the orchestra and successively 'drag' its members along on a trajectory towards an unknown destination.

First to respond to the cellist are the bass clarinet and bassoon (bar 1 ff). Next, horn and marimba join in (bar 13 ff), then only strings accompany two variations (bars 24 ff, 33 ff). The full orchestra only plays in the fifth 'variation' (bar 44 ff) and makes room again for the strings only in the sixth variation (bar 55 ff). By this time the ostinato pattern is firmly embedded in the orchestral texture, allowing the solo cello to introduce new material, rise from bass- to descant register and – ever more exuberantly – probe its freedom in fast-moving and unexpectedly twisting passages (bars 61-74). In the seventh variation the woodwind quartet supersedes the strings (bar 61 ff). Only the violins accompany the soloist in the eighth variation (bar 68 ff); now just as energetic as the soloist at the start of this movement and with the ostinato pattern in their best register (two octaves higher than on its first appearance).

There is not to be a ninth rendition of the pattern for the next (by now almost) routine call by the woodwinds (bars 74-75), which elicits a most unusual response: Instead of the expected pitched and rhythmically matching musical reply, there is a sharp, upward rising 'whistle' performed on just the headpiece of the piccolo, harshly interrupting the flow (see *Example 23*). The remaining woodwinds hesitantly try to pick up their thread once more (bars 76-79), but are again interrupted, this time by an elaborate, decidedly unorthodox and independent response resembling an ornately improvised birdcall (bars 79-81) that forces them to resign from their previous, obstinately linear pursuit (bars 82-83). After a moment of perplexity the soloist takes the initiative of imitating the 'birdcall' (bar 84). This is commented on with disbelief from her fellow string players

(bars 85-86) but prompts an all the more affirmative, dialogical riposte from the piccolo representing the ‘bird’ or ‘foreign spirit’ (bar 86 ff). These two partners subsequently engage in a lively exchange of – semantically random but rhetorically compelling – confabulations (bars 87-112).

* Piccolo to imitate sound of a birdcall throughout the following section with piercing, sharp and rather narrow sound. Avoid exact pitches; play improvisatory, slightly irregularly, but well phrased. Create the impression of a hauntingly evocative bird or spirit call.

Ex. 23: ‘Birdcalls’ interrupting the ostinato

This dialogue (which incidentally resulted from the transcription of a real encounter with a responsively chatty bird during a hike in the Waterberg) is central to the composition’s narrative. The cellist instantaneously reacts to the new situation by adapting at least five musical parameters: tonality is suspended, the metered pulse is given up, the cello’s ordinary tenor register is abandoned, stopped notes are substituted with natural harmonics (overtones) and the ordinary weighty sound production (relying on intense string contact) replaced with that of fast, ‘whistling’ bow-strokes. Moreover, the musical process is no longer propelled by the logic of harmonic progressions, but instead directed by a mutually responsive, gestural (and in that sense rather extra-musical) rhetoric.

Ex. 24: ‘Spirit talk’ – the bird and cellist in conversation.

The improvised enunciations thrown back and forth do not function as musical references but rather re-enact the gestural and communicative elements of a conversation, in effect simply replacing syllables or words with musical pitches. On a musical level they therefore introduce something completely ‘other’ or ‘novel’, serendipitously fulfilling the purpose of the musical ‘expedition’ while concurrently annihilating its previous strategy. The incident shows that nothing new could have been found through solely self-referential musical exploration. A call from the ‘outside’, from ‘beyond’, from an altogether ‘different’ vantage point was required to open up the previous idiomatically confined process that resembles, in effect, a methodologically closed enquiry.

The call squarely confronts and questions the notion of progress and advancement, finally putting it to halt by unmasking it as an *invasion* of the unknown (on the terms of the invader) rather than an *investigation* of such a realm (on terms yet to be discovered). Nothing new can be found self-axiomatically or from mere introspection when this very activity prevents the perception of the novel, external, other, different and foreign. The call from the other side needs to be heard and heeded as plea to be perceived, to be un-coded and de-ciphered as far as possible; if not fully understood, then at least this call has to be acknowledged in its own context.

The orchestral forces grind to a halt when confronted with such a challenge.³⁸ They abandon the soloist-explorer at this moment and finally grant her the freedom and necessary space fully to face, embrace and focus on the challenges ahead. Responding to the call in the ‘outlandish’ musical idiom – for which she seemingly already possesses a propensity – she scrutinizes the medium, probes into it, begins to negotiate its possibilities and thereby fortuitously opens a dialogue with the caller. By mere virtue of its unfolding – at first imitational, aimless and arguably meaningless – this interaction gradually enters into a communicative sphere, tangibly demonstrating³⁹ that such a sphere is inherently present in the very procedure of an attentive dialogue created through the ‘simple’ act of responding, being responsive, assuming a ‘responsibility (honing one’s ‘ability’ of being ‘responsive’). Put differently, it must be concluded that cognition does not depend on mediation, but – to the contrary – that a degree of preparedness (willingness, curiosity, openness) is constitutive to cognition and, by implication, to perception. There is thus no excuse for not understanding.

The change of musical idiom, initiated or rather ‘inaugurated’ by the ‘birdcall’, amounts to a principal rift in the score. The cellist’s crossing of this threshold amounts to a genuine transition and, thereby, a decisive turning point in the compositional structure and approach. Only now does the envisaged exploration become meaningful; once it has been opened to admit the unforeseen, unexpected, unpredictable and different. A revealing etymological dimension is at play here: Both activities, ‘to implore’ and ‘to explore’ rely on the Latin root *plorare* (‘to cry’),⁴⁰ as though it requires the ‘imploration’ (‘invoking with tears’ from the outside, in this case by the birdcall) to facilitate a genuine ‘exploration’ (‘to cry out’ in response, from within). Whichever side takes the initiative, the decisive moment lies *in the act of deliberately entering into a relationship*, of reimagining the ‘self’ in relation to an ‘other’, of expanding the notion of *singular identity* into one of *relational identification*.

III. MAHORORO – IMPLICITLY AND EXPLICITLY

Given a principal preparedness to reach out beyond familiar references of identification (‘to imagine ways of knowing ourselves differently’),⁴¹ further modes of expression to which we can relate or with which we can identify await ‘dis-discovery’. In terms of the meta-narrative of the concerto this means that in the same way as a new idiomatic expression could be accessed and integrated into one’s own repertoire, a relationship with different forms of cultural expressions can be established. The birdcall only prepared the cellist for a much deeper encounter, namely that of relating to an ensuing *mbira* song referencing an idiomatic expression of traditional Shona music.

Once again, what is required at this moment is to acknowledge, to listen and to respond from a respectful, yet assertive own position; subsequently to engage by means of relating or perhaps by reflecting, miming or commenting; gradually stepping into the song, creating an exchange around it, eventually sharing and thereby dynamically enriching it.

Tinashe Chidanyika introduced his song *Mahororo* to me long before I knew that I would be using it in the cello concerto. However, when this opportunity arose its integration here seemed predestined as, coincidentally, the narrative underlying the metaphorical lyrics of *Mahororo* is Heleen du Plessis’s story just as much as that of the protagonist implied in the original *Karanga* context.

³⁸ In their unfortunate current form of existence orchestras as cultural ‘institutions’ embody their recipe and strategy to such an extent that they simply cannot ever escape from their role – it is only them and their music or nothing at all. (In this regard they resemble many western institutions, such as states, administrative offices, schools, universities: No matter how one wishes to transform them, a kind of ‘colonial curse’ seems too deeply ingrained to be erasable.)

³⁹ It is worth mentioning the ‘magical’ moment, which occurred at the very first rehearsal of this passage. In an instance the typical organizational rehearsal situation (dominated by technical restlessness of organizing, fixing and therefore merely simulating a musical experience) was transformed into a true dialogue, pulling everyone into its spell. The intention of the passage manifested directly and there was no need to ever ‘rehearse’ it.

⁴⁰ A most gripping musical setting of this word immediately springs to mind. It is that oft he final chorus of Carissimi’s oratorio Jephthe: ‘Plorate filii Israel’.

⁴¹ Gayatri Spivak, personal communication, STIAS, 27.8.14.

The lyrics read as follows:

O yerere iye wo
(yodelling)

Ona vakomana mandiregerera
(See folks, you have let me down.)

ndaive mudzimu ndaigarapano
(If I were the ancestral spirit, I would stay here.)

Vano reva nhemha vakomana
(Folks, someone is holding back something, you're not speaking the truth!)

Mahororo aherere ona regai nditaure kufa kwaBaba vangu.
(Mahororo please listen to me, grant me to speak to you about the death of my ancestors.)⁴²

Tinashe Chidanyika offers the following interpretation:

Something has happened, giving the singer reason to believe that he has been harmed or treated unjustly. Yet nobody wants to admit this or accept the responsibility for the circumstances. Eventually he confronts the others and, as the matter is not resolved, accuses them of betrayal. He calls on them metaphorically, stating that if he were an ancestral spirit, he would stay on to cleanse the community and reinstate justice. But as he is only human, there is nothing he can do but to move on and elsewhere attempt to claim a better place for himself. He invokes *Mahororo* – a 'beautiful place', where there is peace and harmony, a place, which is uncontaminated by what has happened and where a new beginning is possible.⁴³

In the context of the concerto the song becomes self-referential, suggesting that its own trajectory is one that might lead to *Mahororo*, or, even more directly, that a kind of musical *Mahororo* might manifest in its very invocation. As far as the exploration of the notion of relational identity is concerned, this is, in fact, the hope: Through the physical, personal, and informed involvement of a *mbira* player, genuinely bringing forth – not only emulating or indicating – a singular instance of indigenous African performance practice and musical expression, the work is 'composing' (in the sense of 'presenting') a forum for a tangibly 'real' social interaction, not only its symbolical re-enactment.

9 **24**

Voice: O ye - re-re iye wo O-na va-ko-ma-na man-di-re-ge-re-ra

Mbira

11

Voice: O ye - re-re iye wo ndai-ve mud-zi-mu ndai-ga-ra-pa-no

Mbira

Ex. 25: Excerpt from *Mahororo* showing two complete cycles of the underlying *mbira* pattern.

⁴² Translation by Tinashe Chidanyika.

⁴³ Personal communication, Stellenbosch, 14.12.12.

Going even further than oscillating between what Georg Kaden calls ‘functional resonance’⁴⁴ (the symbolic representation of events) and ‘structural resonance’⁴⁵ (where social relations and life processes ‘themselves’ enter into the artistic expression thereof), the composition here leaves the realm of ‘resonance’ behind altogether, opening up towards the prime source of sound: life itself. For a moment the notion of ‘staged’ representation should be dropped completely, fully opening into a situation where social relations, the encounter of two differently acculturated musicians and life processes ‘themselves’ *replace* artistic expression.

This, at least, is the compositional intention. As always the performers’ ‘interpretation’ may or may not correspond with such intentions. In this case their freedom to ‘interpret’ is effectively curtailed as both soloists are literally ‘inscribed’ into the composition, ‘scored’ as it were into the work in their personal capacities and not only in functional (substitutable) roles. More important than Heleen and Tinashe’s respective musical interpretations, is their mutual presence and collaborative interaction.

The composition of this work, in fact, prevents them from escaping from this imperative: A minimum of practical or strategic arrangements between cellist and mbirist will have to be made prior to and during rehearsals, before their dialogue can be ‘performed’. During the preparations it will have been necessary for both to discover something of the other’s style within each one’s respective own frame of reference. If there were no shared communalities at all, this would not be possible. Yet, reducing the nuances offered by the other to the (inevitably) habitual own rut would equally disqualify the attempt, severely impoverishing the interaction and musical result. In setting up such a forum of intercultural dialogue and translation, the assumption is thus that discreet singularities (differences), as well as sufficient common ground (sameness) for transactional negotiations exist. The musical challenge for both parties lies in ‘internalizing’ (gaining genuine access to) what is new and different, to be able comfortably to participate in and contribute to the interaction. What is required in terms of relational identity is to *discover the ‘other within’*.

While this might sound idealistic or naïve, the intention is, quite to the contrary, to express a most complex relationship in which the tension between self and other is concurrently upheld and resolved. In rephrasing this paradox one might state that gaining access to certain facets of one’s truly own, but hidden (subdued, restrained, unconscious) identity, is only possible through an outside stimulus.⁴⁶ Expressed in terms of systems thinking, one would say that certain aspects (of the identity) of a part or component only emerge in the systemic context of a bigger whole. As has been expounded in Chapter 2,⁴⁷ the identity of a part in an organized whole is in fact different when it is on its own, even without changing ‘essentially’ (i.e. on a physical, component level). For this reason ‘essentialist’ definitions of identity can never be complete and the concept of ‘relational identity’ must be acknowledged.

Finally returning to the musical process: For the two protagonists to be able to play this song ‘together’, to invoke a shared *Mahororo*, the *other* must have caused a resonance *within*. Through the interplay of differences – a negotiation between the familiar and the unfamiliar – a mutual common ground must have been established on which it is subsequently possible to encounter and endear⁴⁸ the other and the self.

Only now is it possible to envisage a transformation, which – deserving of the term – would imply a genuine shift, a qualitative change involving and benefitting everyone; a change allowing for something genuinely novel to emerge, re-defining and re-configuring the whole complex of music making in a multi-cultural context.

⁴⁴ Christian Kaden, *Des Lebens wilder Kreis: Musik im Zivilisationsprozess* (Bärenreiter, Kassel 1993), 10.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Perhaps this statement is just a complicated way of describing the notion of ‘growth’.

⁴⁷ See Chapter 2.7. pg. 41 (The part is more – and less – than the part.)

⁴⁸ I wish explicitly to distance myself from any superficial romantic notions that which might be associated with some of the terminology I have used here. I have become very sceptical of notions of goodwill, *ubuntu* or brotherhood, etc. as motives for reconciliatory initiatives. What I’m describing here is fully contained in the ‘mechanisms’ of complex systemic interactions, without having to invoke any metaphysical or super-human qualities. On the other hand I have no qualms to acknowledge the implicitly constructive role that generosity, openness and even love may play in mutually beneficial systemic relations.

IV. MAPFACHAPFACHA MUMHEMERO

The fourth movement attempts to exemplify this idea. In many respects it is the opposite of the first movement. From the ‘departure of an individual’ we have come to the ‘arrival of the many’,⁴⁹ from the anxiety and restlessness accompanying the former to a relaxed sense of ‘being in the moment’ in the latter; from solitary searching, probing and rejecting to returning, embracing and entering into a celebrative, collective flow.

On a technical level the differences are just as pronounced. The musical parameters used in *Mapfachapfacha* effectively contradict (or complement) those of *Partida*: We are now in simple triple metre derived from a consistent (even insistent) pattern determining regular, recurring four-bar phrases, a fixed key (hardly ever departing from C!), tonal organisation around a single pair of shifting chords (C – D) eliminating the possibility of ‘forward-moving’ harmonic ‘progression’ and instead instituting a perception of cyclic, recurring time. (Perhaps it would be more appropriate to state that what is instituted is a mind-set of contentment or happiness to endure or enjoy the recurrence of the same events, not hoping for improvements and therefore not clinging to changes.) Even the notion of ‘metre’ is effectively replaced by that of ‘groove’, necessitating the participation of African drums and various other non-pitched percussive instruments. Finally, space for improvisatory passages (i.e. solos for double bass and marimba) is provided.

Mapfachapfacha is linked to the third movement by a short transitional passage during which a motive from the first movement is revisited in retrospect as though being picked up for the last time before being discarded as obsolete. For a moment fear and anxiety flare up intensely, as all forces are drawn towards the maelstrom of the last movement from which there seemingly will be no escape. Then everything falls into place. We’re in a dance, cradled by an incessant lilt, nested in comfortably predictable procedures, swept away by unconstrained rhythmic energy.

While this finale does not contain any ‘new’ musical material, its organizational design attempts something new: combining formal principles of African and European origin to shape a self-axiomatically coherent whole. Obviously this combination is not ‘new’ either, but it remains challenging. Attempts at achieving a meaningful synergy of both perspectives have very rarely been convincing. In this sense the quest for an uncompromising *sun-phonia*⁵⁰ still stands as a feat yet to be accomplished.

The ‘African’ elements in the mix have already been listed above. A synopsis of the ‘Western’ components would, first of all, have to mention the premeditated design of a ritualistic performance committed to script, further – on an acoustical level – all instruments with specific pitch, as well as the resulting orchestral texture. With regard to the genre the tradition of a finale in Rondo form must be acknowledged (affording the convenient opportunity of restricted forays from the safe haven of a *ritornello* base-camp) and a dramaturgical sense of wrapping up and closing musical procedures (so as to demarcate a decisive end to the performance situation and allowing everyone to step back into the realm of ‘ordinary life’).

The image shows a musical score for a four-bar pattern. The score is written for six instruments: Bells, Hoshoh, Marimba (Mar), Violin 2 (Vn 2), Viola (Va), Violoncello (Vc), and Double Bass (Db). The time signature is 3/4. The key signature is C major. The pattern is characterized by a consistent rhythmic motif across all instruments, with some variations in pitch and articulation. The Marimba part starts with a dynamic marking of *mf*. The score is numbered 21 at the beginning.

Ex. 26: The four-bar pattern that ‘drives’ *Mapfachapfacha*

⁴⁹ See footnote 7 of this chapter.

⁵⁰ Greek origin of symphony – referring to the phenomenon of ‘sounding together’, ‘resonating’, manifesting as ‘sound combination’.

What subsequently emerges from the inter-cultural combination is a hybrid form of *representational* as well as *celebrative character* (performed for an audience *and* self-enacted for the performer's own sake), serving both the format of a 'concert' and that of a 'forum' for social interaction. Moreover, the combination results in 'happy' and essentially uncomplicated music, a quality that could hardly be attained from within currently fashionable norms of Western contemporary 'art music production'.

On a formal level cyclic musical periods are enfolded into larger sequences of musical events. In this way the nuanced observation and expression of the 'momentarily present' is embedded into a dramaturgically structured whole; the former providing a compelling physical presence in the 'here and now' of a performance situation, the latter being of crucial importance for the effective conveyance of representational music. Once again I am using the best of two worlds to which I would not have had recourse from only a single cultural vantage point.

On a material level the work highlights the propensity of Western musical devices to resonate with African structural principles. It proves that the latter can reveal something like the European material's innate or underlying susceptibility to African structures. What is novel, different or other is in this way discovered within; it does not merely reside outside. It is not completely foreign, just unacquainted, unaccustomed; possibly not even uncharted, but just untraveled. When a certain stimulus hones in on the apposite frequency to cause reverberation or resonance within oneself, the resulting feeling is one of affirmation and completeness. In this case the other and foreign is neither menacing nor intimidating. Rather, it brings to the fore what already potentially exists in us. This is what is meant by the sentence that underlies the final phrase of the work (and which the orchestra members may sing along, if willing): 'You hold the other within.'

But arguably the most important benefit to be derived from the contextual combination is the immediately tangible opportunity for the negotiation of (musical) identities. In this regard I once more refer to the discussion in Chapter 3, where it was stated that differences don't result from given identities, but that identities can only be recognized through differences.⁵¹ Applying this reversal of an intuitive understanding of cause and effect to the concerto implies the following:

To speak of certain musical elements as being 'Western' is only possible by showing how they differ from others, which may then – for reasons of distinction – be referred to as (in this case) 'African'. The differences allow the identities to stand out as in relief and in that sense the respective positions reciprocally 'make up each other', or at least make each other stand out in a more pronounced manner. Heleen's musical profile becomes more clearly discernible by virtue of Tinashe's completely different musical approach, and *vice versa*. Moreover, interacting with each other in close proximity allows both musicians to test and negotiate boundaries, to play with degrees of similarity or difference; in short, to negotiate with each other how and where they want to position themselves.

It is important to note that the 'labels' 'Western' and 'African' follow the differentiation and are not postulated in advance to construct differences. The identities they denote do not arise in an instance but emerge continuously, dynamically and provisionally. The labels become mere placeholders, indicating a space in which an on-going process of identification and differentiation can take place.

A final comment is called for regarding epistemologically open collaborations such as the one under discussion. It concerns the remarkable complementarity of African and European musical principles. Stated differently, it may be observed that the primary musical concerns of the respective cultural constructs hardly overlap. While this often leads to the conclusion that 'they don't have much to say to each other' it could be reframed by noting that they 'each have something the other doesn't even know of'. Once a curiosity about such a potentially complementing propensity has been awakened, the first statement may be reconsidered as 'they will have a lot to say to each other, once they understand each other.'

⁵¹ See Chapter 3.2., pg. 59.

These varied formulations highlight the delicacy of dealing with differences. Seeing only differences easily leads to statements one and two, which will effectively bar any collaboration. But the position expressed in statement three cannot be reached by simply eliminating differences. As it is their existence that makes for the richness of the encounter and therefore their acknowledgement that will mobilize the necessary energy to engage with them,⁵² there is no reason to eliminate differences. At the same time it is imperative that differences should be ‘overcome’ for the very same reasons of tapping into their potential riches and mobilizing vital energy. The formula should thus be one of ‘overcoming but not eliminating’, ‘upholding the obstacle to make the journey more interesting’, ‘cherishing the abyss as prerequisite for honing one’s skill in building bridges.’ This has been my attitude in ‘juxta-com-posing’ *Mapfchapfacha*.

SPANISHONA

The language transition in the movements’ titles from Spanish (departure) to Shona (arrival) underscores the gradual change of style. It further illustrates the work’s dramaturgical transition from an assumedly general, colonial (or even pre-colonial) musical *lingua franca* towards an open dialogue with a specific local vernacular. The work’s formal structure results from a musical transition that could be read as a synoptic account of on-going historical processes. The composition’s formal design thereby encapsulates a model and perhaps even a productive catalyst for what I deem to be a necessary and inevitable development.

Contrary to a comfortable political conviction⁵³ that the tension between first and third world in South Africa has automatically been resolved through the magical event of free democratic elections, I hold that hardly any tension has been resolved, that the relationship between the West and Africa is strained, that respective perceptions are very far from being mutually understood. In this regard the work is a call for the deliberate and necessary engagement of building bridges, negotiating conditions for true encounters, establishing trust in spite of differences. It is a plea for the continuation and deepening of the ‘*SpaniShona*’ dialogue, for an acknowledgment of the need of human, musical and cultural exchange, not to erase the differences, but to nurture the integrity of our identity by investing it in meaningful and enriching transactions.

Intercultural encounters and transactions are complex affairs, as they are suspended between constantly adjusting double movements. All sides, while speaking to the other, address themselves. All selves discover the own otherness and the other’s similarity. All must subsequently reinforce their choice to remain who they are – different from one another, but all the richer because of recognizing their respective singularity in contrast or in relief with one other.

In a positive, constructive encounter the other is not an opposing force, but an affirmation of ‘what I need to be to make you more complete’ and *vice versa*. By implication, the point of such encounters is not to persuade, convince, change, or even to confront one another, but to allow one another *not* to be the same and instead to be one another’s (more or less significant) other.

⁵² The following foregone conclusion might help to illustrate this point: Seeing the mountain in the first place and further seeing it as challenging and rewarding terrain and not as obnoxious obstacle are basic prerequisites for any kind of mountaineering. Seeing differences...

⁵³ An example of such a view is that expressed by Kevin Volans: ‘... [S]ince 1988... I have avoided any direct reference to African music in my composition. For me, the moment for this kind of work has passed, along with the apartheid state.’ Kevin Volans, *Composer’s Statement*, www.kevinvolans.com/ [accessed 19.5.10].

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I always read authors' acknowledgements with a special curiosity for the implicit bio- and ethnographical evidence they reveal about the circumstances under which a text has come into existence. Often this curiosity feeds a sense of envy at the seemingly overflowing amount of support, assistance, goodwill and sympathetic collaboration that most authors concede to have received. This has often left me marvelling in bewilderment as to why my own circumstances would for the most part seem devoid of such beneficial features, or, alternatively, why I would be incapable of mustering the degree of gratitude so graciously demonstrated by others. I have thus been living with a certain degree of trepidation as to what I would be able to acknowledge unfeignedly, when it became my turn to do so.

This study emanated from a situation that I experienced as a severe and prolonged personal and professional crisis. To embark on the project of this thesis was a task 'accepted' as a final resort of cutting the Gordian knot; a rethinking, reformulating and expressing in yet another format (verbal, academic, philosophical) what I have been pursuing in my compositions, performances and various other musical endeavours. The strain of working in this medium of expression has at times been unbearably arduous, but – considering that my deepest desire is that to communicate and be understood – perhaps inevitable. Knowing that 'to communicate' and 'to be understood' will always remain incongruent to a certain extent, it has been a task undertaken in spite of this knowledge.

In this context I have to mention my adversaries. I will not name them and I will not thank them for their careless and often heartless dismissals, which wasted many opportunities of potentially constructive musical and academic interactions or collaborations. Yet I must acknowledge the rigidity of their resistance as a decisive factor, not only in requiring me continuously and rigorously to question my own position and investigate the causes of our numerous deadlocks, but literally 'forcing' me through seemingly insuperable trials time and again. I could not have asked for a more apposite demonstration of the systemically constitutive role of antagonism – grinding, sharpening, honing my arguments through continuous resistance – and thus 'complexity' intrinsically at work.

As I write my acknowledgements at this moment, I realize that the generosity mentioned above could well derive from the relief of the task almost being completed. Anticipating this proximate moment of freedom I feel initiated into a previously denied kinship of magnanimity and hereby wish to extend my wholehearted gratitude to the following persons and institutions, whose goodwill provided the necessary understanding and support to see me through this process:

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I wish to entrust this work to the beneficial perusal of every interested reader and listener and sincerely hope that it may be meaningful beyond its immediate academic and professional purpose.

I dedicate it to my children Manu and Laurens, as partial compensation for the prolonged period of time during which it preoccupied their father: with love and deep gratitude for your patience, strength and the contagiously enthusiastic manner in which you embrace life!

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COVERLETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE OF SURVEY

Stellenbosch, 21.4.13

Dear Colleague,

I kindly request your valued collaboration in a questionnaire survey on compositional practice in South Africa as part of the doctoral research I am currently conducting at the University of Stellenbosch under Prof. Stephanus Muller.

The questionnaire is aimed at representatively mapping recent and current activities in the field of art music composition (ca. 2000-2013) in South Africa and at gaining insights into the contexts in which South African composers' work is produced, performed and received.

'Art music composition' is broadly understood here as musical production following the European tradition of conceptualizing and notating music, deliberately referencing historical and current stylistic developments as a primarily autonomous artistic activity, not commercially or otherwise functionalized. Even if your compositional practice does not conform to this definition at all times, you are nevertheless welcome to participate and might choose to only complete applicable parts of the questionnaire.

The findings will flow into my Ph.D. thesis and may also be used in publications arising from this research. General professional ethics towards the information and opinions collected apply at all times, as well as the specific ethical regulations of the University of Stellenbosch, under whose auspices this study falls. Should you wish that your responses be treated anonymously, provision is made to indicate this at the beginning of the questionnaire (1.3.).

The survey is designed to garner first-hand information from you, the composers, as key role players. I highly appreciate the time it will take to complete, and I am aware that you may have provided similar information or opinion to previous researchers. I am thus all the more grateful.

My investigation is primarily aimed at assessing *working practices, as well as contextual and infrastructural aspects*. Its objective is an up-to-date insider representation of *our professional field*, focusing on issues of importance and concern to all composers in South Africa. Beyond its immediate academic purpose I hope that a resulting assessment may help the cause of a more discerning regard for the local sphere of new music production.

If you are willing to take the survey I'd appreciate receiving your responses no later than Friday, 31 May 2013.

I very much look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your time and valuable contribution to this research project.

Sincerely,

Hans Huyssen

[Click here](#) to take the survey.