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

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

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

John Davis
President, ISCM Executive Committee
FOREWORD

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

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

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

Peter Swinnen
Vice-President, ISCM Executive Committee
EDITORIAL PREFACE

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

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

Maarten Quanten
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INTRODUCTION

We live in a world in which perceptual input has increased to an unexpected level – an input which is most spectacular in terms of our auditive and visual awareness. We are overloaded with images and sounds. Silence is nowadays, as John Cage mentioned in one of his last interviews, almost everywhere in the world ‘traffic noise’ (New York, April 2nd 1991). Auditory attractions and disturbances are inherent to our fragmentary technological and complex world. While the auditory environment, both of sound and music, is created by humans’ ways of inhabiting and enculturing the world, we often consider its diversity to be indifferent to our own existence, and even alienated from our own subjectivity.

However, the music creations and explorations which result from this perceptual and cultural being in the world question our ways of creating cultures and urge us to be more sensitive to its – disturbing, attractive – diversity. A deep artistic concern for these evolutions and for the ways music education and funding seem to (mis)understand or even ignore them feeds this reflection upon social choices. However, we will argue, art can make the difference here in how we can act, react, interact with the perceptual inputs that our societies and environments charge us with.

Debating the role of art in society means raising the question of what kind of society we want for tomorrow. The role of art in society is inextricably intertwined with the cultural and ideological experiences and processes of the contemporary world, they escape traditional cultural and ideological classification. Our analysis is that Music with a capital ‘M’ can no longer ignore the multiple musics with a small ‘m’, and neither can it ignore the prevailing tools of culture. We definitely argue for the recognition of the multiplicity of strings, scales and spheres in the music arts.

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

Following these considerations, we will argue for an open cultural horizon. An open cultural horizon has a positive influence on both the economy and individual and social well being. Such a horizon opens new perspectives, spreads values, promotes diversity, imagination and tolerance and invites to exploration and reflection. Cultural creativity in society is not only an aim...
in itself, but a tool for a better society with more social cohesion. By allowing access to informed diversity, it counters the situation of the citizen as a piece in a game played by economic and political forces. Instead of feeling unerved or threatened by an imposed environment, the citizen should have the opportunity to debate the world of the sensibilities in an autonomous and knowledgeable way. However, such an open cultural horizon is only possible when a society invests socially and economically in creativity and arts. And that’s where the shoe pinches.

**STRINGS UNDER PRESSURE**

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

The first problem seems to be that classical music has been put on trial for financial reasons. On 12th July 2011 the Art Newspaper, reacting to the announcement of budget cuts of 25 percent in the arts, ran the headline “Cultural funding to be slashed by one quarter; performing arts worst hit”. A year later, on 5th July 2012, El Confidencial, an influential newspaper in Spain, reacted to the announcement of a 15.1 percent budget cut by writing: “The impact of the crisis on Spain’s cultural sector: No money, no culture”. In Italy, the world-famous opera house La Scala faces a $9 million shortfall because of reductions in subsidies in 2012, while Portugal has abolished its Ministry of Culture. However the President of the European Commission, Jose Barroso, claimed when launching Portugal’s stint as the European Capital of Culture that “without culture, Europe has no direction” (European Observer, 24/01/2012). “Culture is a basic need”, added Andreas Stadler, director of the Austrian Cultural Forum in New York and president of the New York branch of the European Union National Institutes for Culture, “People should have the right to go to the opera. […] Culture is […] so linked to our identities.” (The New York Times, 24/03/2012)

But how, then, can culture be sustained?

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

This problem of sponsoring is brought to the fore in a very intelligent way by the book *Nat If But When: Culture Beyond Oil*, where artists and ecologists raised ethical questions about sponsoring – the Tate Gallery being mainly supported nowadays by an oil company (Art collective Liberate Tate e.a., 2011). Where a few decades ago, cultural institutions were funded by tobacco money, now they are funded by oil companies: “despite widespread public concern about the dramatic threat of climate change, oil money is still found greasing the wheels of so many of our cultural institutions” (id., p. 6). Beyond ethical and ecological concerns, other problems arise in the ‘day-to-day’ politics of company sponsorship, as companies change from year to year which music festival or other cultural activity they want to sponsor, to what degree, and whether they want to sponsor it at all. This kind of decision, totally unrelated to the quality of culture or art, makes the existence and continuity of cultural events and structures fragile. Festivals are even cancelled because of sponsorship running dry.

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

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

In parttime arts education, classical music is being invaded and even chased away by popular music. Can we blame popular music for this? Or does education fail to divulge and stimulate classical music for a broad audience? It is not clear if this is the fault of the press, the responsibility of the musician, or of broader society. Or is classical music, considered complex, too scarcely programmed to be understood or appreciated? Or maybe art is devalued to a level of entertainment that blurs expertise and aesthetic creativity with popularity and commodification – an idea put forward some time ago by Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Still, new developments take place beyond their observations. It is interesting – but often disappointing – to see celebrities or political figures becoming ambassadors of the arts more often than piano virtuosos do. Maybe this is caused by the world of music itself remaining too hermetic, too rigid and too severe, closing doors and ears to a wonderful creative environment.

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

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

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

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

However! We would like to bring a positive message, a musical message. And that message is present. Never before has music been so omnipresent in our society. All kinds of music are present: classic, rock, pop, contemporary, yours, mine, his, hers, … All ways of experiencing music pervade our living environment: radio, performances, mp3 players, mobiles, iPods. We experience different kinds of music or ‘musics’, listened to, played, encountered by chance on the corner of a street, through an open window, by passing a whistling man, or deliberately sought out in a beautiful concert hall, by humming in the kitchen, or by turning the wheel of the iPad. And these contemporary ‘musics’ give pleasure, they enchant and attach people to other people and to their worlds. They accompany our thoughts and our sorrows, our movements and our choices. They open up a cultural horizon. So why shouldn’t these ‘musics’ encounter each other over the walls of the box in which they are usually imprisoned by habit or self-protection, instead of remaining in these boxes as if afraid of each other. In these closed boxes, they experience themselves as ‘small music’, fearing the other as the ‘big Music’, be it an elitist ‘M’ – of intellectual superiority, or a market ‘M’ of economic superiority, or, on the contrary, they consider themselves as the Music – with the big ‘M’ – overthrowing or ignoring the other music with a small ‘m’.

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

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

**CLASSICAL MUSIC IS ON TRIAL!**

A PLEA FOR MUSIC WITH THE ‘M’ OF MULTIPLICITY

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

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

There is a resemblance between this world of bubbles and our reflection upon music (with both a big ‘M’ and a small ‘m’). The ideas behind these notions are not ours, but are borrowed from Alan Bishop’s theory of mathematics (Bishop, 1997; François & Van Bendegem, 2007). Bishop distinguishes between mathematicics with a small ‘m’ and mathematics with a large ‘M’. The notion of ‘mathematics’ stands for universal mathematical competencies and ‘Mathematics’ for the western scientific discipline. The big ‘M’ then refers to a possibly idealised but also fossilised view of mathematics,
The role of the big ‘M’. Musicking, on the contrary, Western star pop music, both fighting for the Western concert tradition or the commodified of music and music performance, be it the elitist big ‘M’ would thus be the typically Western view activity, not an evaluative one. Music with the ties of Bishop. Musicking is then a descriptive part and parcel of human capacities, such that Small focuses on music as an activity, as having the foregoing section? Some kind of general evincing the hierarchical path we explored in culture. Relying upon Bishop’s insights, what mathematics. [246x109]– or at least very plausible – that these six activi ties are universal, and anthropological research shows that different cultures have developed their own symbolic technology and activity of mathematics.

The theories of both Alan Bishop and Peter Slet erdijk offer us insights into the prevailing music culture. Relying upon Bishop’s insights, what could be the equivalent of the small ‘m’ in music, evincing the hierarchical path we explored in the foregoing section? Some kind of general human propensity and potential to music making. Christopher Small’s concept of ‘musicking’ provides a good candidate: “To music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practising, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing.”

Small focuses on music as an activity, as having a nature and function in human life, as being part and parcel of human capacities, such that it resembles the universal mathematical capacities of Bishop. Musicking is then a descriptive activity, not an evaluative one. Music with the big ‘M’ would thus be the typically Western view of music and music performance, be it the elitist Western concert tradition or the commodified Western star pop music, both fighting for the role of the big ‘M’. Musicking, on the contrary, is present in Indonesian gamelan music, or the adźda dance of the Ewe of Ghana, African American blues as well as urban rap, Bach’s St Matthew Passion, or in a version of Singing in the Rain by your father under the shower. The point made by Small is to consider all these as perspectives on the universal activity of ‘musicking’, and to blur the lines between those who create, those who interpret and those who consume, as well as between levels within these categories. 

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

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

EMBRACING MUSICS FROM ALL DIRECTIONS

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

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

But how can we implement this change?

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

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

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

Another example concerns the creation of music and its embeddedness in time. All present events form the history of tomorrow, but the present is also the scion of the past. Art is embedded in referentiality of the present and the past. The glance and reflection upon a paint ing of Rubens has fundamentally changed since
also from the audience’s, and will also impoverish the existing music. If we compare this attitude with visual art, the proportion of creation and reproduction is reversed – at least in Belgium, which could explain the international recognition of Belgian visual art.

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

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

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

Small details, small accents can make the difference. In contemporary art, the interrelation of the multiplicity of art forms, the use of different media, is one of the driving forces to relate to society.

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

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

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

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

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

The concept ‘work’ and not ‘event’ is the cornerstone of music history […] The subject […] is made up, primarily, of significant works of music that have outlived the culture of their age.”

“This quote may be ‘acceptable’ for music historians, but it is not for musicians. Such a view kills all creativity, not only from the artist’s side, but also from the audience’s, and will also impoverish the existing music. If we compare this attitude with visual art, the proportion of creation and reproduction is reversed – at least in Belgium, which could explain the international recognition of Belgian visual art.”

References
born in 1938 in Westfield, Massachusetts, Frederic Rzewski has been a pianist and composer since 1960. As a pianist he specialized in new music by participating in Karlheinz Stockhausen’s first performances. He co-founded the group MEV (Musica Elettronica Viva) with Alvin Curran and Richard Teitelbaum in 1966, in Rome. Their music, which also involved Anthony Braxton and Steve Lacy, evolved between improvised music and electronic music.

It’s only in 1975 that his work The People United Will Never Be Defeated, derived from a political song by Sergio Ortega, began revealing the quintessence of Frederic Rzewski’s art. The piece magnifies the piano as the instrument of choice and proclaims the freedom of expressions as a compositional basis. Thereafter, the composer never ceased to assert that freedom in his œuvre.

This dimension is indeed much more important in his work than the ‘politically engaged’ label that is too often used to describe his music. No law, but a constantly reaffirmed and non-compromising integrity: through his quest for freedom, Frederic Rzewski always searches deeper to find the core of his own music and write it as directly and simply as possible. In fact, this was the basis of his teaching at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Liège where he was composition professor from 1977 to 2003.

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

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

Frederic Rzewski: When Boulez was in New York in the 70s, he wanted to organize a concert series. He was open and was welcoming suggestions. I went to one of his meetings with Ursula Oppens and she pointed out that the United States is a multicultural country and new music has a different meaning there than in Europe, it is more complex. So, Ursula thought it would be interesting to have a musical program that reflected the complexity of the culture. At first, Boulez did not seem to understand. Naturally, she was primarily talking about African-American music with all its novelties such as Anthony Braxton. But Boulez still did not understand! Then he said: “Oh, I see what you mean, I think you’re talking about improvisation, I heard that in Europe, it’s always the same thing!” But I really doubt he had heard that in Europe! I think he was thinking of Globokar’s group.

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

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

Rzewski: I hope it never is.

Bosse: Isn’t that one of the bases of your approach?
Rzewski: Yes, of course, it certainly is, but for most people music is a piece of plastic that you buy in a store.

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

Rzewski: I would have to read the articles!

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

Rzewski: At the time? Which time?

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

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

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

Bosse: Is your type of improvisation very different from jazz?

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

Bosse: How so?

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

Bosse: For Beethoven, for example?

Rzewski: And Bach too.

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

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

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

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

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

Bosse: And Chopin?

Rzewski: I naturally know Chopin because I am of Polish origin and since I was a child, I was told about Chopin! But we don’t know much about improvisation from back then, because it was not recorded. And yet… when Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1880, it was a very simple device, with no electrical power: it was mechanical, it worked with a crank. Why then was this device not created a century earlier? Mozart would have enjoyed it; he loved gadgets, and music boxes. There is no technical reason why we cannot hear the recordings of Beethoven’s improvisations today! Why was that device not invented in the eighteenth century?

Perhaps it means that the concept of recording is afad that will eventually disappear! Maybe this century will be known by future generations as the century of recordings, the era when people had this weird idea to keep music in a piece of plastic (laughs) kind of like the Egyptian idea of life after death: totally absurd! Yet music has been around for at least 35,000 years, probably much more. 35,000 years is the age of the oldest musical instrument, which was only discovered a few years ago in Yugoslavia, a flute made of bird bones, with three holes, from which we can extrapolate the location of the other holes. And it seems to be a diatonic flute, more or less like the common flutes known throughout the world, with six holes. Music was therefore already quite developed. We can say that for 35,000 years, music was something that people did, and not something that was passively observed in concert halls.

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

Rzewski: ‘Science of repetition’?

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

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

Bosse: It’s a repetition without being one…

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Rzewski** in a sense, they are all the same! In a sense…

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

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

**Rzewski** Yes!

**Bosse** How do you do it?

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

**Bosse** There is André Souris.

**Rzewski** There is André Souris, indeed, and that’s it! There are also composers who are perhaps close to the idea such as Satie, or even Poulenc or Darius Milhaud, and we could say that even Mahler uses methods that may allow the unconscious to somewhat express itself without the usual inhibitions. In painting, theater, cinema, the influence of inner world discovery that comes from psychoanalysis is everywhere, although not in music. With a few exceptions, music seems to have always preferred the rational way. Post-war composers like to present themselves in the white suit of the laboratory technician; they use a pseudo-scientific jargon like ‘parameters’, etc. Why? It’s probably not easy to explain but I think it has something to do with the fact that music belongs to priests. The most ancient composers are priests and music is therefore closely related to theology. And, in a sense, classical music is still a kind of sacred music. The division we see in art and culture between top and bottom naturally exists everywhere; however, in music, it is particularly clear: there is a clear division between serious music and light music and, in my opinion, this dualism is simply another form of the world’s division between sacred and profane. This has to do with what we were talking about earlier: taboos in classical music, what is allowed and what is not allowed.

**Bosse** What is the importance of melody in your music?

**Rzewski** It’s hard to avoid! (Laughter) Some composers manage to do it, like Xenakis for example.

**Bosse** In this exploration of the unconscious, of which you speak, does melody have a place?

**Rzewski** Do you write what you whistle?

**Bosse** How about the traditional melodies such as lullabies. It seems to me that there is a link between the mother’s face and the mother’s voice, because there are certain formulas in children’s melodies that are somewhat universal, that can be found everywhere, and many types of popular music from different countries are alike in their pentatonic structure for example, or in their general form. And so, I decided to explore this notion and, yes, in these North American Ballads, I tried to do that, take traditional melodies and subject them to various distortions or transpositions, because I realized that we can still recognize certain melodies through all these distortions. Which is not the case, for example, with dodecaphonic series! (Laughter)

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

**Rzewski** Nothing in particular! Can you explain?

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

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

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

**Rzewski** Hum. Yes, well, which compos-
ers adamantly refuse the notion of tonality? There aren’t many!

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

**Rzewski** They refuse the notion of tonality?

**Bosse** The tonal system anyway.

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

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

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

**Bosse** Can you explain a bit more?

**Rzewski** Yes, the most interesting type of counterpoint is the first kind, one note against one note. I really enjoyed these exercises when I was a student. And I always wanted to teach that in Liège, but it was never possible. I really wanted to make such a long piece of music was to ensure that it would not be performed live.

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

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

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

**Rzewski** The idea was to write on the theme of the road! The road is already there when you arrive and continues when you leave. I wanted to create a structure that takes place outside of time. So, the reason I wanted to number the different parts of the work in miles was to ensure that it would not be performed live.

**Bosse** It’s very Proustian?

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

**Bosse** Are your texts rhythmic?

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

**Bosse** Is the piece finished?

**Rzewski** Yes, it’s been finished since 2003.

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

**Rzewski** Yes, usually two minutes.

**Bosse** So, are you attracted to extremes?

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

**Bosse** I would like to know who you favorite composers are.

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

**Rzewski** I met Poussieur for the first time in June 1960 at the ISCM festival in Cologne. Then I saw him again in Berlin and later in Buffalo, where we spent time together and became good friends. But with Henri, I always felt that even if he was not much older than me, he belonged to another generation. That is to say, the generation of people who experienced World War II. I was born in 1938 and I was 7 years old when the war was over. Naturally, in the U.S. we played children's games where I was always the German or the Japanese guy because I was smaller and it always ended badly! (Laughter) And I would go home in tears. But for me, war was just a children's game. For Poussieur, things were very different, he was forced to join the army and at the end of the war they wanted to assign him to the anti-aircraft artillery, he was only about 1.5 years old, and his mother fought to save him. He was evidently strongly influenced by these experiences.

**Boisse** And is it not true?

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

**Boisse** Are you rather optimistic about the future of Belgium?

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

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

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

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

**Boisse** Other projects?

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

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

Well, is that enough?

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**Note**

1. The Road (1995-2003) is a piece for piano solo made of eight parts.
   Part I TURNS, Ml 1.8
   Part II TRACKS, Ml 9.16
   Part III TRAMPS, Ml 17.24
   Part IV STOP, Ml 23.32
   Part V A FEW KNOCKS, Ml 33.40 (Where Are You Running, Una Tragedia Domestica, Slow March, Strange Meeting, The Days Fly By, Coming and Going, A Friendly Dispute-Making It Civil)
   Part VI TRAVELING WITH CHILDREN, Ml 41.48 (Sailing to Palmyra, The Froggals Parents, Dance, Abaddon, Night Thought, A Walk in the Woods, Why?)
   Part VII FINAL PREPARATIONS, Ml 49.56 (The Weak and the Strong, Castle in the Air, Notes from the Underground, The Some Old Story, Too Late!, Back to Earth, The End of the Line, The Flood, Epilogue)
   Part VIII THE BIG DAY ARRIVES, Ml 57.64 (Jawing, Marriage, Many Loves, Uphill, Stop the War!, The Bubble, Nowhere, Leaks And Plug)
   The Road, like all of Frederic Rzewski’s works can be heard on http://icking-music-archive.org/ByComposer/Rzewski.php
THE PLACE OF CONTEMPORARY ART MUSIC

Peter-Paul De Temmerman

IN THE CURRENT CULTURE DEBATE

An artistic expression does not exist simply because it exists. I believe that the essence of an artistic expression also lies partly in the fact that it has arisen from choices, explicit or otherwise, and not primarily because it did not exist beforehand. Why am I discussing ‘contemporary’ music and not ‘new’ music? For the simple reason that the term ‘new’ is far too general. Consequently, I have chosen the term ‘contemporary’ because it can cover three important areas of meaning. Firstly, it may indicate a form, content or event that is taking form now, at this moment or in this period. Secondly, it concerns an expression that is active now, whose effects are now being felt, which is intervening now to a greater or lesser extent, although it may not have been formulated now. This may happen in the field to which the expression was addressed or outside it. But in any case it implies relevance. Thirdly, ‘contemporary’ phenomena are those which are important now, things which are not trivial and even have an urgency about them, a certain necessity. At best, these three aspects manifest themselves simultaneously. Hopefully it is already clear that ‘contemporary art music’ does not refer to a monolithic block of expressions, but to expressions that share a considerable cultural and historical background, consequently also manifesting themselves in a related cultural field.

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

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

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

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

Before we delve further into the position of contemporary art music in the cultural debate, I would like to consider for a moment the place that this music occupies in the West European cultural scene. The answer is simple: its place is almost non-existent. To begin with there is the superabundance of cultural expressions, from film, literature, theatre, dance and visual art to circus, music, sport etc., of which music is only one. If we only consider music, we are struck by the fact that even here contemporary art music occupies a particularly marginal position. That applies both to the music available to listen to in concert halls or music carriers such as CD and vinyl, and to the opportunities to get to know it through the general, commercial and/or public media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines). What are the consequences of this? I am working on the assumption that the media, and cultural spaces in general, contribute both to the formation of the individual’s frame of reference and to the creation of social relationships between different individuals, and in that sense to a community. Clearly they do not exclusively fulfil this role, because of course there is school, work, family, religion etc. as well. Nevertheless, their influence on the formation of a world view,
in this case personal reality, is far from negligible. We live in a community that is completely detaching itself from its own cultural heritage. Popular culture – not the older folk culture – forms the frame of reference for almost all areas of the cultural field. In itself that does not necessarily need to be a problem, but it is certainly important to try and find out for example which influences are causing the presence of art music to wane. I do not believe that this is exclusively, or even primarily, to do with the characteristics of the music itself, but rather due to the cultural policy of the last few decades, which is of an ideological nature. Of course the overwhelming subject of cultural expressions to market forces plays a role as well.

Efforts have been under way for decades to level out the difference between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture for good, in favour of pluralism and social equality. And yet this debate itself is primarily a fundamental part of high culture. Even this text belongs in that context. It is mainly academics or other representatives of high culture who make social and political pronouncements in the context of such debates on the cultural expressions of some culture or other that is considered to be lower. They do not do this to compare aesthetic characteristics, but to compare the value of the recipient of the cultural expression with the value of the person judging the recipient. And this should be unambiguously equal. I, as a lover of Bach and hence implicitly a representative of higher culture, announce that I am worth no more than my neighbour who loves Elvis and does not listen to Bach, let alone knowing or understanding anything about his music. This is a moral principle, not even a judgement, because it is true from the outset. Reflexively, people go on to conclude from this that the cultural expressions that delight the judge and maker of pronouncements (myself) and the recipient of lower cultural expressions (my neighbour) must also be equal. That is a moral judgement disguised as an aesthetic one, which places the adherent of this principle in a decidedly ambiguous and fundamentally hypocritical position. When an aesthetic judgement is read as an ideological discourse, you create a situation in which people may no longer dare to speak openly. They may say that Bach is of equal value to Elvis, because I do not want to be suspected of believing I am worth more than my neighbour, not because I really think Elvis is as good as Bach. Hence if you make a positive aesthetic statement in such cases, referring to an elite which may or may not exist, you automatically make a latent negative statement about those who do not belong to that elite. Or conversely, if I make a positive statement about the Rock Werchter festival for example, I am automatically saying something positive about the people who attend it. After all, rock festivals of that kind are the apotheosis of pluralism and social equality: all classes are united fraudenly on a big party.

Although the moral and aesthetic judgements in this context have nothing to do with each other, we do try to link them, which increases the likelihood of taboos arising, and therefore also surveillance of what is valuable. This makes it high time to sweep this debate off the table. It is only when we go back to distinguishing a moral judgement of a group or its members from an aesthetic judgement of a product of a member or members of a group that it will once again be possible to make the following aesthetic statement: “Of course such things as banality and triviality still exist.” Ultimately this should be at the heart of the debate, and not the question of who feels insulted or reinforced.

THE THRESHOLD PROBLEM

You don’t create a new audience by asking for one. But you will not get anywhere, unless you make the artistic expression available. In any case, most people will only go looking for unfamiliar music if an impulse comes from a person or institution which acts as an example or reference point to the lay person in question. That is not really about the intrinsic value of the artistic expression, but generally has much more to do with the place allocated to it in the social network concerned. Cultural relationships have always been connected to social relationships: if the social relationships change, so do the cultural ones. The opposite occurs far less. Formerly, this influence and effect was much clearer and, especially, more open: one need only remember the cultural associations affiliated to the Belgian social movements. These social movements were rooted in the pronounced political and social pillars in society, resulting in each case in a cultural association grafted onto the corresponding ideology. For example the Catholics had the Davidsfonds, socialists and non-Catholics had the Vermeulenfonds and the progressive leftist Masereiffonds, Liberal non-Catholics had the Willenfonds, and Flemish nationalists, the Radenbachfonds. In Flanders (as the largest cultural community in Belgium), these associations also contributed to a stronger sense of Flemishness and the creation of a Flemish identity in the Belgian political and cultural system. The cultural associations all have two features in common. Firstly, they aim to provide a platform for their ideological heritage. Secondly, they aim to offer their members cultural development that is to a greater or lesser extent ideologically influenced, thus permitting personal growth and, in that sense, emancipation. Nowadays – and not entirely without justification – this approach is strongly felt to be paternalistic. But here, too, we can discern a certain ambiguity and hypocrisy: people cringe at the idea of ‘improving’ the lower classes but do proclaim the virtues of social mobility. In my opinion, however, there is no essential difference between the two. Both are rooted in an emancipatory ideal. Lowering thresholds to increase social mobility is praiseworthy of course, as long as it is done through education, initiation and training and not by intervening from above in the content of what is on offer. It corresponds to the old ideals of education, but also to the emancipatory aims of the old socialist vision of popular improvement. The Flemish composer Lucien Goethals (1931-2006) once put it like this: “It is not the threshold that needs to be lowered but the people who need to be raised up.” I think it is high time to re-evaluate that idea and reformulate it in the context of our time, in the sense that the experience of culture and the arts can contribute to raising people beyond their personal and social limitations.

In that context I assume that art itself is more or less oriented (or should be) towards superseding its own categories – more specifically, in the very making of art. Someone who practices an art form, such as a composer or musician, aims to reach an ever-higher level, (usually) within the limits of the vocabulary of their art form. Of course artists are subject here to a historical development. As an artist, you react to the present context but also to the history of the art form you practice. History is obviously linear in time, but the development, unavailing, discovery and/or refinement of cultural expressions often happens in fits and starts. New times sometimes demand new means of expression. Sometimes these new means, just like the desire to renew them, can be so radical that people claim to have broken with the past. This is clear for example in the way that composers like Pierre Boulez talked about their work. However it always turns out with hindsight that no one can completely divest themselves of their own history. That focus on surpassing one’s own categories has also frequently been present in the valuation of the arts. It was a valid aim to develop one’s own faculties in order to make an aesthetic judgement. In other words, taste could be improved. I have written this is the past tense because people tend to assume nowadays that the refinement of taste – if it exists at all – cannot be shared collectively, and if it is shared in the high arts such as classical music, it is mainly snobocracy anyway. In popular artistic expressions, however, the emphasis is usually different, namely a focus on ecstasy, flow, experiencing excitement, one’s own body, which is by definition personal. In music-making, people tend far more to orient themselves towards the effect they are creating than refinement of the expression itself or the experience of it. Here ecstasy, passion, desire and entertainment play an important role, sometimes supported by intoxicants. In the higher arts this aspect of frenziedness, ecstasy and
A lot of contemporary art has retreated into a

ceremony. Negation is no longer creative.

If you make the effort, you get a corresponding

result; otherwise you don't. It is so simple, and

if you like that. In my view that is a strange way

to make it, and so it is 'exclusive'. And people

effort excludes those who cannot or do not want

to make it, and so it is 'exclusive'. And people

don't like that. In my view that is a strange way

to thinking. Such an effort excludes because of

the individual or because of the envisaged aim. In other words:

if you make the effort, you get a corresponding

result; otherwise you don't. It is so simple, and

yet the idea survives that many contemporary

arts are deliberately exclusive, and above all that

this is a problem. This is how Bart De Wever, the

most popular Flemish politician of the moment,

a dyed-in-the-wool right-wing conservative, puts it:

'These days art hardly touches the community

at all, despite some artists' desperate attempts to

shock. Or as the Spanish (sic) Nobel Prize win

ner Octavio Paz said: 'Rebellion has turned into

procedure, criticism into rhetoric, transgression

to ceremony. Negation is no longer creative.'

A lot of contemporary art has retreated into a

private reservation, where art holds a select

circle together but also segregates it and sets it

apart from society. These contemporary art works

are only recognisable as art to that little insiders'

club and don't make the slightest bit of sense

to the man in the street.' So art is supposed to

touch the community, but does De Wever mean

the whole community? It is pretty cross, but many

people implicitly validate this idea. This begs

the question of whether an artistic expression should

adapt, lowering the threshold and becoming

accessible to 'the man in the street.' I find it

problematic that people in Flanders have been

done just that over the last few decades, on

the initiative of organisations themselves, of

government bodies etc. Composers, ensembles and

organisers are expected to build bridges, and so

here and there you suddenly find pieces for an

ensemble and DJ, ensemble and video artist, en

semble and back, ensemble and a celebrity who

needed to declare their love for classical music

or a popular jazz pianist who has been asked to

write a piano concerto. Whet this really does

build bridges is something I sincerely doubt, but

the contents of the resulting productions are

effectively determined by policy. Maybe – or

even probably – this intervention by the govern

ment has also led to viable artistic choices, and
doubtless to the production of interesting art as

well, without artistic compromises. But in fact

that distinction is not actually relevant here. The point

remains that such attempts indicate that people

believe that (contemporary) art music cannot

stand on its own merits. Or, worse still (and I

think this is implicitly the dominant assumption)

that it is best to hide away the work’s own merits

in the background, because to do so is more

politically correct. That is gradually erring in

the direction of social realism. So, no, I do not

believe that a complex artistic expression should

adapt itself to 'the man in the street'. There are

all sorts of complex expressions that leave 'the

man in the street' completely unmoved: maths

for example. If we adapt the content of maths

so that everybody understands it, our buildings

will fall down. People will accept maths quickly

because the direct benefit of maths to architecture

is demonstrable, whereas the direct benefit of a

complex but interesting artistic expression is not.

On the other hand, the use of a banal artistic

expression is not demonstrable either.

HOW ELITIST IS

CONTEMPORARY ART MUSIC?

Can we create a nomenclature of the basic

characteristics of a cultural expression? And can

it then be classified? In other words, can we

determine its relevance on the basis of features

of its form or content? Can a given expression

have intrinsic values, or are they always found

in relation to something else? The dominant

idea today is that making distinctions essentially

implies discrimination. In my opinion, the denial

of categories such as high and low culture is not

so much an observation as an ideological con

struction that has helped to determine the content

of culture, implicitly also aiming for a dominant

position. Hence a cultural debate must also be

a political debate. Although we live today in a

tangle of connections and minor links between
different social institutions, state institutions,

market players and the individual that is more

complex than ever before, even now – or maybe

especially now – it has to be possible to give a

new, clear articulation to what art actually is.

In my opinion the answer to that question would

have to be justified by the artwork itself, which

implies that there are a great number of possible

answers. I believe that these are consequently

meaningful and less meaningful, more simple

and more complex, popular and little-known.

We have lived through cultural relativism and

seen its – sometimes harmful – effects. It is time

to draw up the balance sheet.

When we talk about high culture, it is still almost

immediately linked to the highest social and eco

nomic class. Supporting or promoting such art

is believed to consolidate the position of that class,

which is already privileged, and that is undemo

cratic. However this reasoning is doubly wrong.

After all, we could just as easily say that it is not

high culture, but low culture that is dominant.

Just about everyone in the academic,

political an economic elite will proudly claim to

embrace popular culture. Surely some of them

mean it honestly, but for the most part their aim is

to safeguard their own social position. An asso

ciation with 'elitism' nowadays puts you on thin

ice. To put it somewhat crudely, you’re cool if

you go to Rock Werchter and an arrogant ivory

tower-dweller if you prefer the Donaueschinger

Musiktage. Two interesting opposing movements

are at work here. On the one hand, society is

becoming ever more informal, and you see this

mirrored in social relationships in the cultural

sector. On the other hand, art literally always

formalises, gives form, structures. In the old days

there were clear parallels between the formal

definition of social conventions and their artistic

counterparts, for example in terms of modesty, el

gance, sexual mores etc. Today this relationship

is uneven, vague and highly sensitive to fashion.

Popular culture may not be the official high cul

ture, but unofficially it is, at least to the extent that

it imposes itself as a frame of reference.

The second reason why the idea of elitist

high culture is wrong is as follows: the idea that

cultural expressions are of equal value has not

led to greater cultural diversity and certainly

not to a proportionately wider-ranging culture; on

the contrary. What is more, it has not led to

the end of ideals of beauty either. And weren’t the

ideals of beauty (demonstrated and promoted

by the elite) what led directly or indirectly to

social exclusion in the first place? We were told

for a while that a shared history was not only

impossible but that any attempt to write one was

despicable. A history that stands still is not only

attractive to progressive left-wing historians. It is

highly attractive to the market as well. It makes

it far easier to form a canon and to conserve

and guard that canon. It is a long time since this

had anything to do with the counter-culture out

of which pop music arose or with guardianship

of heritage in the case of classical music. What

it has everything to do with, is marketing the

canon. For the vast majority of music lovers in

Western Europe, music began some time in the

sixties with Bob Dylan and the Beatles and even

now only consists of related musical forms, which

can be crudely defined as Anglo-Saxon pop mu

sic. For art music lovers, again putting it crudely,

Western music history stopped with Claude

Debussy. Nowadays it is mainly a market-driven
dynamic that makes communities and identities emerge. And although it may just fall short of determining our history, it does define our common frame of reference. It is not a very broad frame: that individual is the highest authority and so personal experience takes priority, but the bare reality is that we are partitioned off into target groups. And for public radio as well as most other state-supported cultural organisations, the main goal is not economic but almost existential. It is not the content that is the determining factor, but the extent to which one identifies with the envisaged target group. And that is precisely where we find the question of legitimacy. People sometimes claim that something’s legitimacy can be measured by its popularity, but that is dubious for at least two reasons. Firstly, popularity is often the result of a self-fulfilling desire: if you let people in Flanders listen to Anglo-Saxon pop music almost exclusively for forty years on four out of the five public radio stations, there is a fairly good chance that pop music will become most listeners’ frame of reference and hence also the substrate from which new musical expressions will arise. Moreover, new heroes are constantly being generated within the limits of this frame of reference. Conclusion: it may be that the genuinely dominant taste preference is formed by an elite, but it has been a long time since that elite represented West European art music, let alone contemporary art music. This means, explicitly, that contemporary art music is actually much more free than people would have us believe. It is time we made that conclusion loud enough to be heard. There is absolutely no need for an individual, organisation or group concerned with contemporary art music to make excuses for the supposed elitism of their chosen form of expression. Rather one should point out the elitist nature of pop music, in the sense that the channels representing pop clearly and consciously exclude other music.

**Notes**

1. The primary divisions in the society of the West European art music have tended to be vertical, i.e. between different religious and ideological groups known as ‘pillars’, rather than the horizontal divisions of a society where class is the primary dividing factor.
2. From a conversation between the author and Lucien Goethals on 11/06/2001. He expressed these thoughts on the problem of thresholds: ‘What is the threshold? This threshold only exists in the imaginations of those who use the word. You cannot lower the threshold of new music without lowering your entire world with it [. . .] It’s not true that new music is harder to understand. The assumption that we need to make music less elitist is idiotic. There is no threshold. Who is stopping you? People make their own thresholds. Obviously you need a certain level of thinking, but are you supposed to disconnect your brain? It’s not the threshold that needs to be lowered but the people who need to be raised up. Many people want deep meaning to manifest itself in the same way that a superficiality. And that isn’t possible.”
3. [www.vrbo.be/faq/wat-de-opdracht-van-de-publieke-omroep/is](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Live_Nation_Media_Group)
4. [Tamzin Durden, “A World of Events at 33 Additional Venues.” Source: Annually, Live Nation promotes or produces over 22,000 events, including music concerts, with a total attendance exceeding 50 million – more than the NBA, NFL and NHL combined (3)](http://www.depubliekeomroep.be/faq/wat-de-opdracht-van-de-publieke-omroep/is)
5. [Anderson, David Byrne, Goodspeed You! Black Emperor, Matmos and so on – as if the contemporary art music scene didn’t produce enough material. In doing this, a state broadcaster helps to define a certain frame of reference that does not correspond to what is actually being made in Flanders or Europe. It is a conscious, ideologically determined policy decision, not a neutral reproduction of the present-day art music world. On its website, the state broadcaster describes its mission thus: “As the public broadcaster, the VRT has the task of reaching as many media users as possible with a variety of high-quality programmes that awaken and satisfy the interest of viewers and listeners.” That is just the point, though: what interest do they want to awaken and satisfy? It has been put forward that the individual is the highest authority and so personal experience takes priority, but the bare reality is that we are partitioned off into target groups. And that is precisely where we find the question of legitimacy. People sometimes claim that something’s legitimacy can be measured by its popularity, but that is dubious for at least two reasons. Firstly, popularity is often the result of a self-fulfilling desire: if you let people in Flanders listen to Anglo-Saxon pop music almost exclusively for forty years on four out of the five public radio stations, there is a fairly good chance that pop music will become most listeners’ frame of reference and hence also the substrate from which new musical expressions will arise. Moreover, new heroes are constantly being generated within the limits of this frame of reference. Conclusion: it may be that the genuinely dominant taste preference is formed by an elite, but it has been a long time since that elite represented West European art music, let alone contemporary art music. This means, explicitly, that contemporary art music is actually much more free than people would have us believe. It is time we made that conclusion loud enough to be heard. There is absolutely no need for an individual, organisation or group concerned with contemporary art music to make excuses for the supposed elitism of their chosen form of expression. Rather one should point out the elitist nature of pop music, in the sense that the channels representing pop clearly and consciously exclude other music.

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1. Dark matter

Little lion knew little. He could eat, though. Little lion ate the mermaid. “Not too much”, little lion thought. Little lion was legion.
NEW PATHS, BLIND SPOTS, AND SURPRISING ISLANDS

Pauline Jocqué

MAPPING NEW MUSIC EDUCATION IN FLANDERS

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

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

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

To be able to describe the current state of new music education in Flanders, we must first answer a few questions. Within what contexts do we find new music education? Can we speak of a systematic approach or are we dealing with fragmented projects? What educational models are being used? What is the profile of the participants? Who are the teachers? What institutions or organisations are involved? How are they (rejecting)? Are there major gaps? What kind of problems are we finding and what suggestions and recommendations are the experts making? Can we determine any long-term effects – if they are even measurable?

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

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

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

had little or no contact with new music are, very simply, not likely to show an active interest in it. So a vicious circle arises. The lack of expertise among current or future teachers results in a lack of interest in new music among pupils. As a result, the schools do not take steps to set up new projects, train teachers, or otherwise build knowledge among their teaching staff. Some schools say that they would like to break out of this cycle and are asking for ready-to-use teaching materials for new music, opportunities for teacher training, and more knowledge-sharing in general.

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

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

4 Answers from the electronic questionnaire for Part-time Art Education

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had little or no contact with new music are, very simply, not likely to show an active interest in it. So a vicious circle arises. The lack of expertise among current or future teachers results in a lack of interest in new music among pupils. As a result, the schools do not take steps to set up new projects, train teachers, or otherwise build knowledge among their teaching staff. Some schools say that they would like to break out of this cycle and are asking for ready-to-use teaching materials for new music, opportunities for teacher training, and more knowledge-sharing in general.

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

In most cases, though, this only applies to specific classes. New music is seldom integrated into the entire communal school curriculum. Others devote specific classes to new music – such as the Experimental Music Class which Paul Craenen set up in the Oud-Heverlee Municipal Academy for Music, Word and Dance (led by Jasper Van Paemel from 1 September 2012) or the Free Improvisation and New Music Atelier under the leadership of Frederik Croene at the Emiel Hullebroeck Academy for Music, Word and Dance in Gentbrugg. Every year, the Schoten Municipal Academy for Music, Word and Dance even organises its own festival called the ‘Contemporary Music Weeks’. Finally, some schools consciously choose a work from the contemporary music repertoire as the compulsory composition for their final examinations. Often, however, they will do that without placing the compositions in their context.

As we mentioned earlier, projects involving new music take place most often in schools where the teachers themselves are composers or musicians performing this music. Examples include Frederik Croene and Karin De Fleyt (Academie de Kunstbrug in Ghent), Kris and Pieter Matthynssens (SAMWD Sint-Niklaas), Frederik Neyrinck (Municipal Academy for Music and Word in Menin), Kim Vanden Bremp (SLAC/Municipal Conservatory in Leuven), Paul Craenen/Jasper Van Paemel (Municipal Academy for Music and Word in Oud-Heverlee), Johan Bossers [Communal Music School in Tongeren], Barbara Buchowiec [GAMWD Heist-op-den-Berg ], Katrijn Frant (Municipal Academy for Music, Word and Dance in Deinze), Benjamin Van Esser [Communal School for Music, Word and Dance in Zaventem], to name just a few. The finding provides further evidence that the presence of new music in Parttime Art
Education cannot be taken for granted. Rather, it is largely dependent on the personal interest and efforts of teachers and principals to make space for new music at their schools.

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

Flanders (including Brussels) is home to four music conservatories: the Artesis University College in Antwerp (including the Royal Conservatory), the Brussels Royal Conservatory, the School of Arts (including the Ghent Royal Conservatory) of Ghent University College and the Lemmens Institute in Leuven. With the exception of the Ghent Master of Arts Soloist in Contemporary Music (MaNaMa, or Master-after-Master programme), contemporary music does not have a strong foothold in the curriculums. Although the conservatories have clear policies concerning new music, they do not always follow up on them in actual practice. Just as with Part-time Art Education, the inclusion of new music in instrument lessons depends mostly on the teacher. Even in the case of music theory or history, contemporary music does not always get equal time. Some teachers seem to feel distrust, all of which sets the vicious circle in motion. Little knowledge or interest on the part of the teachers is passed on as a lack of interest among students. As a result, teachers feel less called upon to build on their expertise. It goes without saying that teachers can never be entirely familiar with new music and therefore rarely address the material, or are able to, in their lessons.

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

We cannot emphasise strongly enough the importance of expanding and sharing the knowledge of new music and of teaching new music, whether for teachers or students. In specific teacher training at conservatories, too, there is a lack of well established new music programmes. This is clearly associated with the lack of thorough knowledge of contemporary music among students who have completed their basic musical training at conservatories. After all, teacher training is designed to offer educational tools with which to impart the musical knowl-
There is a great deal of demand from the training programmes for primary and secondary teachers for uncomplicated, easy-to-use teaching materials using practical examples for use in the classroom. Specific teacher training programmes at the conservatories are also calling for more practical examples. In the autumn of 2011, for instance, the Lemmens Institute in Leuven invited MATRIX to propose a set of materials for future teachers. Artesis University College in Antwerp (training music teachers for secondary education) and the Ghent Conservatory teacher training programme recently began collaborating with MATRIX with the aim of getting future teachers. Artesis University College in Antwerp and the Ghent Conservatory teacher training programme recently began collaborating with MATRIX with the aim of getting future teachers.

When we look at art education, we are struck by the open attitude towards new music. This is also the case for organisations which operate much more broadly. During the period in question (2011 and 2012) the Ministry of Culture for the Flemish Government under its ‘Arts Act’ provided long-term subsidies for art education at twelve organisations. Eight of these organisations offer some form of music education. At least six of them (Aifoon, De Veerman, Flanders Jeunesses Musicales, MATRIX, MET-X and Musica) offer some amount of new music in their curricula. These organisations are making a steady contribution to new music education.

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

There is also clear enthusiasm for (new) music and an increasing sense of belonging – all welcome additional consequences. A cohesive group emerges, there is no bullying, they take one another’s side. They hone a whole array of social skills.

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

“Surprised, amazed and enthusiastic, and came away with a clearly positive opinion of new music and the new ideas and concepts that they discovered along the way.”

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

More and better networking days involving ensembles, art centres and schools, and official contact persons could provide an answer to this call. The lack of knowledge of new music at the communal music schools and in the field of (compulsory) daytime education is another sore point that was revealed. All too often, teachers at these institutions are not familiar with new music and their attitude to the ideas on offer vary from distrustful to antagonistic. This does not make it easy for art education to connect with daytime schools and communal schools of music, although precedents clearly show that cooperation is possible. Closer rap-
Within the field of professional new music in Flanders, there are numerous ensembles, music theatres, music festivals, art centres and concert organisers – some more highly specialised than others. Many of the organisations and institutions working in new music also offer some form of new music education: in-house workshops in concert halls, master classes for musicians, musical introduction for children, traineeships, pre- or post-concert lectures, and more. Often, they collaborate with art education organisations, conservatories, or university colleges. In the spring of 2012, for example, the Royal Flemish Philharmonic [deFilharmonie] collaborated with arts education organisation De Veerman to create the project Blood on the Floor based on a work of the same name by contemporary British composer Mark Anthony Turnage. The week-long project involved autistic children and their teachers at a Rudolf Steiner School. Some organisations are asking explicitly for broader cooperation in the form of more professional advice or structure from the field of art education to start new projects or explore existing work in greater depth. At times, however, the sector also experiences a degree of reluctance as its searches for new partners or participants for educational projects, especially among schools, private parties, communal music schools and conservatories.

It is worth noting that these organisations more often focus on young professionals or pre-professionals than on the potential concert audience. For example, the LOD production house for opera and music theatre in Ghent offered composer Daan Janssens a professional setting for his first steps in music theatre. The Blindman saxophone quartet is offering young pre-professionals artistic and business coaching. Spectra and Ictus – both contemporary music ensembles – are closely involved in the Master-after-Master (MaNaMa) degree in contemporary music at the Ghent Conservatory. At the same time, Muziektheater Transparant is playing host to the Institute for Living Voice, which works with young vocalists. This focus on young professionals (and pre-professionals) is an important area of new music education, and much effort is clearly being put into it. As to educational activities concerning the perception of new music by concert audiences, there is still room for growth. Cooperation and knowledge-sharing with arts education organisations seems to be the best possible route.

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

The broadening of the notion of ‘musical theatre’ can be taken here as an important indication of the liberating factor it encompassed. The possibilities it created for composers to get involved in music theatre without having to resort to 19th century conventions are reflected in the dynamic and creative music theatre scene that took shape from the mid-1980s onwards. The dominance of the 19th century operatic model (and the few alternatives, notably operetta and musical) gave way to novel tendencies and experiments. For example, though never performed in Belgium yet: the elaborate open form of Henri Pousseur’sVotre Faust (1968). Just as new music required alternative models for pitch organisation or musical structure, so the presence of new music on the (operatic) stage often required fundamentally different approaches to form and dramatic structure, radically rethinking the relations between text, music and staging. Obviously, this does not imply that opera in its more traditional guise as such has disappeared. Many composers, including those in Flanders, have continued to work quite happily (and successfully) within operatic conventions. Adhering to such traditional features as singers representing particular characters, presenting a story involving dramatic action and psychological development of those characters or subdividing the work into clearly demarcated scenes and acts, does not necessarily imply that the musical language would resort to – say – a late-romantic aesthetic. Still, the distinction between working within and outside the boundaries and structural conventions of opera is a fundamental choice and it should be expected that innovative musical ideas by nature benefit more from an alternative take on at least some of the operatic conventions.

The evolution in the course of music history away from conventional opera, towards different, innovative and often hybrid forms of what we are calling here ‘musical theatre’ may be an international tendency, but one with a particularly strong impact on Flemish stages. The first problem in describing this body of innovative music theatre is in most West European countries, Flemish music theatre underwent a far-reaching evolution in the second half of the 20th century. The broadening of the notion of ‘musical theatre’ can be taken here as an important indication of the liberating factor it encompassed. The possibilities it created for composers to get involved in music theatre without having to resort to 19th century conventions are reflected in the dynamic and creative music theatre scene that took shape from the mid-1980s onwards. The dominance of the 19th century operatic model (and the few alternatives, notably operetta and musical) gave way to novel tendencies and experiments. For example, though never performed in Belgium yet: the elaborate open form of Henri Pousseur’sVotre Faust (1968). Just as new music required alternative models for pitch organisation or musical structure, so the presence of new music on the (operatic) stage often required fundamentally different approaches to form and dramatic structure, radically rethinking the relations between text, music and staging. Obviously, this does not imply that opera in its more traditional guise as such has disappeared. Many composers, including those in Flanders, have continued to work quite happily (and successfully) within operatic conventions. Adhering to such traditional features as singers representing particular characters, presenting a story involving dramatic action and psychological development of those characters or subdividing the work into clearly demarcated scenes and acts, does not necessarily imply that the musical language would resort to – say – a late-romantic aesthetic. Still, the distinction between working within and outside the boundaries and structural conventions of opera is a fundamental choice and it should be expected that innovative musical ideas by nature benefit more from an alternative take on at least some of the operatic conventions.

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

As if such confusion was not bad enough, the rather inconsistent use of terminology as practised by critics, directors and composers alike, makes it no less complicated. The primary reason why a work as ‘unoperatic’ as *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) is usually labelled as an opera is that its creators, director Robert Wilson and composer Philip Glass, chose to call it one. For the sake of convenience, the term ‘music theatre,’ as used here, will be taken as the generic term for a broad range of staged works involving a combination of music and other media. In that respect, music theatre may share many characteristics (and sometimes truly overlap) with other common categories. First of all: opera, for innovative aspects may sometimes be functioning within the traditional genre, broadening its conventions, rather than creating something entirely different. In many cases, it is mainly a matter of perception whether to consider a work as opera or music theatre. Secondly, the fashionable label of ‘multi-media’ may often seem applicable (after all: any combination of music, text, visual elements, and scenic action is by nature a fusion of elements from separate media) and especially so in works where visual media, including video, film, computer graphics, etc. have a prominent function. Finally, in those works where spoken text remains prominent, the difference with theatre might be blurry. The distinction between a play with extensive incidental music on the one hand and a music theatre piece involving actors and spoken dialogue on the other hand also depends on perception. Given the increasing presence of visual and musical elements in so much ‘proper’ theatre nowadays, the hybrid position of music theatre should by no means only be seen against the conventions of opera, but equally against developments in theatre as such. One obvious observation is that the genre of music theatre as described here does not constitute a clear-cut independent genre, but is part of a continuum – ranging from opera to theatre – joining elements from both traditions (and other traditions as well: including the visual arts, film and of course literature) in order to find new and exciting means of expression. The one common factor in music theatre would be that music plays an important and often even the most fundamental part in conceiving the production in question: the catalyst, so to speak, that triggers the input from other disciplines and organises them into a coherent work.

How many elements (and artists involved) can thus be combined, and how these combinations relate to the familiar categories of opera and theatre, may already be apparent from the example of what have arguably been two of the most successful Flemish music theatre productions. Let us compare, by way of an example, the two large-scale music theatre pieces by composer Kris Defoort. His *The Woman who Walked into Doors* (2001) is based on the novel of the same title by Roddy Doyle and is set as a monologue for the female lead character, who was represented on stage both by an actress (a speaking part) and a soprano. While, musically, it is a monologue (alternating between speech and singing), the dialogue with the other characters of the story are included in a ‘virtual’ form with the responses of the other characters present on stage in the form of computer projections of texts and images on a central screen. The staging by director Guy Cassiers and the computer-processed video images and
text projections (by Peter Missotten en Kurt D’Haeseleer) are at odds with operatic tradition, moving the drama from on-stage confrontation between characters to a double monologue, placed against the towering backdrop of the large screen, with which the singer and actress interact. A practice that is decidedly different from operatic conventions, but much in line with previous theatre productions by Cassiers. Add to that the musical ambivalence. Defoort, although classically trained, had established himself as a jazz pianist, composer and arranger, with *The Woman who Walked into Doors* as his first substantial ‘classical’ venture. The orchestra pit was occupied by two ensembles: a classical chamber orchestra and Defoort’s own ensemble Dreamtime, thus successfully blending jazz and contemporary classical idioms.

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

Probably the most conventional of these companies, in the sense that they mainly focused on chamber opera to begin with, is the Antwerp-based Muziektheater Transparant (formerly ‘Kameropera Transparant’). The mission of Transparant has long been to present opera on a smaller scale, with special (but not exclusive) attention to contemporary repertoire, including but not limited to Flemish composers (much of Transparant’s fame in the 1990s was based on their productions of nearly all Peter Maxwell Davies’ music theatre works). In recent years, Transparant has ventured more often towards the more eclectic forms of music theatre. Interesting in this respect is that Transparant has developed a long-term working relationship with selected Flemish composers. This approach allows composers to try out different things and to gradually develop their instincts for music theatre through a succession of compositions and productions. Wim Henderickx, Jan Van Outryve and Eric Sleijchim are excellent examples of composers who have had the opportunity to build up a considerable music theatre output during their ‘residency’ at Transparant. With Joachim Brackx and Annelies Van Parys, a younger generation of composers has recently been integrated into this formula.

LOD (formerly ‘Het Muziek LOD’) started out with less clearly ‘operatic’ ambitions – their name stands for Lunch Op Donderdag (‘lunch on Thursday’): the series of lunch concerts that were the original reason for founding the company. Soon, however, they started to develop music theatre productions. Again, as with Transparant, intimate working relationships with artists, including resident composers, are crucial for LOD. Their breakthrough came with the productions that composer Dick Van der Harst made with playwright and director Eric De Volder, such as Diep in het Bos and Zwarte Vogels in de Bomen. Along with Van der Harst, composers Jan Kuijken, Dominique Pauwels and Kris Defoort became the resident composers at LOD, recently joined by the younger composers Daan Janssens and Thomas Smeytens. It is interesting that with LOD, these composers not only have the opportunity to work on music theatre productions, but can also develop more concert-oriented pieces. Strikingly, these composers’ background lies outside classical music. Van der Harst – himself a bandoneon player – is interested in all kinds of world music, as his cross-cultural Huis van de Verborgen Muziekjes testifies. Kris Defoort was, in spite of his master’s degree in classical composition, best known as a jazz
pianist, composer and band leader. Defoort is a particularly interesting example because his work at LOD covers a wide range from jazz-related projects, through classical concert works, to his opera The Woman who Walked into Doors. The commitment to undertake such an ambitious opera project, with a composer who at the time his residency started did not have a reputation as a classical composer, is a venture few opera houses would be likely to undertake. It shows the kind of dynamic and slightly adventurous approach to music theatre LOD, like other ‘smaller’ players, introduced to the Flemish music theatre scene. Such innovative impulses benefit the entire music theatre scene.

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

Although they started by operating in a field that was not covered by the opera houses, their success has in turn vitalised the activities of the opera houses. Indeed, the experience that many Flemish composers were invited to gain with these smaller companies, has allowed them to work towards increasingly ambitious works, that otherwise might never have been realised. The point could be made that these smaller companies made the music theatre-genre accessible to a lot of Flemish composers. The room for experiment and for developing their own music-theatre ‘style’ these composers were offered, also brought them to the attention of the opera houses and in some cases also to international partners. Indeed, from the late 1990s onwards, the opera houses were keen to incorporate some of these efforts into their own programmes. For instance, when LOD created Kris Defoort’s The Woman who Walked into Doors, La Monnaie was one of the co-producers. Similarly, Transparant found eager co-producers for Wim Henderickx’ operas The Triumph of Spirit over Matter (La Monnaie) and Achilles (Flemish Opera).

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Since the mid 80s, the traditionalist approach has remained especially strong in large operas. This tradition was, for all its expressionist traits, still highly recognisable in André Laporte’s Das Schloss (1985). Piet Swerts explored a more neo-romantic style, full of allusions to 19th century operas, in his Les Liaisons Dangereuses (1995, commissioned by the Flemish Opera), based on the novel by Choderlos de Laclos. Luc Brewaeys made his music theatre debut with Antigone, an excellent example of the unoperatic ‘music theatre’ currently practised in Flanders. But for his first ‘genuine’ opera L’uomo dal fiore in bocca (2006 – like Das Schloss commissioned by La Monnaie) Brewaeys resorted to a straightforward realist narrative, based on a play by Luigi Pirandello. The only musical deviation from operatic conventions that appears in L’uomo dal fiore in bocca is the substantial role for the solo tuba, which has quite a virtuoso solo part throughout – an instrumental counterpart to the protagonist’s emotions. In Luc Van Hove’s La Strada (2007, commissioned by the Flemish Opera), the composer takes the movie by Federico Fellini as source and consequently draws a realist, linear narrative from it. A substantial orchestral part contributes ongoing, intricate motive development that provides the basis for the lyrical vocal style. Although these four ‘major’ operas stick to traditional concepts of the genre, albeit with original accents such as Brewaeys’ odd fusion of a chamber opera with a tuba concerto or Van Hove’s faithfulness to the elliptic chronology of the movie-based narrative, their musical styles refer to different contexts, ranging from the romantic tradition to spectralism.

At the other end of the spectrum, the repertoire shows a growing tendency towards alternative forms of music theatre. A very strong tendency in Flanders consists of what may best be described as an eclectic ‘music theatre’ tradition. This tendency partly relates to international evolutions towards small-scale music theatre and alternatives to operatic conventions, but part of it seems to deliberately stretch the musical approaches as broadly as possible. Several companies that receive structural funding from the Flemish government as ‘music theatre’ companies, such as Compagnie Kaet, Theater De Spiegel and particularly Braakland/ZheBuilding are in fact already more concerned with forms of music theatre that go beyond the domain of classical or ‘art’ music, with composers/performers, such as Rudy Trouvé (the former guitar player with the rock band deUS) and Gerrit Valckenaers. Whereas a large proportion of the tendencies described above stem from a classical perspective reflected in musical styles as well as in the primacy of music, Braakland’s productions typically draw their input from a more text-based theatrical background, with music very strongly underscoring the text, rather than providing the point of departure. Peter Vermeersch may serve as an excellent example of a composer who has combined
a great sense of musical heterogeneity with alternative approaches to music theatre. As a founding member of the Maximalist! Ensemble, Vermeersch’s earliest works were influenced by minimal music, but his musical tastes would subsequently take him in many other directions as well. The styles of the ensembles he founded bear ample testimony to this diversity: funk with X-legended Sally, rock with A Group and currently jazz with his big band Flat Earth Society. Vermeersch fuses all these (and other) influences into a recognisably contemporary style that mediates between the compositional and formal subtleties of new music and the more accessible, rhythmic and tuneful drive of the vernacular musical traditions. In De oplosbare vis (1994) and in Chams (2001), Vermeersch turns autobibstic lyrics by Josse De Pauw and the Russian poet Danill Charns respectively into cabaretlike songs that contain some surprising twists, inventive orchestration and grotesque details. These productions systematically alternate between acting and singing. His most ambitious music theatre piece shows a similar alternation between theatrical and musical components. In Heliogabal (2003) the subject – the decadent life of the Roman emperor – is nevertheless more ambitious and the dimensions are much larger, with a large cast and with the Flat Earth Society as orchestra. Many composers subscribe to the tendency to develop new ways of combining music and theatre, as exemplified by Vermeersch. His former Maximalist-colleague Walter Hus, for instance, turned three adaptations of Shakespeare dramas by the iconoclastic theatre maker Jan Decorte into a music theatre trilogy: Meneer, de zot en ikant (2000), Bloetwollerduivel (2001), and Tius Andonderanikustijnklote (2002). The pseudo-naive, almost childlike language Decorte employed is mirrored by low-profile staging as well as a sense of musical simplicity engendered by developing concise motifs and refraining from overly dramatic gestures. Symptomatic of this approach is the final opera of the trilogy, Tius Andonderanikustijnklote which is entirely performed by the – mainly untrained – voices of the musicians who are simultaneously playing their instruments. The bare essence of music theatre, created with very limited resources, reflects the intentional simplicity of music and text here, in search of a sense of music-theatrical purity. Likewise, the collaboration of composer Dick Van der Harst with librettist and director Eric De Volder generated a poignant combination of (again stylistically eclectic) music and theatre in Depp in het bas (1999), Vadria (2000) and Zwarte Vogels in de bomen (2002). The archetypal of small-scale and non-traditional music theatre has more or less become a dominant tendency. It attracts composers who tend to incorporate non-classical elements into their style, such as Frank Nuys, Chris Carlier, Koen Van Roey, Geert Wegaeman and Jan Kuikjes. But composers who are more inclined towards their classically-trained musical background also contribute enthusiastically to this type of music theatre. These include Petra Vermote, Peter Swinnen, Eric Slechim, and Wim Henderickx.

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

However, the two perceived directions are not mutually exclusive. Recent years have shown composers working with both types of productions: either more traditionally ‘operatic’, or more experimentally ‘theatrical’ ones, according to the scope and needs of the work in question. The increasing number of collaborations and co-productions between ‘independent’ music theatre companies and opera houses is further evidence of how the entire field of Flemish music theatre is benefiting from these dynamic evolutions. One recent example of how these tendencies can actually interact or merge in different and surprising ways may serve as an appropriate conclusion to this overview.

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

The appearance of such abrupt musical deviations from the preceding drive of the work may herald the prominence of such metaphysical and even meditative elements in Henderickx’ later music theatre pieces. The early part of Henderickx’ career was dominated by his interest in Eastern music and spirituality. In Void/Sunyata (2007), a work that is part of his Tantric Cycle, Henderickx attempts to combine this Far-Eastern inspiration with the language of music theatre. The meditative and introspective nature of the work becomes quite strong. Void/Sunyata is an utterly abstract work, devoid of all narrative, with voices and instruments entwining in a purely musical dialogue organised around emblematic Buddhist and tantric spiritual notions. Nonetheless, the physical dimension of the work remains essential, as the distribution of musicians over the stage (involving a stage design and video projections by the visual artist Hans Op de Beeck) and the ‘sound of the face’ of the electrics testifies. At the time of the first performance of this work, Henderickx stressed how the concept of this work as music theatre remained essential to him, in spite of its far-reaching abstraction. In doing so, he seems to have abandoned the operatic model in favour of an almost experimental reconfiguration of the relationship between music and theatre: interestingly enough, in explicitly addressing an abstract metaphysical or spiritual theme. An equally abstract treatment was given to Medea (2011), where Euripides’ play was reduced to a series of monologues (written by author Peter Verhees) for the protagonists, performed by actors. Medea’s alter ego on stage is performed by soprano Selva Erdener, whose climactic lamento permeates the entire work. Actors and musicians are positioned in a single long, straight line, directly facing the audience. This setting is based on the tradition of Turkish musicians. The balance between East and West – arguably the most prominent theme in Henderickx’ entire career – is further reflected in the inclusion of non-western instruments (notably the Armenian duduk) as well as in the ritualistic, deeply static staging.
Little lion was legion. Little lion knew it was about time for the grand gesture. But he decided not to act. “How much do you want for this sound?” asked little lion. In the end he wasn’t very hungry.

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

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

Michel Fourgon

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

Charles Chaplin, The Dictator, 1940

In the 20th century, as a vast majority, have shown great interest in the notion of ‘modernity’. In doing so, they embedded themselves in their time, the time of assertion of ‘contemporariness’.

“One must be absolutely modern.”

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

“(…) modernity is this era where ‘to be modern’ becomes at value, even, should we say, ‘the’ fundamental value from which emerge all others.”

From a musical point of view, Rimbaud’s posture, although very noble, transmuted and became the idea of absolute novelty, rejection of academism, and search for the unbelievable. Some even associated it with a certain form of progress—a rather adventurous attitude—, it appears, because accepting the concept of progress in art also means adopting a position which assimilates and reduces the creative activity to its sole technological components. Moreover, some authors have recently used the expression of ‘advanced music’, a clear reflection of outrageous arrogance, because anyone mentioning ‘advanced music’ inevitably places others in the category of ‘retarded music’. However, the qualitative criteria associated to so-called progress in history (and, actually, is history automatically right?) shows the first limitation, because it leads straight and logically to the expression of hardly acceptable nonsense. Is Haydn superior to Guillaume de Machaut? Chrétiens de Troyes less than Baudelaire? Velasquez not as worthy as Kandinsky?

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

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

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

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

So, some composers, in growing numbers, with an attitude that could be described as ‘postmodern’, see their relation to the past in a less negative way. This phenomenon is also observed in other artistic disciplines, as well as in the area of philosophy. However, it is hazardous to formulate an accurate definition of postmodernity. It is a vague notion, difficult to identify and perceived as largely polysemous. Inevitably, anyone who attempts to describe it will first have to navigate in troubled waters. However, such an endeavor may provide a few analysis tools to further understand the musical world around us. Therefore, the object of this article is an attempt to reach a better understanding of the meaning(s) of ‘postmodernism’. To be on the safe side, I will try to restrict my point, as much as possible, to the sole area of music.
“Indeed, pretending we are at a level beyond modernity, and assigning to this fact a somewhat decisive meaning, presupposes acceptance of what more specifically characterizes the very point of view of modernity: the idea of history and its corollaries: the notions of progress and surpassing. (...) However, things turn out differently if one acknowledges, as is appropriate, that postmodernism is not only characterized as innovation compared to modernism, but, more radically, as a dissolution of the “innovation” category, as an experience of “end of history”, instead of a presentation of a new, more progressive or more regressive, level of this very same history.”

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

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

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

This reveals one of the first aspects of postmodernism: this is not a movement or even an artistic genre claimed as such; it is a series of isolated, disseminated behaviors, spontaneously forming a whole which, however, circumscribes several common areas. We will attempt to identify them later; however, I wish to clear up a misunderstanding that currently occupies the minds of many. It appears, indeed, that for many musicians or musicologists, postmodernism is associated with the idea of a return to tonality, to the forms of the past, to simple, rhythmic formulas or even to hypothetical ‘ancient and universal’ laws of composition. Altogether, it would appear to be a truly retrograde, comfortable approach, unable to overcome the past, and sterile of any innovation. Obviously, this approach could be recognized in trends such as ‘socialist realism’ or the more current ‘new consonances’ (of all sorts), or even in the various so-called ‘new age’ expressions. However, it would be appropriate, in this regard, to distinguish between, on one hand, a reactionary vision, that could be defined as ‘neo-classic’ and, on the other hand, the postmodern position per se, that is much more subtle and indifferent to the notion of a return to the past. Indeed, postmodernism re-integrates certain components such as melody, periodicity, and consonance, considered as usable material among others; however, such integration is completed without the necessary rejection of the components of modernity. Starting in the 1920s, Igor Strawinsky is one of the first composers to enter this path. Actually, he is promptly accused of ‘neo-classicism’, and this unfair label has remained with him until today. What he actually seeks, following his so-called ‘Russian’ period, is to play with, and from history, in order to re-create a new, original, even unexpected universe, and this attitude does not erase, in any way, his famous ‘touch’. As proof, his style remains recognizable as of the first measures. This approach, actually shared, in part, with Béla Bartók, is not therefore a remake of the old or a copy of history, but consists of relying on a number of acquisitions to make innovation emerge. In Strawinsky’s case, and in view of his voluminous production, we could even state that he tried to base his compositions on almost all acquisitions. On the contrary, the neoclassical genre attempts (for commercial purposes?) to slavishly renew with the past or, preferably, re-create what already happened. Consequently, this is a true renunciation to explain the world, a flight to the past combined with categorical denial of modernism. However, postmodernism shows a certain form of admiration for modernity. As a matter of fact, it is significant that most early postmodernists were also former important actors of the avant-garde groups. Hence, we see, on one hand, a vivid revisitation of the (near or far) past and, on the other hand, a play on modernity itself, which does not appear to be rejected. This playfulness, a sort of conscious jubilation, also appears to be part of the distinctive aspects of postmodernism: one plays with history as with conventions, codes, languages, and these games could even be painted (as with Mauricio Kagel, for example) with a certain form of humor…

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since then, ‘premonitions’ and ‘small easements’ gave birth to extensive progeny that will make flores! In addition, the fact that some serial composers, following Pousseur, assigned these ‘easements’ and the increasingly important place resulted in some trouble or even confusion. In this regard, the work of Luciano Berio is particularly interesting. After a phase of total serialism, he takes the postmodernist orientation (although without fully relinquishing some ‘serial spirit’), including with Sinfonia (the piece often quoted in this regard), but also with Folk Songs, Laborintus II, Sequenza III (for voice), A-Ronne, Caro, Voc, etc., all (magnificent) pieces written for the voice. Later (and following the death of Cathy Berberian?), Berio seems to have returned, with some significant exceptions, to a style closer to modernism, so that we have a work that shifts unabated between, on one hand a search aimed at exploring new spaces and, on the other hand, a distancing from these spaces. But after all, is this situation such a paradox? In the term ‘postmodern’ is the word ‘modern’ that almost naturally acts as a trace… By the way, Stockhausen’s journey appears even more inextricable (Hymnen, Mantra, Licht, etc.) and I have no intention of attempting to unravel it here.

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

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

Since the middle of the 80s, contemporary music took diverse and varied orientations. We should only applaud this, because this mutation resulted in the conquest of new audiences. The younger composers, having started their work after the 60s and 70s, have taken up the torch of modernity and molded it according to their sensitivity. Others remained in the grooves created...
by their predecessors in Darmstadt, but made them wider (for example, the ‘new complexity’).

Since the creation, 30 years ago already, of the spectral school – a definitely ‘modern’ school because of its attitude, promoted as innovative, and offering an alternative to serial combinatory, itself an alternative to federating a nucleus of new composition tools –, it must be noted that modernism failed to federate around a tangible renewal project and offer, by doing so, the unspookable, ‘unbelievable’ which it claims to offer. So, we are somewhat disappointed. On the other hand, it is indisputable that the great majority of the audience did not respond positively to its invitations. Should we call this a failure? It is certainly too early to say. Since Mahler and Debussy, the tremendous speed of musical evolution evidently left the public speechless or, to say the least, confused. As a matter of fact, the same happened in other artistic disciplines. As a result, in the last 30 years, isolated approaches mushroomed with more or less success. However, the amplification and dissemination of expressions finally drains the very meaning of the label ‘contemporary music’. Obviously, this fact is not foreign to the entropic movement, resulting from the growing and continuous multiplicity of postmodern expressions that emerge. But it doesn’t matter. Today, we are fortunate enough to live in a musical landscape where singularity, alteration and even strangeness are, to some extent accepted. The time of ideological sarcasm seems gone. Today, a composer is allowed to exist without being serial, spectral, or minimalist. He can even be a little of all these things at the same time, if he wants. Despite some rearguard action, the ideal of the new, that, most of the time, does not originate from composers themselves, but rather from commentators, appears to be somewhat out of fashion and the contemporary music ‘clergy’ (who never fail to try to discredit what surrounds them) eventually will admit that they did not win this war. We can only rejoice from this! No more norms, almost, no more ‘guardians of the temple’. Free at last… But, let’s us beware. No hasty euphoria. Today, we must fight the tendency to generally format our hyper consumer society that insidiously eliminates, wherever it goes, anything that jeopardizes its mercantile goals…

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

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Notes
1 With regards to musical composition, the word technology refers to all technical means (including those pertaining to interpretation and diffusion) made available to the composer at a given time.
2 On this subject, André Souris wrote, as early as 1951, ‘to speak of growing complexity, is applying to art progress the term for practical reasons, I do not like this expression. It has been overly connoted by history. I would prefer to substitute the term of ‘living music’. ‘
3 Among other composers, I think of György Kurtág, Luigi Nono or Franco Donatoni.
5 This expression globally refers to troubadours and trouveres.
6 Although we find the first traces of this in Johannes Ockeghem, in the 15th century, this topic was not subsequently investigated.
7 Even though most musicians still use this term for practical reasons, I do not like this expression. It has been overly connoted by history. I would prefer to substitute the term of ‘living music’.

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

ON TRADITIONS, NORMS AND POLICIES

Maarten Quanten & Klaus Coulombier

2012 and the World Music Days are being held in Belgium at the initiative of the relatively young Flemish branch of the ISCM. Thus the participating concert organisations and ensembles are mainly geographically located in Flanders as well. We can add that the venues have been prepared to invest seriously in organising this festival. For some it is easier to combine it with their regular programming than for others. At the TRANSIT Festival for example, the lion’s share of the works programmed are premières anyway, the Logos Foundation concentrates almost exclusively on new music and even the
Concertgebouw Brugge includes a cautious but fairly regular dose of newer works in a programming that is mainly focused on repertoire. For other venues the situation is a little, or completely, different. That some of them are contributing to the World Music Days all the same does show a fundamental interest in contemporary art music perhaps, and even a readiness to invest in the newest of the new. However this is in no way an expression of a general tendency for Flemish (and by extension, Belgian) venues or other media, where the old or tonal/metric idiom is usually predominant in the form of classical repertoire or popular musical genres.

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

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

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

Every piece of art music is a multiplicity of connections, internal and external relationships that gain meaning in the communication between maker, performer and listener, constructions that are formally related to every other musical expression. They are a consequence of an abundance of ideas on the part of the composer, who expresses himself in relation to his or her musical and extra-musical ‘circumstances’. The maker produces these relationships consciously, less consciously and/or unconsciously. There is no absolute method of coding or decoding them, and probably a large proportion of the content is lost in the communication process. The receiver’s mind, after all, is not the same as the sender’s. The phenomenon of music (a sound structure) has the potential to ‘move’ the receiver, to have a physical effect on his or her body, to evoke feelings of connection and religiousness and even contribute to a trance or meditation. When music has this kind of impact, we can speak of a form of power production. Authors such as Jacques Attali even take this a step further. In Noise: The Political Economy of Music he claims that the power of music can serve or oppose those who hold power – incidentally Plato had described such characteristics of sound structures long before in The Republic. That mechanism of ‘serving’ became menacingly apparent in the twentieth century under the German Nazi regime: glorification of the Volkslied, appropriation of the great German musical tradition, the ban on expression ‘foreign to the system’ (Entartete Musik, jazz, the Second Viennese School). And then there was Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno who took upon himself to defend that school. The ‘neo-Marxist’ considered complexity and innovation to be no less than an antidote to the culture industry and its conformity disguised as innovation, to the artistic manifestation of liberal capitalism that – just like authoritarian regimes – created dependency and hence was no longer directed towards the subject seeking autonomy.

Throughout Western history, various powers have determined which forms of artistic expression were allowed to flourish and which kept small or out of the way. In extreme cases, ‘music foreign to the system’ has even been associated with the ‘enemy’, whether that was the Jewish people, the bourgeoisie or intellectuals in general, demonising the music along with its associated context. It did not matter whether that ‘otherness’ had arisen from the inside (think of modernist or experimental music) or came in from outside (e.g. Yiddish music, jazz). As already said, these are extreme cases of the repressive exercise of power by state apparatus fighting a wide-ranging political and often also military battle against anything that deviated from a norm they measured by their own standards. Art that did not conform to the aesthetics of the regime could become a symbol of foreignness and enmity. This certainly did not only mean texts and pictures that directly referred to a (political) reality; an ‘abstract’ succession of sounds, free from linguistic semantics, could perfectly fit the bill simply by not meeting the theoretical musical demands considered by the regime (whether secular or religious) to be ‘good’ or even ‘true’. Furthermore, many of those in power believed that showing or playing ‘foreign’ art could lead to heterodox or even dissident thoughts. Maybe music has that power, and is it not capable of encouraging people to think? In any case, history has shown that making and dealing with music has often had a clearly ideological nature.

But how exactly the link should be made between music and the wider social context is anything but a matter of consensus. Where Adorno, the Second Viennese School and even the post-war serialists and many after them viewed complexity and innovation as an aesthetic and ethical necessity, other thinkers and makers such as Cornelius Cardew (who himself had once been a prominent member of the avant-garde) denounced them as the playground of the bourgeoisie, soothed by music, detracting them from the hard social reality in which they behaved as oppressors. And according to Pierre Bourdieu, in making certain aesthetic choices a listener mainly expresses his or her socio-economic context. Cultural capital (which could be familiarity with and appreciation of modernist music) is then – crudely speaking – a way for the ‘intelligentsia’ to distinguish itself from the ‘materialist, philistine economic elite’ and the ‘poorly educated working class’ (Osborne, 2008). There is probably no algorithm to state what exactly the political meaning of a construction of sounds and silences is. Furthermore, there is little hope of a ‘truth’, let alone one that is absolute, static or independent of context. Nevertheless, the discussion above has taken place and is still going on; human beings are trying to understand their art, even more now that it can no longer be made for the glory of God and the emperor.
Perhaps there is a certain link between today’s populist nationalist who pleads for the abolition of government subsidies for experimental art forms and similar thinking on the part of earlier, extreme nationalist regimes. After all, both base their ideological discourse on the premise of a stable culture and a clearly delineated people to be defended, expelling anything foreign to it and consequently avoiding alterity. Maybe such ideas are even related to the centuries-old church pamphlets denouncing polyphony as heresy? If such links do exist, they are difficult to consolidate. So we do not intend to explore theories of this kind. However it is easy to prove that political ideologies – in the widest sense of the word – still have a significant impact today on ideas of how the arts in general, and music/the music scene in particular, should be shaped. It could well be that such mechanisms are more difficult to fathom and often seem more subtle in one’s own time. For example, liberal economic principles have had an impact that is difficult to overestimate on music produced in the last few decades. Pop culture has replaced folk music culture to a great extent. Aesthetics and music theory have moreover allied themselves with procedures such as market research and market observation (“giving audiences what they want even if they don’t know it yet!”): a beloved and lucrative activity for the creative industries, which (even if they don’t know it yet): a beloved and lucrative activity for the creative industries, which could ultimately lead to the difficulty of a simple ‘self-regulating’ economic mechanism that allocates ‘value’ and ‘significance’ to works being replaced by a far less absolute principle. After all, when does art become valuable? As cultural sociologist Rudi Laermans notes in a publication on Flemish cultural policy, Het cultureel Regiem (2002), government subsidies do not only bring in money but also bestow official, symbolic recognition on the artistic player in question: it gives them symbolic capital (Laermans, 2002, p. 49).

In Flanders, committees of specialists advise the Minister of Culture on her task of subsidising the arts world. Although the Minister personally still has the final right to decide, the government has decided to put its own ideological position into perspective by partly decentralising the power of decision. Both in determining the framing regulations and in effectively implementing them (evaluation of the sector), the Minister allows herself to be supported by advisory councils of knowledgeable persons, who thus effectively shape the musical landscape at macro level. Their considered judgement, after all, determines which artistic players will be helped to develop by the State, as the shaping power whose democratic convictions, in this case, can counteract knee-jerk reactions from the market, and thus shape the arts world and society. In practice this means that composers, musicians, theatre makers and programmers are subjected to peer review, since they also make up the committees, sometimes alongside an (independent) musicologist or journalist. (It is understood that they must leave the table when their own funding applications are up for discussion.) The government does not expect – it has said as much in various publications – that these specialists will achieve complete objectivity in their evaluation, which would be impossible anyway. However they are expected to increase their objectivity by (only) taking into account the criteria mentioned in the ministerial Arts Decree, for example. Furthermore, the government hopes that precisely the combination of several ‘subjectivities’ will lead to a more objective, ‘inter-subjective’ and hence high-quality assessment. In artistic terms, the need for diversity is pointed out, both in terms of aesthetic tendencies and the balance between established projects and young initiatives. In other words, the macro-organisers of the landscape, policy makers, do not intend to create dominant trends but a fertile soil for multiplicity – a fundamental equality of value between different artistic tendencies that wish to develop relatively independently of the market. Of course ‘quality’ in art remains an elusive term. It is easy enough to determine whether a string quartet has generally good intonation and a steady tempo, but other aspects of ‘good performance’ are far less absolute. And what about the quality of a concert programme? Is it originality that counts or (conceptually) solid combinations? What outweighs what? And should early music be ‘historically informed’ to count as ‘good quality’? Or maybe nowadays it has become ‘original’ (and as such ‘good quality’) to stop doing that? The various committee members are bound to have different opinions. In any case, the Arts Decree and accompanying guidelines and manuals do not always provide guidance. These issues make clear why it is that as well as formalising their procedures, both the Minister and the committee need to communicate on the artistic policy they apply and how they consequently deal with specific cases, since in a democratic system, cases create precedents. At any rate, authoritarian decisions must be avoided as much as possible in such a context. A suitable way to ensure this seems to be as much openness as possible on artistic norms and ideological positions. The required communication can be done by publishing vision texts and essays by assessors, individually and in a group. Certainly, the aim to create plurality, as we see in Flanders, is an interesting and democratically defensible starting point. When we look at the work done in practice by the committees to shape the cultural field, we see however – as already said – that this does result in a scene dominated by repertoire, ‘classical music’ at least seventy years old. These distributors of monetary and symbolic capital seem to have concluded that the art music world does not need much contemporary expression to achieve plurality (particularly in terms of presentation venues). This observation demands a closer look – after all, the evaluation committee can only evaluate and make choices, not bring new initiatives to life. Over the past years, however, several new music venues have disappeared from the landscape. Consider November Music (Gheni), De Nieuwe Reeks (Leuven), M..
CONFIRMING A TRADITION IS AN ACT OF CULTURAL POLITICS, JUST LIKE BREAKING WITH TRADITION
if policy wishes to take a conservative position in shaping the art music landscape then – after self-observation over the last few years – it should anchor this position in its decreases. If that is not the case, perhaps the committee’s analysis of the landscape does need further clarification. Openness, after all, is a necessary condition for questioning and discussion.

What we ultimately hear at our concert venues is of course to a great extent the responsibility of concert programmers. They have artistic freedom of movement, but within our socio-economic reality they are still dependent on subsidies. In that sense, they need to direct themselves towards the context created by the government and supervised by the group of their peers. Their artistic impact on society is relatively significant – often more significant than that of a composer or ensemble. These actors are in fact occupied with the production of norms: they are involved in affirming professionals, getting the audience to attend certain musical expressions, they are capable of supporting new projects by artists they trust. They receive and distribute symbolic capital and, yes, this implies a certain exercise of power. Just as was the case for governments, programmers need to underpin the power they exercise. They receive and distribute symbolic capital and, yes, this implies a certain exercise of power.

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

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

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

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

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

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

But at least new music is allowed now! It has been able to create a bubble for itself – not as the normal form of expression, but most of the time it is tolerated. Resistance and action, concepts from the 1960s and 70s, no longer seem necessary since the old taboos have been removed from the corridors of the conservatory. However the context constantly reproduces the norm, the power of habit. If we compare art music education to other (performing) arts degrees, ‘habit’ undeniably becomes ‘conservative’. But all the same, conservatories have not introduced any fundamental changes to curricula. The basic skills of the modern musician are apparently still based on an absolute mastery of the classical values and knowledge of repertoire. Questions over why and why not do not have to be answered: this is just the way it is, and apparently no new formulation of the ideological basis is required.
Teachers in part-time arts education are trained at conservatories such as these and transfer their knowledge to children who – assuming they have the necessary ‘talent’ – may also consider a career as a musician. In short: in music education, a constant and intensive interaction with new art music is anything but obvious. This helps to create a culture that fundamentally excludes twentieth and twenty-first century symbols and sign systems. The history of our music education is what it is. A tradition like this is strong, and that it should continue in this way is to be expected and even understandable, but this does not make it any less of a choice, which is not free from ideology.

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

However both Flanders and Wallonia have a radio station focused on art music and [sometimes non-European] folk music. There is little to be said about twentieth and twenty-first century music on the Flemish station Klara (Klassieke Rádió, CLAssical Rádió); it hardly plays a meaningful role at all. In recent years the station has put particular effort into conforming with the mores of commercial media and music culture. Thus a culture of anecdotes dominates, music charts are created, classical composers are portrayed as far as possible as the personalities of their time, classical music awards are portrayed as far as possible as the person for whom the 'call' card. And endless repetition goes without saying, easy listening, to be sure not to scare off the listener. Newer and more complex music is not taboo – since that would be grist to the critics’ mill – but consigned to the late night programming. The listener must not be challenged, must be tucked in with the familiar, soft, warm fleece of major repertoire.

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

The past decade in the Flemish art music scene does not seem to have been a revolutionary one. And yet a number of shapers in education and the performing arts scene have been successful in putting contemporary art music on the map. For example, there are post-Master’s degrees offering music students the opportunity to focus exclusively on contemporary music. The number of students remains relatively limited, probably because the highly traditional training they have received prior to this course greatly shapes the young musicians’ frame of reference. In part-time arts education, experiments have been conducted here and there with new music classes over the last few years, and in several places these have or will become permanent fixtures. Furthermore, a few arts education organisations have committed themselves to new music and the experience of sound during the same period, through workshops, lectures, residential courses, lessons and installation trails. In the conservatories, the number of progressive teachers is growing, albeit slowly. A handful of large venues now give contemporary music more stage space than a few decades ago, and sometimes it even seems to be coming out of the sidelines. These people are fighting back against the norm of ‘classical’ culture, despite its being a much more powerful force within the niche sector of art music.

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

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

However, if we continue to follow that logic, we have to ask whether a concert with string quartets by Haydn and Schubert is that much more socially relevant than a production with works for ensemble by Johannes Kreidler or Beat Furrer – and we mean this purely on the basis of the number of tickets sold on an average concert evening. Let us assume that there will be four hundred listeners at the ‘classical’ concert and eighty at the ‘new’ one. These numbers must of course be considered in the light of the more than seven million Flemings to whom the Flemish Minister of Culture is answerable. We can state objectively that most of them will not be at the concert, and yet they have to help pay for it (to quote, for a moment, current populist discourse). Figures like these can generate very convincing pie charts – not four hundred versus eighty, but 7.3 million versus eighty (0.000011%) and four hundred (0.000055%). How does the system actually work? At what point does a production become socially relevant? From the moment that half the seats in the hall are filled? Or three quarters? And how big should the hall be? Neither ‘quality’, ‘social relevance’ nor even ‘participation’ (what does the audience hear, ex-
and one can only take a solid, well-considered and defensible position in a context of continuous debate between the architects of the arts scene, journalists, musicologists, sociologists, philosophers, politicians and other observers. In doing so these architects should be given the opportunity to engage in social debate on the substance of music policy, to see it questioned and to have their shaping powers made less dependent on positions of acquired power within the arts world, networks and management skills. Maybe this is a utopian scenario in our time? Nonetheless, this dynamic does seem to be far more present in the other performing arts in Flanders. Is there a link with the fact that contemporary forms of expression play a greater role there and aesthetics are automatically more in line with the time in which they are made public? The last thing we want to do here is to claim that there are no voices in the art music world pleading for substantial examination, debate and the development of an artistic and social discourse. A notable contribution of this type appeared in 2006 in the form of an open letter from Herman Baeten, the then chair of the evaluation committee for music. He called upon the large venues and ensembles to develop a substantial discourse for the place of music in society and to organise debates on the subject. He also questioned the absence of the academic world in the development of such a context. Baeten does not specifically direct his remarks towards those concerned with contemporary music, but maybe the urgent need for action that he indicates is greatest for them.

Perhaps such aesthetic, ethical and political discourse from the music scene will make little impression on the neoliberal and neoliberalist powers that Gielen describes. After all, it is characteristic of their ideology to claim that their own logic – including its aesthetic ideas – is an objective, static truth. Possibly they will believe with apparent justification that they have to deny musical difference its right to develop, supported in that view by ‘the people’. Clear ideological positions from these political powers will probably be given the empty, supposedly objective label of ‘common sense’ or ‘good management’. Under this type of ‘pragmatic’ government of the State, in its attempt to remain financially healthy, will perhaps try to rid itself of so-called ‘money-guzzling’ ‘left-wing elitist hobbies’. Such plans have already been implemented by our Dutch neighbours but the ideological tendencies responsible also constitute a political majority in Belgium, especially in Flanders. New music, experimental sound can be considered an artistic questioning of apparently absolute values. A considerable number of authors, of whom we have already mentioned a few here, have pointed out such relationships between aesthetics, ethics and politics, and this issue continues to occupy researchers in various disciplines. Maybe we will never be able to put our finger on the exact connections between the domains; maybe effective exposure of such mechanisms would even completely change art (or our experience of it). Nonetheless, the architects of the musical landscape believe in the power of art – whatever power might mean here. They believe in certain formations of the arts landscape that may be radically different from how other shapers see the future. That belief is (part of) a reflection, and its critical and artistic basis does not need to be crystallised within the (absolutist) ideological frameworks of ruling powers, either in their artistic or their general political and executive variants. It is necessary however for the ideological approach to the relationship between art and society to be linked to a strong discourse with substantial content, to make ideas explicit, to openness. Only if ideas are made explicit, with an analysis of the social situation and one’s own (artistic) vision for this situation as their basis, can this lead to a genuine confrontation of ideas, free from personal preferences.

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

Notes

1. www.kunstenerfgoed.be (including the clarifications of the Arts Decree and guide to the evaluation procedure)
4. Hedendaagse Kunst column by Bart De Wever in De Standaard (8 November 2011)

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— Gielis, P., Over de naakte onmaat
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— De Wever, B., Hedendaagse Kunst, column in De Standaard (8 November 2011)
— www.kunstenerfgoed.be
— www.muziekcentrum.be
In a literate musical culture, the baton gets dropped from time to time. ‘Hand over’ – at once resembles a relay race in which the transference itself. We can distinguish between a variety of modalities in the transference of the music – a form of transference which one could call informal, through a type of spontaneous transcription into another medium. I am part of the oral history. Whistle it on!

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

Spontaneous acquisition and acquisition through instruction - that which the growing child gets to hear of music and that which she or he hears to which this brain has been exposed up to this moment how that which is heard is processed. And this experiential state determines at every moment how that which is heard is processed. It is the interplay between the received musical information and the listener’s pre-existing mental strategies of the music-maker and the listener carry out the segmenting and grouping through which the listening mind grasps the musical process in a comparable way.

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

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

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

This essay was drawn from prof. dr. em. Herman Sabbe’s Homo Musicus. Over muziek als evolutie, published in 2010 by the Royal Flemish Academy of Sciences and Arts in its series Academiae Annales. In this book, a collection of scientific essays, Sabbe focuses on music as an evolutionary adaptation, combining knowledge from a great diversity of research areas such as neurobiology, genetics, psychology, economics and of course musicology.
1. Dark matter
Little lion knew little. He could eat, though. Little lion ate the mermaid. “Not too much,” little lion thought. Little lion was legion. Little lion knew it was about time for the grand gesture. But he decided not to act. “How much do you want for this sound?”, asked little lion. In the end he wasn’t very hungry. “Lullabies are for pussies”, little lion roared. “I am the one farting symphonies. I use electronics to dry my manes. The whole animal world sings in my head. I ate the peacock.”

2. Yellow lion
Yellow lion was convinced one needed theory. He hated to fly, though. It produced dead tones in his stomach. His research was based on travels by foot. And from time to time he could borrow a string quartet to do the dirty work. He preferred chanting the necessary incantations. Yellow lion drank a barrel of wine. He saw black landscapes everywhere. Quakes shaking. He was chasing a pig named Ulrike. Knowing his spirit could not triumph over matter. He trembled and got lost in the woods. The drum of Hiawatha banging in his ear. Fuzzy harmony in his head.

Codetta: Red hedgehog
Red hedgehog loved to read blue books. Red hedgehog got eaten by a yellow lion. The yellow lion had to throw up. Out came a peacock with the tail of a mermaid. Out came a mermaid with the tail of a peacock. Left was a little lion. Little lion knew little.
Red hedgehog loved to read blue books.
Red hedgehog got eaten by a yellow lion.
The yellow lion had to throw up.
Out came a peacock with the tail of a mermaid.
Out came a mermaid with the tail of a peacock.
Left was a little lion.
Little lion knew little.

ARTISTIC INVASION

Monika Pasiecznik

BELGIANS IN DARMSTADT

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

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

Stefan Prins returned to Darmstadt as a star. Well known on the German music scene, honored with a grand prize, quizzed many times for various interviews and radio programs, he had a difficult task: he had to confirm his class. He brought with him a freshly released double album (Sub Rosa, 2012), containing compositions from the last few years – above all, three works from the Fremdkörper cycle, which is a peculiar artistic manifesto. It is epitomized by the confrontation between body and machine – so, electronics and the acoustic instrument parts contrasted with them. Prins philosophizes on the place of technology in the life of contemporary humanity, poses questions on the quality of the relationship between them. Criticism of technology in Prins’ rendition does not, however, boil down to a simple cultural pessimism, if only because he...
himself moves perfectly well in the world of new media. He has computers at his fingertips, as can be heard from the first contact with his music. He is an electronics virtuoso, utilizing frenetic cascades of sounds, often overdriven, contaminated by digital errors, defects from which he is able to conjure up miracles.

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

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

Language and the thought associated with it is changing at lightning speed under the influence of new technologies; similarly, our perception, hearing and feeling is changing… Even just the physical ‘struggle’ with the guitar, sound production using various objects, was able to create a peculiar bodily counterweight for the cerebral dimension of a composition, subordinated to language (programming) and its structure. Electronics à la Prins is the complete opposite of sterile, ideally pure studio electronics utilizing abstract sound. Even if it is based on algorithms, it has its texture, its weight, its power, its body. This time it was the human being who had the chance to establish control over the machine, which could have resulted in greater virtuosity of playing, a broader spectrum sounds, a yet bolder and more sensual approach to electronics. Why did it not happen this way, why did Stefan Prins stop halfway, jump up on stage and turn into an actor?

**NADAR ENSEMBLE**

**A HYBRID ELECTRONICS**

The concerts in Darmstadt – especially those at the Orangerie – were of predominantly conventional form: an ensemble appeared on stage and played a set of more or less aesthetically independent works by various composers. Never mind that a program comprised of stylistic, generational, geographical monads neither builds new content nor provokes a layered manner of listening. Darmstadt is a mecca for composers and performers and the un(?)limited capabilities of the computer gives an artist, the composer boldly transfers them to the ground of music. This yields a result similar to the case with Prins – an instrumental-electronic hybrid, except built on a somewhat different principle ‘music with music’/ ‘Musik mit Musik’. Here, as well, we have a play with the limited capabilities of performers and the unlimited capabilities of electronics – especially when we are talking for Composition – in 2008 and 2012, respectively. Nadar Ensemble prepared a music-film show for Darmstadt, arranging its program on the basis of a continuum. The combination of music with cinema is, obviously, an extraordinary charming idea, virtually guaranteeing success. However, for a program continuum to succeed, each work must be at an equally high level and correspond with the rest of them.

Most of the pictures – Norbert Pfaffenbichler’s Intermezzo (2011), Nicolas Provost’s Long Live the New Flesh Part I/II (2009) and Martin Arnold’s Haunted House (2011), as well as Jorge Sánchez-Chiong’s music-film mix Used Redux (from Autocine) (2012, première) – made use of a ‘found footage’ technique, processing and deconstructing, among others, Charlie Chaplin films (Pfaffenbichler), cartoons (Arnold) and horror film scenes (the daring Provost!). The remaining music-film compositions – Stefan Prins’ Piano Hero #1 (2011/2012) and Johannes Kreidler’s Die »sich sammelnde Erfahrung« (Benn) – utilized rather concept and musical rules at the image level.

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

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

Also standing under the banner of technology and the effects of its use Johannes Kreidler’s new work Die »sich sammelnde Erfahrung« (Benn) – der Ton. Known for his affirmation of the capabilities that the computer gives an artist, the composer boldly transfers them to the ground of music. This yields a result similar to the case with Prins – an instrumental-electronic hybrid, except built on a somewhat different principle ‘music with music’/ ‘Musik mit Musik’. Here, as well, we have a play with the limited capabilities of performers and the unlimited capabilities of electronics – especially when we are talking
about speed of data transmission and of task performance. The work is a self-organizing chaos of snippets of musics, a sound splash generated with the aid of algorithms [7] which, however, fascinates the listener from the first sounds with its ghoulish humor and casualness relative to the concept of original composed music.

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

**BESIDES ENSEMBLE**

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**PREDATORY AND MINIMALIST**

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

Before the audience took their places, light music, played sotto voce and da capo by the ensemble itself, was already wafting from the stage. As it turned out, the concept consisted of a peculiar threading of successive works onto a string of these café music sounds. Played back from offstage between the individual compositions, it did not flirt with any of the ghoulish humor and casualness relative to the audience's predatory rock image.

For Travelers like Angels or Vampires (2012). The first of them could have reminded us of Morton Feldman’s concept for Nadar Ensemble’s concert, which was no doubt dictated, however, not so much by the good of the compositions being performed, as by the ensemble’s predatory rock image.

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

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

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

**LIQUID ROOM**

**LISTENING AND DRIFTING**

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

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

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

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

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

Where did the Belgians get their ideas; where does their musical vitality come from? This year’s Festival and Courses for New Music in Darmstadt showed that today, they are a force to be reckoned with. Belgium is growing into an important center of contemporary music which, in the future, will have yet many surprises for us.
This is what makes it worthwhile to rethink the position of the musical instrument in arts education as a whole, across disciplinary borders and styles. First and foremost, we need to analyse the way present-day music education thinks about instruments. My point of reference for this is Flemish part-time arts education (the official, state-subsidised schools providing non-compulsory arts education to children and adults, called Deeltijds Kunstonderwijs and abbreviated to DKO). This is where the vast majority of amateurs and pre-professionals receive musical training in Flanders. Then I will investigate what space might be found in the music education of the future for new instrumental approaches and technologies that are already commonplace in today’s composed or improvised music.

LEARNING MUSIC

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

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

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

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

THE INSTRUMENTAL LENS

A strengthening factor in the link between standardised instruments and musical curricula is that the instruments learned have a stable identity, both in terms of their construction and the techniques used to play them. This stability enables...
a long-term learning process with a powerful motivational structure: students have to practice for years before they really get the hang of an instrument, but from the outset they are surrounded by inspiring, living and breathing role models, beginning with their teachers. The latter provide living proof that practising hard can lead to success over time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nonetheless, there is one contemporary element that does sometimes pop up in instrumental teaching and which is strongly associated for many people with instrumental experimentation in musical modernity: what are called ‘extended techniques’: percussive sounds on string instruments, clusters on keyboards, preparations for the piano and guitars, noise and multiphonics on wind instruments etc.: everything that might be considered ‘improper use’ of the instrument.

EXTENDED TECHNIQUES

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

Extended techniques can be integrated into instrument lessons right from the start. Playing clusters on a keyboard instrument is an obvious starting point for the beginner piano student whose motor coordination is not yet highly developed. The same applies to producing noise sounds on a wind instrument or scraping, scratching sounds on a string instrument by varying the bow pressure. Although only a few instrument teachers will encourage such playing techniques in beginners who have not yet got the ‘correct’ position and tone under control, there are enough arguments for allowing ‘incorrect’ playing techniques in instrument lessons from early on and for approaching them from their own sound potential. The conscious exploration of alternative playing techniques leads to a better understanding of and feel for the instrument, a more direct and physical comprehension of the relationship between physical effort and tone production, and in this way can even reinforce feeling for conventional tone production.
The need for attention to the intimate interaction between the instrument and player is where a task for the teacher lies.
The relationship between physical input and sound production remains linear with extended techniques. Change in tone quality can only be achieved by changing the motor input. From an educational perspective, the extended techniques approach does not therefore need to differ fundamentally from ‘normal’ tone production. The tone possibilities of extended techniques are equally within the physical limitations and possibilities of the instrument and player, which also means that they are just as susceptible to canonisation and optimisation. Just as with the production of a ‘good tone’, there are better and less efficient ways of playing on a cello or getting a clarinet to produce a specific multiphonic. And yet the context of alternative tone production usually allows far more room for variation and experimentation. And this is precisely where the educational relevance of extended techniques in instrumental education may lie: the discovery of alternative sound possibilities demands an adventurous attitude of students. It takes them into sound terrain with other norms and values, often leaving them far more reliant on themselves. Furthermore, the sound results of an alternative playing technique may be different from one instrument to another (more than with conventional tone production for which the instrument has been optimally constructed). This means that extended techniques also require closer listening to the relationship between action and sound result. This need for attention to the intimate interaction between the instrument and player is where a task for the teacher lies.

Extended techniques will never replace the ‘proper’ way of playing the instrument. The desire mainly to make the instrument sound the ‘proper’ way of playing the instrument. The familiar instrument can remain the starting point for live electronics. The advantage of live electronics here is that the way they are played does not necessarily need to be adapted in order to explore new areas of sound. They can also be very simply applied to techniques that have already been acquired. The main obstacle to using live electronics in music education is not down to the student, but the teachers. Electronic sound techniques are absolutely not part of the basic training of music teachers.

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

Live electronics even have didactic potential to increase consciousness of the relationship between action and sound result. For example, the student’s sound input can be used directly to control electronic sound effects. Sound itself, rather than extra hardware, buttons or mixers, can be used as the interface. Audio software can be programmed so that a specific sound effect only occurs when the input reaches a specific volume, pitch and duration. The intensity or modulation of digital sound processing can be controlled in real time by the input of an acoustic instrument. The extraction of relevant musical patterns out of acoustic data is a feature not yet available in commercial software programs, but even that will come increasingly within reach of the average music user in the near future, with the result that even more intuitive forms of musical interaction become possible.

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

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

Up to now we have concentrated on new instrumental approaches and technologies where the presence of standardised musical instruments is still the starting point. The greatest benefit of integrating live electronics into music education is elsewhere, however. Live electronics create a context in which the entirety of sound production can
be understood as an input-output model. Unlike traditional instrument teaching where practice is always aimed at optimising motor input in relation to auditory feedback, what is between input and output becomes important here: how the instrument is connected to the speaker and what sound processes occurs between them. This intermediary area becomes a free playground for the student’s design and conceptual thinking, where the familiar relationships between physiological input and sound output can be completely rethought. Obvious relationships can be turned upside down: small actions can have big effects and vice versa. Playing very short, isolated notes on the instrument can generate long drawn-out drones or, conversely, long sustained notes can cause percussive sound effects.

As soon as you give students the freedom to intervene in the familiar sound relationships of a mechanical, acoustic environment, theatricality, a sense of space, audiovisual aspects of musical interaction and even humour come into view. This broad application potential makes it clear that live electronics do not have to be restricted to technologically-minded students. However, learning to work with live electronics does require specific technical training that is generally lacking in musical education for amateurs today.

The integration of live electronics requires a structured extended range of courses in electronic sound techniques and digital sound processing, and also greater attention to the basic scientific principles of acoustics and perception.

**INSTRUMENTAL DESIGN**

Once the student is familiar with an input-output model over which he or she has full control, it is possible to consider not only the interface between the instrument and output but also the sound source itself that is required to generate input. And then it soon becomes clear that the acoustic instrument, with all its finesse and historically evolved characteristics, forms a fairly arbitrary source of sound in combination with live electronics, that does not necessarily produce richer or musically more interesting results than any other objects that can be used to produce sound. The neutrality of the digital medium means that just about any form of input, any form of information can be translated into a musical context. Game technologies (Wii, kinect etc.) nowadays provide the tools for converting physical movements directly into sound, just as all kinds of sensors (heat, infrared, brainwaves etc.) can provide controlling signals for sound production.

And there we make the ultimate U-turn: the flexibility of the digital medium puts the definition of both input and output up for debate. As soon as the input model can become part of musical creation processes as well, we will be dealing with a learning process that may incorporate aspects of instrumental design (both in the technical aspects of sound design and interaction concept) as well as live electronics, musical interaction, composition, design or choreography. An open instrumental learning process in which all these aspects can be exposed to the student’s creativity demands a completely new pedagogical and didactic framework. An important point of attention is that there is no longer any question of a hierarchical learning process where the instrument, repertoire and educational targets are necessarily set in advance, as they are in traditional instrument teaching. Hence the students may come into contact with numerous input models over the course of their education, instead of devoting years to learning to play a single instrument. This clearly has important consequences for the results of such a learning process. As we stated above, traditional music teaching the stability of the mechanical, acoustic instrument forms an important factor in the development of progressive, quantifiable paths of learning. From a traditional instrumental perspective, giving up that stability may potentially lead to a loss of efficiency: the results of open instrumental learning processes are far less clear, and relatively less virtuosity will be achieved (overall less time is spent practising with one type of input), the path followed from the choice of input model to a musically relevant result is complex, and the chances of success are not certain in advance. One does not build systematically and step-by-step on previously gained skills and knowledge as in conventional instrumental education, but nonetheless connection points are constantly possible with a wide range of technical, artistic or interdisciplinary skills.

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

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

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

Maarten Beirens & Maarten Quanten

ON MUSIC TODAY

After a turbulent 20th century full of innovations, interesting turns, currents and evolutions, new music is no longer the self-evident, prestigious and trend-setting art that it may have been once. Aesthetic premises have become more and more diverse (and in some cases even explicitly antagonistic), ‘classically’ composed music has to find its position in a landscape in which music genres that are not-composed and not-‘classical’ become increasingly prominent. The making of aesthetic choices, the assimilation of influences or the development of a ‘musical language of its own’ has become a more complex question.

Technological evolutions offer new ways to generate musical materials, to manipulate and use them, concurrently influencing the mode of thinking about the constituent elements of music. In a contemporary praxis which ranges across the whole gamut from laptop virtuoso to author of symphonic scores the profile of a ‘composer’ becomes ever more versatile. Connected to this, the question of the commitment of the composer comes to the fore: what is the societal relevance of a commitment to the creation of music? There, too, the whole field is open, from withdrawal into autonomous beauty and ‘art for art’s sake’ to active involvement in contemporary societal developments and challenges.

With these considerations in mind we approached a handful of Belgian composers with a view to picking their brains about their opinions, dreams, complaints and desires concerning these themes. In other words: What does composing mean to them in Flanders or Wallonia at the beginning of the 21st century?

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

Cédric Dambrain (b. 1979)

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

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

Performed by
Ictus, Françoise Berlanger, Anne Deforce, Zwerm, Bart Maris

And also
human-machine interface developer

Stefan Prins (b. 1979)

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

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

Performed by
Klangforum Wien, ChampdAction, Nadar Ensemble, Ictus, Nikel Ensemble, Ensemble Mosaik, Zwerm Electric Guitar Quartet, Jean-Guihen Queyras, Matthias Koole, Mark Nnopt

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

“A difficult point is the societal relevance of music”, Daan Janssens says. “The crux is the term relevance. Is new music relevant? How can it acquire this relevance? Probably society can keep going without new music. Admittedly a couple of hundred people in Flanders would be unhappy. But in economic terms this number is negligible…” Janssens also mentions the curious position of so much contemporary music that reaches only a relatively small audience, while its intrinsic attraction should ideally keep socializing of contemporary music keeps provoking questions and, perhaps, also doubts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

“The twentieth century has generated an abundance of new musical techniques”, Janssens specifies. “These techniques are certainly not a reservoir a composer can take his cue from in an unbridled way. Because everything or at least such decisions can be seen as political or at least ideological.” To deal with these choices in active and intelligent ways is one of the crucial challenges for a composer today.

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

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

Performed by
Spectra Ensemble, Arsis4, Goeyvaerts string trio, Aton & Armide, Ensemble Orchestral Contemporain, Neue Vokalisten Stuttgart, Ensemble Musiques Nouvelles, VocaliLAB, Jean-Guihen Queyras, music theatre LOD

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

Annelies Van Parys (b. 1975)

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

Recent compositions
Second Symphony (Les Ponts [orchestral]), An Oresteia (music theatre), Drifting Sand (string trio), S Frammenti (vocal ensemble)

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

And also
— Teaching formal analysis and orchestration at the University College Brussels, dept. Royal Conservatory
— Honorary ambassador for the Ghent Royal Conservatory
— Laureate of the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Arts and Sciences
but structurally speaking that project has been essentially completed since Lachenmann. The search for ‘new materials’ is to be found today in different areas, as the visual arts have already realized quite some time ago. The battlefields have shifted to the new media, to the new technologies, to new ways of dealing with information, imposing a new mode of making and handling art (and in the case of music: composing)."

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

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

**TECHNOLOGY**

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

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

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**Bram Van Camp (b. 1980)**

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

**Recent compositions**
The Feasts of Fear and Agony (after Paul Van Ostaijen), Improvisations for violin solo, Music for three instruments, Violin Concerto performed by delPhilharmonie (Royal Flanders Philharmonic), Hermes ensemble, Het Collectief, I Solisti del Vento, Hommages Ensemble, Wilbert Aerts, Nikolaas Kende, Piet Van Bockstal

**And also**
— Composer in residence of Het Collectief and Hermes Ensemble
— Harmony and composition teacher at the music academies of Schoten and Merksem (Antwerp)
— Coaching young composers in composition projects
ON TALL TREES AND FLOURISHING UNDERGROWTH

Klaas Coulombier & Rebecca Diependaele

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

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

ON TREES, UNDERGROWTH AND CLEARINGS IN THE FOREST

When we talk about the ecosystem of the new music landscape, we have to begin with composers. They are the ones who quite simply provide the necessary conditions for a new music landscape to be possible: new music. What particularly interests us in this discussion is the colourful area between the most fundamental musical foundations and the presentation of a successful composition, played by top musicians, to a full house in a national arts centre. The undergrowth, let’s say, that is closest to creation, that creeps into small spaces and reaches upwards to the light. When we look at the new music landscape in Flanders, we quickly realise that there are all sorts of brand new, young, small-scale and/or specialised initiatives that we can classify as undergrowth. The forms they take are as diverse as their aims and motivations. In the first part of our discussion, we would like to sketch this diversity without aiming for completion.

Festivals & concert organisers

Between the domains covered by the new music programmes in large venues and festivals, there is a large area of follow ground that is being colonised with great enthusiasm by smaller initiatives. The lack (and even disappearance) of playgrounds for young ensembles – necessary places where they can gain experience and show off their abilities – has led to a handful of new festivals emerging in recent years. In 2009, a group of musicians (Toon Callier, Matthias Koole, Fabian Coomans, Sam Foes and Jutta Troach) organised the one-day What’s Next festival in Brussels for the first time. The second edition of the Tik Tak Toe festival was in July 2012, an initiative by composer Frederik Neyrinck, cellist Saraphine Stragier and double bassist Tim Vandenberghe held in an art gallery in Meigem (a village near Deinze in East Flanders). A different motivating force is behind the two-day Voortwaarts Maart/En avant Mars festival in Ghent. Composer Frank Nuyts has been running this festival since 2010 to provide a stage for aesthetics that get less of a response from the larger concert halls in Flanders, in this case mainly work that can be situated within certain manifestations of the post-modern and neo-styles. Moreover, not all the initiatives in this context are young. The Logos Foundation has provided a permanent stage for young, lesser-known, experimental or otherwise exceptional contemporary music since 1968. It is the only concert organisers that presents a concert of new music almost every week, all year round, in a context that enthusiastically supports musicians (and audiences) in their journey of musical discovery. Despite its relatively small scale, this centre is home to a treasure trove of expertise and a network that extends around the world, making Logos – along with its radical artistic choice for the newest of the new – a crucial player within the ecosystem of new music in Flanders. The deep commitment of founders Godfried-Willem Raes and Moniek Darge and their team of young colleagues who currently run Logos can certainly be called exceptional. Finally there are also a few ‘workplaces’ in Flanders: small, specialised organisations aimed at offering composers, musicians and other artists a place and context to work on new concepts without the pressure of deadlines or the demand that their work result in a saleable production. In particular, the Brussels workplace Q-O2 deserves a mention here.

Ensembles

As already mentioned, we can state that composers form the core of musical humus. The same can be said of the musician in search of something exciting, new repertoire, a different approach, a place to develop and give shape to his or her ideas. Where musicians meet, ensembles spring up like mushrooms. It sometimes looks like an experimental jigsaw puzzle: collaborations and instrumentations are tried out, often in response to a specific occasion, and the best match is explored further. This leads to numerous new ensembles, often with a pronounced individual identity. In recent years, for example, we were able to make our acquaintance with ensembles including the string quartet Arsis4, chamber ensemble Besides, electronics duo Jasper&Jasper, mobile ensemble Nadar and electric guitar quartet ZWERM. What is striking about these ensembles [and the same often applies to established ensembles focusing on new music] is the close relationships they maintain with composers. New compositions are often the result of an intense collaboration. Compositions
are made to measure for specific musicians or groups. This phenomenon can (in parentheses) also have a negative aspect, when a composition is so closely linked to the style and characteristics of a musician that it is difficult for other performers to pick up. In any case, the personal interaction between composers and performers is a particularly good fertilizer for the layer of humus in the soil. The composer is confronted with the possibilities and impossibilities of the instruments, whereas the musician is challenged by the composer’s possible and impossible ideas. The atmosphere of spontaneity, idealism and independence unique to this type of initiative is perhaps its greatest advantage.

New music and (new) media

In the world of music, the media plays an important role. But is that also the case if we concentrate on new music? Does the rainforest of contemporary art/music get coverage? If we go in search of new music, we have to admit there are few, if any, high trees to be seen. On Klara, the classical music radio station run by the public broadcasting service, new music only occupies a tiny place. The same applies to the other stations and channels of the Flemish Radio and Television service (VRT) (although its online culture platform Cobra.be has considerably increased its attention to the arts) and the regular written press: here, too, new music is only covered exceptionally. In the undergrowth, however (that is mainly flourishing online here), we do find various inspiring initiatives. Since as far back as 2006, the blog Oorgetuige has been bringing together all announcements for ‘contemporary music and other new sounds’ in a handy summary, with lavish amounts of background information and an impressive news archive. In this context the website Kwadratuur also deserves a mention: it focuses on innovative tendencies in all kinds of musical genres. Contemporary art music is regularly given space on this website in CD discussions, interviews, reviews and concert announcements. New music is sometimes presented in a few art magazines as well, although still less than other art forms and classical music (e.g. Kunsttijdschrift Vlaanderen, Staalkaart). On the airways, it is remarkably enough two of the last free radio stations that give new music a fixed slot. Joris De Laet, a composer of exclusively electronic music, has had a fortnightly programme for years on the Antwerp radio phenomenon Radio Central, a station where new music is regularly featured on other programmes as well. In Leuven a group of musicology students make the weekly programme Kontakte about new music on Radio Scorpio. In media land new music seems to be almost entirely dependent on such initiatives.

**IT TAKES MORE THAN A FEW TREES TO MAKE A FOREST**

Without lowly undergrowth there are no tall trees. That message has been put across more than once in articles, opinion pieces and books published recently in the context of the social debate on the current cultural budget and the accompanying plans to make savings. We have already mentioned the Potgrond manifesto, and Rudi Laermans recently wrote in the arts magazine De Witte Raaf (in a discussion of Bart Carons book Niet de kers op de taart) that “the strength of the regulated cultural field is precisely in its pairing of a few large players with quite a lot of medium ones and very many small ones. If you cut back the latter hard to strengthen the middle level, you will inevitably take all the dynamics out of the Flemish culture system”. The big players – concert halls, festivals, ensembles – are expected to play at international level, follow up major developments and contribute to shaping them. It is certainly no easy task to combine this mandate with major artistic risks: the hall needs to be filled and the audience expects undiminished quality, a form of security. The presence of small allotment gardeners is vital in this light to the artistic leaders of larger organisations. They offer the opportunity to see new ideas in practice, to discover what is ‘ripe’ for the large venues, to get inspiration. Various medium and large organisations implement a
noteworthy policy through which they become acquainted with and support new initiatives and ideas and thus help to ensure healthy connections between the different layers of the forest. The most common route is probably that of the larger venues which periodically make room for work by young composers – as is the case each year, for example, at the opening concert of TRANSIT – or established ensembles that offer upcoming talented composers a residency. The annual call for works by ISCM Flanders also offers young composers the opportunity to present their work to an (international) jury, which may give their careers a kick start. Beginning ensembles have various sources of support, including the Flemish Government. The Kunstenloket offers a wide range of practical advice, and a very simple application form allows ensembles or soloists to have a concert programme included in a government database under the name Podium (stage) or Nieuw Talent (new talent). The government then provides a contribution to the fee paid by concert organisers who are registered with this initiative. A somewhat more recent phenomenon could be described as ‘kangaroo ensembles’: established groups who take young musicians under their wing and coach them in artistic and organisational matters. Blindman’s method is a good example of this. They began as a saxophone quartet and, years ago, took on young counterparts who now stand squarely on their own feet. Later a string quartet was added that grew up into Arsis4. In the meantime, Blindman has grown into a collective of four quartets (saxophones, strings, percussionists and singers). ChampdAction provided the electric guitar quartet ZWERM with the necessary care for a few years and has made a permanent place for young green shoots with LabO (a two-year scheme for young creators in co-operation with Artesis University College and deSingel).

Finally, we should mention the alternative management bureau Cohort set up by Ictus. Cohort offers business and administrative support to young and small-scale organisations and ensembles active in new music, such as Aton’ et Armide, Besides, Mangalam!, Nadar, What’s Next and ZWERM, but that is not all. Besides a shared back office, Cohort acts as a platform to exchange knowledge, experience and ideas.

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

Hence the major players in our musical landscape certainly do contribute to supporting smaller initiatives. But we also have to note that new music often remains a relatively marginal phenomenon in large venues’ own programmes. There is a rich supply of new music to hear in Flanders, but all too often this music is pigeon-holed as ‘contemporary’ or ‘new’ at festivals, events or workshops. Maybe the greatest assistance to small players could be provided if the
A fine example of how a small seed can follow an organic pattern of growth through all the layers of the forest can be found in the career of the – still young – composer Daan Janssens (°1983). In 2005 De Nieuwe Reeks, a small-scale concert organisation for contemporary music that was operating in Leuven at the time (and was entirely run by volunteers) came across a collaborative project between Ghent Conservatory and the Goeyvaerts Trio. The latter had committed themselves to performing work by a considerable number of composition students at a few of their concerts. In that context they played Gegeven/…/Beweeging/… (2004/2005) by Daan Janssens and Caro-Kann by Maarten Buyt at the TRANSIT festival alongside works by Jörg Birkenkötter, Peter Swinnen and Sami Klemola. In the autumn of 2006, the Goeyvaerts Trio found themselves at De Nieuwe Reeks for the second edition of their project for young composers. The names on the programme that particularly ring a bell today are Frederik Neyrinck and Fabian Coomans. De Nieuwe Reeks also decided to give the very young Daan Janssens a commission for the Spectra ensemble for the following season (spring 2007). It turned into (…nuit cassée.) which was nothing less than the young composer’s first chance to work with a large, experienced ensemble. In 2008 Daan Janssens received a commission from the TRANSIT festival for new music, specifically for the opening concert (with the Spectra ensemble) that is traditionally devoted to promising young Flemish composers. In the same period, De Nieuwe Reeks gave Daan Janssens a second commission for his first string quartet (Passages III). For the première in the spring of 2009, the equally young Arsis4 ensemble was called in. (…nuit cassée.) made the ISCM Flanders selection in 2008. Daan Janssens has since come up with his first opera, Les Aveugles, (a production by LOD), which has been performed twelve times to date in Belgium and abroad and is on the programme at La Monnaie in April 2014.

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

New, young and small initiatives are often vulnerable. In recent years, November Music Flanders and the Leuven concert series De Nieuwe Reeks have given up the ghost, and others have to do their utmost every day to defend their existence and keep afloat financially. On the one hand a certain amount of decay, of (partial) failure, is inherent to the lowest levels of an ecosystem. Whether it is a question of a very young ensemble, an experimental composition or a specialised concert series: artistic innovation remains a leap in the dark and the chance of failure is inextricably linked. On the other hand, there are many factors besides artistic ones that can determine the survival chances of the very newest phenomena. It is not unusual for the smallest players in the field to take the biggest artistic risks, which makes the audience size difficult to predict and the finances correspondingly uncertain. They often work on a project basis, usually with a small budget. Moreover, they are often highly dependent on collaborative partners and the personal commitment of a handful of individuals. A critical point in the development of such initiatives often turns out to be the transition from a volunteer project rooted in idealism and ideology to a semi-professional or professional organisation with one or more paid employees and a workable budget. It is all but impossible for new and therefore unknown initiatives to generate a high proportion of their income themselves. Takings from ticket sales are extremely uncertain and it is almost impossible to bring in sponsoring. After all, the primary concern of potential donors is to reach as large an audience as possible. And reaching a large audience is precisely the problem in new music.

Furthermore, it is characteristic of the humus layer in this sector that it wants to commit fully to the artistic project and devote as much time and money as possible to the music itself. Expensive promotional material and labour-intensive communication work, then, is often a lower priority. This choice is logical (and intellectually honest), but it also makes further audience generation more difficult and creates a vicious circle. The role that the subsidising government body can play for the humus layer here is not to be underestimated. By paying attention (i.e.: hard cash) to these often modest initiatives, the government can play a corrective role to counteract the levelling of market-based thinking and hence create more space for diversity and innovation. Project subsidies thus constitute an essential source of income for many initiatives. Hence the recent extension of the project subsidy budget from 3 to 10% of the total subsidy budget for the Arts Decree is gratifying news. However it is often difficult to evaluate the chance of success for an individual funding application. In practice, financial uncertainty and instability are the Achilles heel of many projects. Even structurally subsidised organisations have difficulty escaping this. After all, the relative financial security of structural support is set against the large number of obligations stemming from the rules imposed by the decree, including those concerning the income that an organisation must generate for itself. Fluctuating audience numbers can rapidly play havoc with the accounts. Moreover, the combination of artistic and financial risks makes these initiatives extra vulnerable in times of austerity. It is not infrequent for the complex, not always very transparent tangle of evaluation criteria, budgetary cuts and other manoeuvres to hit the most vulnerable players hardest. The fact that they cannot put forward many ‘guarantees’ makes it that much more difficult to defend their position and plead for the right to take risks. For example, in the latest round of evaluations the Logos Foundation was criticised for the vagueness of its concert planning for the coming four years, with only a few theoretical agreements and not enough detailed concert programmes. However
More established organisations in the artistic sectors, there are two distinct types of subsidy. The subsidising of artistic initiatives in Flanders has been treated at length in the 1983 De kers op de taart, in geen cultuurpolitiek. Over Bart Caron and his col leagues. He is currently a culture specialist for the previous Minister of Culture, Bert Anciaux. Bart Caron is a double bassist and worked on the advisory committee to the 43 million euros. Within the Arts Decree, which regulates official government subsidies (for two or four years). It is also possible to apply for a project subsidy for a new, one-off, short-term or small-scale initiative. Applications for such projects are dealt with twice a year. More info: www.kunstenfgoed.be.

More information about the initiatives, organisations and bodies discussed:
- Aniss/4, www.aniss4.be
- Aton’ et Armonde, www.atan-armmonde.com
- Basides, www.ensemblebasides.be
- Blummad, www.blummad.be
- ChampdAction, www.champdaction.be
- Cobra, www.cobra.be
- Cohort, www.cohort.be
- De Nieuwe Reeks, www.deonnewekeks.be
- ISCMFlanders, www.iscm-vlaanderen.be
- Jasper&Jasper, jasperandjasper.be
- Miaza, www.miaza.be
- Kunstencentrum Vlaanderen, www.kunstencentrumvlaanderen.be
- Kwadratuur, www.kwadratuur.be
- LABO, www.champdaction.be/ndl/lnaboiv
- Logos Foundation, www.logosfoundation.org
- Magalalam, www.magalamtrio.be
- Nadirr, www.nadirrensemble.be
- November Music (Dutch version), www.novembrarmusic.net
- OK!, www.overlegkunsten.be
- Oogstuitge, oogstuitge.skeymeblads.be
- Podium/Nieuw Talent, www.aanbodpodium.be
- Radio Centraal, www.radiocentraal.be
- Radio Scorpio, www.radioscorpio.be
- Radio Zeeuws, www.radioscorpio.be
- IJsg, www.ijsgonline.be
- Stadskoor, www.stadskoor.be
- Taltonv, www.taltonv.be
- Transit Festival, www.transitfestival.be
- QOH, www.qoh.be
- Voorwaarts Maart/En avant Mars, www.hardcore.be
- What’s Next Festival, www.whatson.getenv.be
- ZWERM, www.zwerm.be

SOUND ART IN BELGIUM

THE OUTLINES OF AN AMORPHOUS ART FORM

Exhibitions focusing on sound often include a broad variety of art forms. Some exhibitions include a listening room where the audience can listen to music, whilst the content of other exhibitions solely exists of music. The exhibition programme is regularly extended to include a series of performances, sometimes of artists whose work is included in the exhibition, sometimes of artists who have nothing to do with the exhibition itself. Besides performances, radio broadcasts or film projections can be part of the exhibition programme. The exhibition itself can contain experimental music, sound installations, sound sculptures, documented performances, radio broadcasts, visual installations, mail art, project intentions, kinetic sculptures, experimental instruments, antique instruments, video art, poetry, conceptual art, paintings and sculptures with musical themes, musical automata, technological demonstrations, sound weapons and graphical scores (Maes, 2007). Sound art seems to be a trend in art which can include anything...
which produces sound or, in some cases, things which do not (Neuhaus, s.d.).

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

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

The confusion increases as a work of sound art can also produce music. Sometimes records are released with – processed or unprocessed – recordings of sound works. On top of that many sound artists are also active in other art forms. Max Neuhaus makes drawings of sound installations and uses them as a project in sight, there is always a material aspect to sound which produces sound or, in some cases, things which do not (Neuhaus, s.d.).

Max Neuhaus who creates site-specific works and always hides his sound producing elements so that many sound artists are also active in other arts, always has an aural as well as a visual aspect. In both museums and concert halls a secure distance is commonly kept between the spectator and the work of art or the performer(s). This distance largely evaporates with sound works as the visitor can often walk around or into the work or is even encouraged to touch it. As a consequence the works have no fixed beginning or end. The time dimension is partly exchanged for the space dimension. The visitors come and go as they please and can determine independently how long they attend the ‘performance’. Sound art is like a performance lasting 24 hours a day, seven days a week. As a result most sound works are not narrative and very few make an appeal to performers to produce sound. Instead sounds are generated electronically, electro-acoustically or acoustically.

The sounds are automated or activated either by natural sources or by acts by the visitors.

The auditive appearance of sound art

The amplitude of the sound produced by a sound work can differ immensely. It can be deafering such as the sounds produced by the organ pipes of Stephan von Huene’s Totem Tones (Grayson, 1975), but it can also be nearly inaudible like the 16 hertz bass produced by the impressive organ pipes of Gunter Deming (Schulz, 1988). It may seem contradictory at first sight but sound works do not necessarily produce sound. Some works are based on the idea of reflecting or muffling sound generated by the audience or its surroundings such as Michael Asher’s installation for the exhibition Spaces (1969) in which Asher covered walls, ceiling and floor with drywall to increase the sound absorbent characteristics of the room (Licht, 1969; Asher, 1983). Whilst most sound works employ frequencies within the human audible range (20-20,000 Hz), other works explore the borders of the humanly audible, either above (ultrasound) or below (infrasound) the audible range. Works that make use of sounds below the audible range do so to create sensations or to visualise these inaudible sounds.

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

The visual appearance of sound art

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

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

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

The characteristics of sound art

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

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

The sounds are automated or activated either by natural sources or by acts by the visitors.

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

SOUND ART IN BELGIUM, THE EARLY YEARS

The Philips Pavilion

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

The tape composition comprising of electronically processed sounds of voice, percussion and melody instruments, bells, sirens, electronic tone generators and machines (Chadabe, 1997) could be heard through more than 400 loudspeakers distributed in space. As the space held around 400 visitors (Blesser e. a., 2007) the actual experience was different for each listener.

Edgard Varèse composed his music at the Philips Laboratories in Eindhoven, the Netherlands. Willem Tak, the lead sound engineer from Philips designed a system so that

“‘The listeners were to have the illusion that various sound-sources were in motion around them, rising and falling, coming together and moving apart again, and moreover the space in which this took place was to seem at one instant narrow and ‘dry’ and at another to seem like a cathedral.’
As a little boy Godfried-Willem Raes, who later founded the Logos Foundation, was regularly dropped by his parents at the Dutch pavilion during their choir rehearsals. The whole experience made a huge impression on him and influenced his later work (Raes, 2012).

**Logos Foundation**

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

From 1969 onwards the Logos group invited like-minded musicians and collectives and started to organise concerts and events. In 1971 the first edition of the Mixed Media festival took place. The festival was organised for ten successive years. For its fifth edition, in 1975, an exhibition comprising collaborative work by Godfried-Willem Raes, who provided home-built circuits and ceramicist Lieve De Pelsmaecker was set up in the corridor of the Zwarte Zaal in Ghent. This idea was expanded during the three following editions of the festival. International artists such as Walter Giers, Michel Waisvisz, COUM, Linda Wolker, Ulrike & Wolf-Dieter Trüstelted and Hugh Davies were invited to exhibit their work in these so called Sonomobiles’ exhibitions. The term Sonomobiles was launched by Logos as a collective noun for these exhibited works combining sound and other media. The exhibition catalogue notes that Sonomobiles address visual as well as auditive senses. They cross borders and range from the final saleable product to the object.” (Darge, 1977, p. 6)

By shifting the emphasis from the final saleable product to the object, the Logos lab creations were regularly on display. From time to time sound works by other artists, including Richard Lerman, Martin Riches, Frédéric Le Junter and Peter Bosch & Simone Simons, were exhibited (Logos Foundation, s.d.).

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

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

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At the end of the nineties and in the 21st century exhibitions became rare. The majority of the works produced at the Logos workplace were musical automata – additions to the Man and Machine (M&M) orchestra – that was showcased at the monthly organised M&M performances. While the Logos concert hall gradually became filled up with the expanding M&M orchestra, the acquisition of an adjoining building at the end of 2011 opened up new opportunities. A first exhibition, including work by Moniek Darge, Helen White and the author was

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

PERMANENT COLLECTIONS

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

**Klankenbos**

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

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

Houses of Sound

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

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

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

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

Musica aims to further extend the operation of the Klankenbos with small-scale events around the collection such as performances and temporary exhibitions, guided tours and residencies for students and artists. Although the activities of Musica have a primarily educational character, the Klankenbos collection is targeted at a broad audience of art lovers, schools and families.

**Sound Factory**

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

In contrast to the Klankspeeltuin, the operation of the Sound Factory is not restricted to workshops. Instead, the Sound Factory is open six days a week and is run by Musea Bruges. It is the intention of the Concertgebouw to reach a broader target group than the Klankspeeltuin, although the workshops are currently only organised for participants up to the age of 18 (Vanacker, 2012).

The Concertgebouw also aims to create more coherence between their concert programme and the Sound Factory by integrating sound works into their festivals where possible. Sound Factory is not the first endeavour by the Concertgebouw in the world of sound art. In 2003 Edgard Varèse’s Poème Electronique was permanently installed in the highest layer of the building.
Belgium has quite a few sound trails that present sound art in an urban environment. These include both one-off events such as the .WAV project in Bruges in 2002 as well as the yearly sound trails in Kortrijk and Mons.

**Sounding City**

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

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

From the first edition onwards Happy New Ears has invested in the ideal presentation of the selected works by acoustically isolating the exhibition spaces as much as possible from each other (Fonteyne, 2012). For the period 2005-2008 Happy New Ears also made an appeal to Interreg subsidies to finance sound works and concerts in Kortrijk and Lille, a sequel to Audioframes. In Kortrijk the sound works were no longer presented in one location. Instead, under the designation Sounding City, they were spread throughout the city centre of Kortrijk. The exhibition transformed into a sound trail.

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

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

The Flanders Festival Kortrijk is also a partner in Resonance, a platform for exchanging expertise and supporting new sound art in the form of performances and documentation. The festival also aims to invest in permanent audio walks. David Helbich will present his new audio walk in 2013. His audio walk and an updated version of the audio walk created by Christina Kubisch for Happy New Ears 2007 will be permanently available in the near future from Kortrijk’s tourist office (Fonteyne, 2012).

**City sonic(s)**

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

Most art centres, workshops and festivals focusing on experimental music or media art and concert organisations focusing on experimental music have occasionally presented sound works. Festivals such as Artefact (Leuven), Ars Musica (Brussels), the former November Music (Ghent), Oorsmeer (Ghent), the former MAIS (Brussels), Verbindingen/Jonctions (Brussels), Courtisane (Ghent) and Citimacs (Brussels) have presented sound art as part of their programme. Since 2011 the festival La Semaine du Son is organised in Brussels (La Semaine du Son, 2012). In 2003 the Flanders Festival Ghent organised the sound art exhibition Strings²⁹.

Art centres such as the Vooruit in Ghent, Argos in Brussels, STUK in Leuven, Netwark in Adst, and Z33 and België in Hasselt sporadically pay attention to sound art. Since 2006 workshop QO-2 has focused on experimental contemporary music and sound art. QO-2 regularly offers sound artists residencies and exhibits sound works. (Eckhart, 2012) With support from the European Commission, QO-2 and its partners have set up Sounds of Europe, a project around field recordings (Sounds of Europe, s.d.).

Since its creation in 1996, Transcultures has given residencies to sound artists. After the launch of City Sonic(s) this support became more intense. Since 2010 Transcultures is in charge of European Pépinières²⁶ for young artists for the French speaking community in Belgium and also supports other European programmes (Franck, 2012). The Centre Henri Pousseur in Liège offers occasional technical support to sound artists (Berthet, 2012).

Concert organisations such as Les Halles de Schaarbeek²⁷, now extinct Cling Film²⁸, Kraak²⁹ and Les Ateliers Claus regularly present sound works alongside concerts of experimental music. Metaphon, an organisation founded by members of Noise-Maker’s Fifes after the death of Geert Feytens, has organised a series of performances by sound artists playing on home-built instruments²⁷ (Metaphon, 2012).

When Brussels, in 2000, and Bruges, in 2002, were the cultural capital of Europe, specific sound art events were organised. During Brussels 2000, Yves Poliart initiated the Nemo project which brought together artists from Belgium, France and the Netherlands³⁰ who played home-made instruments. Baudouin De Jaer created a composition for these unique instruments. The project was repeated in Ghent at the Vooruit in 2001. The audience could play most of the instruments after the performance.

In Bruges the .WAV²² sound trail was organised. Cling Film organised a sound installation at Kaapstad with 30 national and international artists³¹. Kraak²⁹ and Cling Film presented performances and sound works on the Stubnitz boat and at De Republiek, in the context of the .WAV festival.

GALLERIES AND MUSEUMS

Belgian museums and galleries only occasionally venture into the presentation of sound art. Contemporary art museums and galleries presenting sound art are still an exception.² Even fewer museums include sound works in their permanent collection. Some museums have organised an exhibition focusing on sound such as Images du Son³³ at Espace Nord 251 in Liège, Beeldende Muziek³⁴ at the Provinciaal Museum Hasselt or Nature et Sons³⁵ at the Château de Senelle, but those remain exceptions.

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

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

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

EDUCATION

Sound artists have very diverse backgrounds. Whereas in painting the majority of the artists have a background in visual arts, this parallel cannot be drawn with sound art. It is rare for an educational institution to organise the course sound art and to deliver – once graduated – sound artists.³⁶ This sparsely available schooling has contributed to the fact that since its origin the background and education of sound artists has been very divergent.

This diversity is not only caused by the lack of available education, but also has a lot to do with the nature of the art form. Sound art is not a trade that can be taught. Its manifestations are extremely diverse, from mechanically moving sculptures to home-made software. Sound art invokes all sorts of disciplines and many trades can be involved. Although some conservatories⁷⁷ and universities⁶⁰ in Belgium are or were equipped with electronic music studios, the border with other art forms such as visual arts is rarely crossed. In art schools more experiment seems to be present.³⁸ Although no Bachelor’s or Master’s degree in sound art is available in Belgium, the art form does get attention in some courses ⁵¹. However, this is often not structurally embedded in the syllabus and content largely depends on the teacher.

Some schools offering part-time education³¹ give courses in experimental music. The content of these courses does however depend too strongly on the teacher.

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

Notes

1 Many sound works make use of field recordings for example, but this does not imply that field recordings in themselves can be labelled sound art.
2 The exposition Four environments by four new realists in Sidney Janis Gallery in 1964 did not present, as the title seems to suggest, any environments (Reiss, 1999).
3 In 1996 Cling Film records released the tape Wasserturm by Brussels based collective Noise-Maker’s Fifes. The release contained a recording of the first installation by Noise-Maker’s Fifes, set up inside a dam in Eupen (27th April 1996). The tape was re-released on cd in 2005 on the band’s own label MFT productions. Brussels based Sub Rosa released various cds with recordings of sound works. In 2010 the cd extended four-
The bike of each cyclist is converted into a musical instrument. A loudspeaker attached to a bicycle tire emits sound waves which are picked up by an acoustic sensor. The sound waves are then transmitted to a computer, which processes the data. The processed data is then used to control the sound waves, which are then amplified and played through a loudspeaker. The result is a unique sound experience that is specific to each cyclist's movement.
DANCES WITH ROBOTS
AND THE SONG OF ALGORITHMS

Mattias Parent & Maarten Quanten

ON A FEW FLEMISH COMPOSERS BETWEEN MUSIC AND TECHNOLOGY

“The springs of the human machine are such that all the vital, animal, natural, and automatic motions are carried on by their action. In a purely mechanical way the eyelids are lowered at the menace of a blow and the pupil contracts in broad daylight to save the retina, the pores of the skin close in winter so that the cold cannot penetrate to the interior of the blood.”
The twentieth century in music is almost unthinkable without electricity. This controlled physical phenomenon contributed to radio, brought about a revolution in sound recording and reproduction, and made electronic sound production possible. The mutual influence of music and technology has of course existed for centuries. Bone flutes had to be carved, all kinds of membranes needed to be made supple and then stretched taut. Max Reger's organ works would have been radically different without pneumatic tracker action, and the Gesang der Jünglinge is unimaginable without a tape recorder and pulse generator. In many cases, new forms of musical expression have only been able to emerge thanks to technological developments occurring outside the specific artistic context. Think, for example, of the automated instruments originally intended to reproduce existing music but simultaneously bearing the potential to transcend certain motor characteristics of the human performer. Conlon Nancarrow made use of this in conceiving his hyper-complex Studies for Player Piano, whereas composers such as Igor Stravinsky were also interested in the mechanical quality of automated music, which implied freedom from human expression. The machines heralded a new aesthetic that superseded their original reason for being built. A somewhat more recent example can be found in the electronic studios where high-tech electro-acoustic measurement and recording apparatus was used non-idiomatically to generate, modulate and combine synthetic sounds. These procedures were used, for example, to realise the radically multiple serialist ideas of composers such as Karel Goeyvaerts and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Once electronic music had become a fairly established phenomenon – from the early 1960s onwards – engineers and physicists were also brought in to develop specific apparatus intended to generate electronic sound complexes. The Institute for Psycho-acoustics and Electronic Music (IPEM) in Ghent is a perfect example. This was where the engineer Walter Landrieu built several analogue sequencers for a university ‘research and development’ project that were intended to automate some of the highly labour-intensive studio work. In doing so he collaborated closely with composer Lucien Gaethals, who was familiar with the musical context and was making further explorations in that area (Landrieu and Goethals, 1973, p. 71-99).

Humans used the machine to create sounds and larger musical structures that had not existed until that moment, a practice that corresponded perfectly with the post-war artistic attitude that radically focused on innovation. Nonetheless, two tendencies in the artistic approach to new technology can be discerned, be it a little crudely. For example, there were composers such as Louis De Meester who used the equipment in a way that did not greatly differ conceptually from the familiar acoustic instruments. They integrated electronic sounds into their musical idiom (which was already more or less developed), although they did not necessarily try to imitate traditional instruments. For others, the specific principles of sound synthesis and compilation techniques led to a fundamental renewal of their thinking on musical structures and forms. Gottfried Michael Koenig described such artistic methods in several of his texts on early electronic musical practice (Koenig, 1964, p. 288-293). Configuring the instruments was not just an incidental technical job like tuning a piano: the technical experiment was intimately linked to the exploration of the musical material, composition and playing – a symbiosis of science and art. Orderings of electronic sound that refrained from any experimentation easily led to synthetic mimesis of instrumental music and its techniques. Karel Goeyvaerts, however, initially focused on the sine tone generator and tape recorder because he believed technology would offer him a solution to aesthetic problems he did not think he could solve with traditional instruments and musicians. Take his complex serial work structures and their reflection in sound structures, for example, and his search for ‘static music’. Goeyvaerts composed his Nummer 4 voor dode tonen in December 1952,
in the period when Stockhausen was creating his Konkrete Etüde during his internship with Pierre Schaeffer in Paris. Number 4 was the first multiple serial work to use exclusively synthetic sounds, but then the problem of actually making it arose. The trouble was that Goeyvaerts could not get permission to experiment at the Belgian radio studios. After all, Belgium had no Herbert Eimert at the time to plead the case at the large institutions for taking such new artistic directions.

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

Lucien Goethals experimented with synthetic sound production and modulation and contributed, as already said, to the automation of the IPEM studio. In 1966 he wrote and created a noteworthy serial electronic work, Contrapuntos. Its sound complexes are an example of musical structures that arose from the protocols of the studio – ears technologica. Short, raw sound particles (sine waves, square waves, noise but also samples of piano clusters) are combined into electronic Klanggestalte that are easiest to describe in terms of forms of movement or tendencies in frequency space. In that sense Goethals’ music is clearly related to the electronic group and field compositions by people such as Stockhausen and Koenig. However the work demonstrates an idiom of Goethals’ own, infused with a modern but sensual use of counterpoint. Contrapuntos consists of twelve layers of material mixed in a stereo version. This electro-counterpoint technique – the synchronisation of “monophonic” layers into a “polyphonic” whole – was also a necessity in the studios and encouraged composers to shape their music on the basis of such production methods and protocols. In itself of course this would not be particularly remarkable, were it not for the fact that Goethals also made a version of the work in which layers of material (or collections of such layers) were played on separate tape recorders. Switching the machines on or off was moreover done with signals from photo-electrical cells that reacted to the movements of concert-goers walking around. Goethals had created an interactive installation that generated an aleatoric, spatial counterpoint.

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Godfried-Willem Raes founded the Logos group in 1968 in Ghent, along with several other students who shared his views. Even back then he was a ferocious opponent of the ‘conserving’ mentality of Ghent Conservatory and developed into a militant advocate of musical innovation. In Raes’ eyes, aesthetics were and are inextricably linked to a wider ethical and political reality. His own experimental artistic orientation developed in parallel with certain anarchist and Marxist political ideas. In that sense the Logos group was related to the British Scratch Orchestra and its members performed music by, for example,
Cornelius Cardew, Christian Wolff and Mauricio Kagel. Although Raes currently works as a lecturer in composition at Ghent Conservatory, he was thrown out of the institute for refusing to engage with old music. This radicalism was closely intertwined with an intense interest in technology that he used as a means for and object of artistic experimentalism. In the 1970s, this interest was mainly translated into an exploration of electronic sound production. It is striking that Raes – just like Michel Waisvisz in the Netherlands and Hugh Davies in England – soon began designing and building his own instruments, sound sculptures and installations. That practice became an integral part of his artistic activity. The medium of sound sculpture straddles the border between construction, composition and music-making. The direct interaction between the audience and the installations, and the disappearance of the dividing lines between stage and audience also represented an artistic materialisation of Raes’ political ideas. Thus he also questions the strict division between musical amateurism and professionalism, for example. What is less obvious is that his stage instruments also have formal characteristics shaped by ideology. An example here would be his Synthelogs series (1976), consisting of small analogue synthesizers. They do not have piano keyboards, because he believes that a keyboard would impose the logarithmic division of the octave, as the symbol of old and commercialised music, on the musician.

Godfried-Willem Raes’ relationship with means of electronic sound production is a complex one. On the one hand, technology provided an obvious area of experimentation for a composer whose artistic thinking was self-evidently progressive, and who moreover displayed an explicit passion for and knowledge of engineering sciences. On the other hand, we note a disappointment in the medium that we would like to sketch briefly here in three points of concern.

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

It may be clear that Raes’ aesthetic ideals are a far cry from the modernist aspiration towards new sound complexes, as was customary at analogue electronic studios such as the IPEM. His criticism of electronic sounds and equipment was inextricably linked to his compositional and/or instrument-building concepts. For example, he viewed the Synthelogs explicitly as ‘magic boxes’ and the demystification of the equipment and sound sculptures occurred when the audience touched and played with them. Raes continued to use electronics, but only in work involving explicit caricatureization: as a soundtrack to political cartoons (mocking the establishment), for example. However, many of his instruments, installations, sculptures and performances are based on acoustic sound producers (e.g. the Pneumaphone Project, see photo) or electronics with highly intuitive or physical characteristics. The Symphony for Singing Bicycles (1976), for example, is to be performed by cyclists whose bicycle is fitted with an electronic oscillator driven by a dynamo. This composition/performance/installation is suffused with Raes’ aesthetic. It is performed in public spaces, by professional or non-professional musicians or even non-musicians. Sounds, clusters and gestures arise that do not conform to the (unwritten) laws of what is normally heard in public spaces (i.e. muzak). The electronic sounds are raw, naked, divested of invisible and mystifying modulations or transformations and connected to the physical gesture of cycling, the translation of pedalling speed into a frequency. A number of Raes’ instruments are designed as ‘electrical’ and not ‘electronic’ for exactly that reason. In this context we mean by that that the musician touches an object leading to the material and/or surrounding air being made to vibrate. The latter is then converted using transducers (pick-ups, air and contact microphones) into an electrical vibration pattern whose acoustic manifestation is a direct consequence of the physical contact between the musician and the instrument.

The fusion of aesthetic innovation and technology in Raes’ work is also reflected in his composition process. He developed algorithms for this early on. After all, one could claim that the creative act of composing, in the eyes of the composer, is far less a matter of merely executing and varying a system of rules than intervening in and developing the rules that connect sounds for a composition or group of compositions. This is why the young Raes opposed conservatory practices such as tonal harmonics, classical counterpoint and traditional fugue techniques that hinder free creative think-
ing and result in a mixture of academicism and craftsmanship. This is also where his distaste for modernist composers lurks, who tried to develop new ‘big systems’ that would apply across the board (e.g. certain approaches in multiple serialism or spectrum). Raes’ Book of Fugues (1992–1993) is a good example of a formalised collection of artistic ideas that can theoretically generate countless compositions. A computer programme like this one incorporates composition, perhaps it even is the composition; it contains a systematised aesthetic that can be infinitely materialised in the form of numerous variations. The craftsmanship in composing work is contracted out to machines, humans determine the creative rules and musical foundations (such as how the chords are related to the key). Technology is a liberating force here, ensuring that humans only need to concern themselves with the typically human aspect of artistic production – creation instead of mere variation. The task of human musicians in the situation described above is limited to programming the automata. They disappear from the stage, their physical actions and musical movements are no longer relevant. However it was not Raes’ intention to make human musicians disappear; on the contrary. The interaction between human and machine has even become one of the central aspects of his artistic work in the last few decades. More specifically, he has developed interfaces that convert movements or sounds into commands for the robots (projects such as Hex, Holosound and Namouda). This artistic practice, too, can be seen as a criticism of the overruling Western music culture that is almost completely materialised in the form of numerous variations. The principle of automation did not only interest conservative musical education. This is related to the fact that it makes certain of their assumptions as the composer: philosophy becomes politics becomes technology becomes music. The ‘dancing musician’ can play a whole orchestra at once, his or her actions no longer limited to the single instrument whose characteristics have been intensively internalised over decades. Once again, the dividing line blurs in Raes’ musical culture between the professional and the amateur. The ‘instrument’ moreover incorporates the score (or part of it). After all, the composer creates an algorithm that describes the reactions of the robots to the movements of the performer. The latter improvises, dances a choreography or does both, and the role of performer may even be taken on by the audience if the machines are set up as an installation.

In the 1950s, electronic technology promised to open up a whole new creative world of sound. As time progressed, composers gained ever-increasing control over the pixels of music, the atoms of sound. The musical avant-garde developed an unprecedented interest in technology, an artistic rocket that would carry them up out of the traditional Western aesthetics. Many of us have already connected serial aesthetics, the general rationalism and progress-based thinking of the 1950s and a form of ‘post-Auschwitz’ ethics. The development of unheard musical structures, work forms and sound forms belonged in that context. When Herman Van San said that he wanted to rid music of emotion and infuse it with mathematical rationality, he was invoking a far wider, shared current of thinking. Such aesthetic ideas bear witness on the one hand to a rejection (to a certain extent) of old norms (or at least the reproduction of these norms), and on the other hand they express hope for a future in which the formal beauty of structures that were traditionally ‘non-musical’ could become musical – electrons and algorithms, quantum mechanics. Musical expression, here, demands from its audience a far-reaching empathy with otherness as a condition for communication. In this context aesthetics are anything but detached from life, even if they perhaps take on an unprecedented form of sensual stubbornness. Or to put it in the words of Gottfried Michael Koenig:

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

Godfried-Willem Raes’ artistic production is explicitly infused with ideology at many levels. His multifaceted work is political, and hence so is the constantly present technology, although he does not always entirely affirm this. Technology, the machine, frees humans from their limits, through its interfaces becomes an extension of their limbs, vocal cords and maybe other organs as well. These interfaces and algorithms ensure in turn that the performer has access to a whole array of instruments, and that the classical virtuoso
no longer takes central stage. Technology changes and/or renews musical culture, and is formally grafted onto Raes’ social and artistic ideals.

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

It is striking in Prins’ early work that communication, interaction and symbiosis between human and technological systems is not only a means or an instrument for creating musical structures, but also a basic conceptual principle. Initially the composer noted the very close intertwining of humanity and the machine in today’s world and has subsequently made it a theme of his work. The computer is all but omnipresent, influencing the thoughts and actions of their host. Although this is not a case of a fundamental, or even partial evaluation of ‘good’ and ‘evil’, criticism (from the arts world) is self-evident here. This is because the individual’s autonomy seems to be affected, especially if we view the human subject through a romantic/modernist (including Marxist) lens. There is certainly a dose of criticism present in Prins’ work, but the last thing he does is to express this by avoiding technology or aiming for ultimate control of the alien system by ‘naturalising’ it further towards humanity, removing the friction. Rather he creates an artificial mirror of that field of tension by transforming the relationships and mechanisms inside it into musically fertile structures and processes. In Not I for electric guitar (2007) for example, the composer plays with the alienating effect that live electronics can have on the auditory result of the performer’s physical gestures, the non-analogue relationship between touching strings and the sound result that the listener (and performer) associate with that action. The soloist, performing a monologue, loses subjective autonomy – just like the female protagonist of Samuel Beckett’s Not I (1973) – as another voice, another perspective, breaks in and takes over. He and she are forced into alterity, the ‘i’ into the ‘not i’. In conceptualising the piece for ensemble Fremdkörper I (2008), written for a concert programme on the theme of Entarte Musik, Prins explicitly links the technological ‘foreign body’ with the cultural and social ‘other’. Each instrument is amplified using a guitar amplifier that is also connected to a computer with pre-recorded, electronically processed material from the same instrument. When the performer is playing, the alien (or alienated?) digital sound producer (or reproducer) is silent; when the performer stops, the technological body immediately forces its way through the amplifier via an electrical signal. The two worlds, that of the flesh, with sounds linked to physical and visible action, and that of sublimated, reproduced and transformed sounds, interpenetrate each other. They move between heterogeneity and fusion in a sound world in which alterity is anything but exclusively linked to one of the systems and whose borders can moreover blur. In Infiltrationen (Memory space #4) (2009) for four electric guitars and live electronics, the phenomenon of technological infiltration is linked to the idiosyncrasies of the human brain, more specifically memory. The score is generated during the performance by a computer algorithm and contains musical tasks for the musicians to perform. The guitarists can give signals to the algorithmic network, react to what is happening and thus direct the musical ‘game’ for themselves and the others – humans appear to be the masters of technology and intervene creatively in the art work. But the symbiosis is more complex than that. The computer commands the musicians to remember certain actions and then recall them later. Here technology determines human activity and at the slightest hesitation – as in Fremdkörper – it takes over from the musicians: it controls, evaluates and intervenes. The computer appears here as the superior entity in terms of processing speed and memory, and humans have to adjust to technological nature. The basic conceptual principles – though not their development – are related here to Raes’ claims for the role of the machine in a creative context. The mere search for new sounds is something Prins has long since left behind. New times create new challenges.

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There is one thing that Goeyvaerts, Van San, Goethals, Raes and Prins have in common: they are not satisfied with the state of things as they are. From their observation of the world and music they extend, add, change, contemplate, question and communicate. In their music, they reflect the newest world in all its complexity, its possibilities, paradoxes and uncertainties – both using and commenting on technology.

Note

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

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In the beginning: the computer and music software made to transform sound, rhythms, and patterns. In the beginning: turntables, mixer, and vinyl discs touched, glued, scratched. In the beginning: sound matter, fragment, sample, beat, ‘click’, accident… then the loop, sequence, pattern, mix… From these multiple electro-organic elements emerge mobile and fluid sound architectures. Frozen on pause at a moment of assumed instability, they are the smallest molecule or simply adding, subtracting or modifying their components.

This art of re/mix is not limited to the DJ, whose practice it is. It has become a method pertaining to the very creation of the living sound organism. Hence, what is recorded, then offered to the public domain often is a choice among tens of different versions, and other choices are bound to be issued on various media, remixed by the same or by others. This second level of sound processing can be denominated differently. Depending on the degree and type of processing, it can be called ‘remix’ (creation of remix albums, the essential maxi following the single, or even as a bonus, generally offered at the end of the original album), ‘reconstruction’ (such as the producer-musician Bill Laswell at the mixing table, gathering 25 years later some of Miles Davis’ most famous compositions from 1969 to 1974, and offering with the album titled Panthallas, an ‘emotional chaining’ by selecting and highlighting certain elements instead of others, creating a sort of respectful introduction to Miles’ psychedelic period), or in ‘revisitation’ as in Maximin (Young God Records, 2002) where Jean-Marie Mathoul and David Coulter borrowed, with his permission, long excerpts of Charlemagne Palestine’s original compositions and added subtle elements that melt into the maxi/minimalist master’s universe, left intact, while respecting his spirit and original sources.

Some, including Bill Laswell, dare using the word ‘translation’, that of a musical source into any esthetic creation (ambient, dub, etc.). In any case, we switch from the notion of original creation to the concept of transformation and reinterpretation using a variable process, placed in the foreground by electronic creation.1 This art of linking, switching, recycling, circulating, and commuting is now integrated into daily practice and is subject to market expectations and pressure (in search of ‘novelty’ or ‘new versions’). A ‘viral art’ revealing a viral society, which contaminates genres, cultures, and media in an endemic, endless continuum; one remix after the other, the source is diluted, mutated, and mixed with other organisms for further reproduction.

This art of flow, ‘deteritorialized’, gives birth to a nomad body made of multiple, variable, parasitic, residual matters… resulting in arrangements described by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in Mille Plateaux,2 a ‘reflection of flow and fold’ continuously reread and re-mixed and an inspiration for numerous electronic projects and musicians. In the same spirit are ‘organized’ Folds et rhizomes3, released by Sub Rosa immediately after his death and including young ‘electronic musicians’ selected by the wild herb philosopher (Scanner, David Shea, Mouse on Mars, Oval, Main, Tobias Hazan), and the double CD titled In memoriam Gilles Deleuze, the founding piece of the Mille Plateaux label managed by the Frankfurt philosopher Achim Szepanski (including, among others, the aforementioned, along with DJ Spooky, Jim O’Rourke, Atom Heart, and numerous figures who since then have become major actors in these lush rhizomatic fields). Without Deleuze’s ‘tune’, Sub Rosa, Mille Plateaux and many other independent record labels, valued sound labs for today’s researchers would likely not have developed into their current state.

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

SUBVERSION OF THE INFRA-THIN

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

In his notes, Marcel Duchamp describes the infra-thin as a “possibility with a future”, “switching from one to the other precisely being the place of infra-thin.”4 Infra-thin is used by the ‘bearers of shadow’, an anonymous society represented by these sources of light. Some electronic music genres utilize these infra-thins which
can be heard in negative format, between two clicks, between two layers, between two grooves, between needle and vinyl, between mouse and screen, between bass and drum. Sceali, Cage, Feldman also ‘materialized’ the infrathin in their music of silence. Ryjoi Ikeda clearly isolates it between two abyssal pulsations and infra-bass, while Terre Thaelmiz uses it in a concept album (Interstices, Mille Plateaux, 2001) that delivers slices of insidious ‘muzак’, an essentially catchall, tasteless genre in disturbing segments, a manifestation of claimed radical queer approach that sees identity as ‘an information strategy rather than an end point for essential truth’. David Toop tracks it between two signs of nocturnal life (37th Floor of Sunset-Music for Manophrenic, Sub Rosa, 2000) turned into a vast installation in which the British anthropologist-technologist acts as a sound voyeur while Scanner blurs the limits between private and public life by integrating in his digital net cellular interceptions of the place where he stands. A city monitored, scanned 24/7 to which these audio-voyeurs attempt to return its elusive soul using sound instants, fragments of ‘found poetry’.

**RECOMPOSING GEOSONIC ITINERARIES AND TRANSCULTURAL ACTIVISM**

The sound flows redesign forgotten natural links, highlight others unknown until today by investing, for the time of an action-creation, other geographies and other cultures. This is how Charlemagne Palestine, a New-York Jew of Russian origin, subtly mixes, in Jamaican Heiniekens in Brooklyn (Baroni, 1998) the anthropologic recording of a ceremony including Jamaicans, Cubans and Dominicans in Brooklyn with a quasi idle synthetic drone (but the art of the quivering resides in this ‘quasi’) to take us in a slow trance to the limits of the sacred, the pagan, and the schizo. Likewise, Walking in Jerusalem (Mille Plateaux, 2002) by Random Inc, part poetic documentary, part ballad, and part film noir based on recordings made in Jerusalem, or Lune Lume (Staubgold, 2000), a soundtrack for the Danube composed by the Romanian violinist Alexander Balanescu (in collaboration with artists from the German, Austrian, and Italian electronic scene) broadcasted in the Linz Klangpark during the Ars Electronica Festival. Other itinerant creations have proved more committed. In Plunderphonics 96 (Seeland, 1996), John Oswald, a member of the activist collective Negativeland, deconstructs, using wild audio-collages, 30 years of rock history and creates a zapped Frankenstein. With Second nature (Mille Plateaux, 1999), Ultra Red created an ‘electroacoustic pastoral’ in Los Angeles’ Griffith Park occupied by homosexuals previously expelled by the police; an ode to a threatened libertarian ‘playground’. (Emotional multiculturalism, militant multiculturalism stimulated by NICIs and their use in musical creation, without hymn or flag except that of minority voices and of the right to universal singularity.

**IDENTITY NOMADISM**

Most electronic nomads who ignore the genre borders own more than one passport. We see an inflation of identities, pseudonyms and hide-and-seek games. Well-ranked in the hit parade of electro-(multi)schizos, Atom Heart, previously known as Lassigge Benthaxis (the name used for his techno productions) became Senor Coconut for a latino version of a Kraftwerk standard, before morphing into Geez’n’gosh for a ‘gospel’n’cut’ album (Nobody knows, Mille Plateaux, 2001). The prolification of disposable names results in corrupting the disc market by flooding it with productions (to this day, Atom produced over 40 albums under various labels) and creates a form of freedom, preventing excessive determinism relative to the evolution of these jousts, the ephemeral encounter of two organisms that refuse to merge and generate a third, parallel channel. Co-presentation, in/comunicating cohabitations or rubbing, clicking, sparks… connections most often devoid of fusion, episodic linking.

The magic of these improvisation moments that generated new dynamism to live creation, occasionally evoking free-jazz (clicking of samurai knives with Ottoma Yoshohide, Philip Jeck and Martin Tétreault) where video games combine experimental and playful dimensions in a sound happening, confrontations seen and heard by a passive audience, that result in a long drift by some accomplished ‘electronicautistics’. Ultimately, those are only confronted with themselves. Rather than choosing any piece from Folds & rhizomes, Oval choses, for his remix of his de-leuzian successor, Double articulation (Sub Rosa, 1996) to download all other participants in the album to recreate a perfectly homogenous continuum. Whether he grabs other sources or uses his own, it always results in a autoremix (whether a 1976 electro-acoustic essay by Henri Pousseur or an electro-jazzy piece by Squarepusher blended through his ‘Oval Process’, it mutates again and only into an ‘ovallian’ flow.

**ESTHETICS OF CONFRONTATION**

Urban nomads without any community other than virtual, without any god or nostalgia, unattached ‘isolationists’, free electronists who meet in networks and enjoy friendly, creative confrontation: Scanner versus Kim Cascone, Kim Cascone versus Keith Rowe, Ryjoi Ikeda versus Carsten Nicolai/Alva Noto (aka Cyclco), Carsten Nicolai versus Ryuichi Sakamoto, Janek Schaefer versus Robert Hampson/Main (aka Comea), Main versus Jim O’Rourke, O’Rourke versus Fennes and Rherberg (compression of these three personalities into a three-headed Hydra called Fenneberg), Rherbeg versus Bauer, etc. the associative chain is long.

The art of confrontation, of the ‘versus’, opposing/linking two entities, two or more universes collating, temporarily mixing while never losing their individuality that is fortified in these jousts, the ephemeral encounter of two organisms that refuse to merge and generate a third, parallel channel. Co-presentation, in / communicating cohabitations or rubbing, clicking, sparks… connections most often devoid of fusion, episodic linking.

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**AN ADVENTUROUS CONFRONTATION BETWEEN SOUND GENRES AND WORLDS**

To inaugurate the ‘electro-contempo’ series, the classical, non-conventional composer Jean-Paul Dessy (Musiques Nouvelles) selects sequences and sounds suggested by Scanner who in London samples cello parts played for the occasion. The next step is the writing by Jean-Paul Dessy in Brussels and exchanging emails, comments back and forth over the Channel. A few weeks later, they meet onstage at the Botanique in Brussels during the ‘electro-contempo’ weekend with a Musiques Nouvelles string quartet. The following year, a CD called Play Along (Sub Rosa) completed with other pieces borrowed here and there or personally arranged continued this collaboration. A successful ping pong game compared to many failed transgender attempts, between two sensitivities, different backgrounds who, while totally remaining true to themselves and each with their knowledge, languages, and instruments, invented a new mode of crossed creation and composition while avoiding overlapping.

We know that the electronic music generation that emerged in the nineties enthusiastically rediscovered the pioneers of concrete music (Pierre Schaeffer, Pierre Henry, as well as Luc Ferrari, Eliane Radigue, etc.) and the great masters who amazed us so much. (Stockhausen remixed despite of himself, Xenakis with, among
A VIRAL ART

REVEALING A VIRAL SOCIETY

Modern Art Museum in Luxembourg, Pan Sonic tamed by Charlemagne Palestine for a recording of Mort aux vaches at VPRO, the Dutch radio, the pioneer-poet of electro-acoustic music Leo Kupper at Théâtre Mercelis (Ixelles/Brussels) playing like a naughty little boy at throwing his MIDI sounds in the middle of the Brussels turntablism duo Géographique, and Janek Schaefer with his two-arm ‘twin turntable’. Also, the composer Henri Pousseur, fellow traveller of Berio and Butor, whose visionary electronic work is joyfully re-discovered and who accepted that Robert Hampson (Main), Philip Jeck and Oval play their personal versions of his 8 Études paraboliques, initially recorded at WDR (Cologne) live at the Botanique (Brussels) in 1972. By the way, it should be noted that this was not a remix in today’s sense but rather another mix, since the sound journey is constructed from the principle of mixing and modulating initial sources.

The confrontation also happens between musicians and artists from other disciplines (multiple encounters that should be analyzed in a separate article) with electronic media as common point: multimedia artist (Scanner and Tonne, with both dimensions potentially coexisting within the same person), choreographer, writer-performer (the duet between electro-guitar player Richard Pinhas, and Maurice Dantec, author of Babylone Babies, both influenced by deleuzian teachings), or visual (performances by Thomas Koner with his compatriot Jurgen Reble, film alchemist, or with the French experimental filmmaker Yann Beauvais). Despite its potential, the confrontation between live sound and image, increasingly present and almost mandatory today (among other reasons, to deal with the unspectacular austerity of the experimental electronic scene) remains problematic and, in many cases, frustrating. The appeal of images, even when poor, tends to obliterate the musical dimension. Today, the really successful interactions and collaborations requiring not only time but also understanding of media specificities and protagonists’ universes are much more rare than hasty juxtapositions and editing between wall-paper effect, graphics and MTV-style melting pot. Other audio-iconic attempts (although a minority, but one can hope since this issue of the image-sound interaction and that of new representation modes are the object of numerous debates) fortunately emerge from these much too recurrent schemes. Among others, Sounds and Visions of Imaginary Cities, a truly nomad project that revitalizes the [now too] conventional DJ-VJ formula, starting from an original urban sound database recorded on vinyl by DJ Olive and an image database on imaginary cities simultaneously mixed for a given time, by electronic musicians (Charlemagne Palestine, who was the DJ for this project, only relied on turntable speed, and Boris Polanski who lacerated and tore vinyl discs to modify their sounds), and video artists. Other, more ambitious projects, integrate music and multimedia dimension to create ‘electronic’ or ‘virtual’ operas (a never-ending return to the fantasy of Wagner’s total art). Here also, we see that the musical dimension is often relegated to a form of emphasis of often-impressive iconic devices that obliterate, with heavy use of technology, the stage and, too often, the meaning.

The vocabulary used by today’s music critics and sound investigators has many common terms with that of visual artists: matter, texture, layer, volume, etc. This lexicon is the foundation of a practice that works sound as a visual material, using software or, directly on the medium by physically altering vinyl to distort, scratch or destroy it as does Christian Marclay, the herald of so-called ‘actionist turntable’ as well as on the CD as does the California collective DISC who, starting from the principle that there are too many CDs in the world, tries to remedy this situation by torturing them with anything they find before ‘composing’ a piece made of scratches, jumps and repeated tracks, and accelerated buzzing. Numerous artists, today known as musicians used to be (and remain, directly or indirectly, true to their approach) visual artists (Philip Jeck, DJ Olive, Christian Marclay, Christina Kubish, etc.), architects (Janek Schaefer) or even landscape designers (Carsten Nicolai). Since the space dimension prevails...
over time considerations in electronic music, they immediately felt comfortable in this discipline.

With Sound Art (a hybrid genre including various practices involving space and sound art), that produced many musicians, visual artists as well as designers, poets, performers, etc.), sound enters other spaces, not directly dedicated to music, museums and exhibits, increasingly attracted to these invisible volumes, urban spaces, transportation, public broadcasting systems “misused” for the time of the event. Sound trajectories and masses are “projected” in space by the creator/engineer/space specialist: an intended ‘poésiation’ of noise, using sound calligraphy: visual sound, and sound vision, sound staging, film for the ears, and invisible soundtracks.

REINVENTING THE LISTENING EAR

While hi-fi technologies strive for the most precise and encompassing finish, the most popular daily listening conditions are mediocre. As music broadcasting devices are made available to greater audiences, are more varied (CD player, Walkman, MP3 player, built-in hi-fi in cars, etc.) and allow for private, a la carte listening, we are no longer immersed in a sound universe with all the attention and availability it requires. Most times, we only hear music in an undifferentiated manner, mixed with other sound stimulations/pollutions, but we are not really listening. In this paradox, concerts or a new mode of music rendition could guarantee the survival of musical immersion. Today, there are several types of broadcasting spaces, calling for different listening modes:

— Musical environments: outdoor or indoor urban spaces, dispatching music or sound, in which the visitor comes and, eventually, stops for a generally limited time;
— Relaxation spaces: ‘chill out’ or ‘lounge’ spaces in which visitors are invited to relax, sit or lie comfortably, listening to the sound of a DJ mixing down tempo music;
— Places of architecture contemplation that speak to soul and spirit, with an encompassing, qualitative and precise approach of sound, which triggers full attention and availability of the listener;
— Performance venues: concert halls, most often still in a traditional frontal position. They are less and less suitable for experimental electronic creations, for their broadcasting tools, and for the non-spectacular character of their representation devices (admiring the artist’s forefront lit by his laptop screen, or his hand moving the mouse and, in a supreme releasing movement, his head nodding over a live ‘activated’ track);
— The nomad listening and listening types in polyphonic architectures such as a large festival dedicated to electronic music; the listener wanders easily, at his pace, from a ‘chill out’ space to an open-space or closed stage or to a more intimate space.

In the immediate future, we still need to (re) invent listening lounges, ‘sauna sonora’, ‘sonic gardens’, new temples dedicated to the gods of music (but they already exist…), and other spaces designed for active listening and sound experience.

WATER MUSIC

Sound object, sound sculpture, sound architecture… Electronic sounds are raw materials for visual and organic constructions. Following the visionary architect-theorist Markus Novac, inventor of liquid architecture, a ‘transarchitecture’, combining reality and virtuality, hardness and flexibility, masculine and feminine to create a third species”, we could pretend that electronic music, freed from the weight of academic or commercial dictates, would liquefy or fluidly even more with metadata exchanged in multiple networks with high speed variability. Digital music invades data sphere (or, is it the other way around?). Sound flows create mobile immaterial forms that populate various spaces and communication means, whether physical or virtual.

Sound architectures built on ‘floating foundations’ that resist earthquakes6 and adapt to fluctuations and chaos. Sound and music of impermanence in constant mutation… Water music flowing forever…

Notes
1 In his quest on relationships between “models of creativity broadcasted by digital technology” and the trauma, the architect Mark Goulthorpe speaks of “apparent break in the strategy of performance”, a change he describes as the ‘switch from a notion of original to the notion of transformation’, of which the most obvious effect is to use time as a creation element. (…) Transformation moves from original creation and disperses, its historical legitimacy (locked in a vertical temporal segment) among a now unlimited electronic horizon.”


3 Deleuze and Guattari mention Hüsserl who “discovered an area of material, vague essences, vagabond, anazaar, and still rigorous, as opposed to fixed, metric, formal essences. Such essences generate texture (materiality) with two characteristics: ‘first, it is inseparable from the passage to the limit as change of status of distortion and transformation happening in a space-time which itself is inexact, acting as events [removal, adjunction, projection, etc.]; second, it is inseparable from expressive or intensive qualities, capable of more or less, produced as variable affects (resistance, hardness, weight, color, etc.) Consequently, there is an ambivalent events-effects coupling constituting the vague body essence and distincs from the “fixed essence-resulting properties in the object”, “formal essence-formed object”.


5 The two of us wrote L’Anti-Oedipe together, since each of us was several persons, it made up a crowd. From this first sentence of Mille Plateaux, we imagined Sub Rosa. From the outset, we wanted to be something else than a label, maybe a machine made of rhizomes, peaks and grooves, real and excitement, illumination [why not], and maybe exasperation and doubt. That is how things are, the miracle of epiphany. Under the rose, the intimate word of friendship, something beautiful that comes back different. A pack who scatters, then regroups in a dark forest, a dry desert. (Except from insert notes of the Folds & rhyzomes CD, written in 1995 by Guy-Marc Honnorat, co-founder of Sub Rosa).

6 These artists and sound works, object of an increasing number of productions and publications, on a double CD titled Bitstreams, Sound Works from the Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, Whitney/Longwoods 2001.


8 Inspired by this concept of Frank Lloyd Wright and the principle of fluidity, the Sub Rosa label released three composite albums including abstract sound pieces with high visual dimension by, among others, Christophe Charlier, David Toop, Mark Cliftford, Stephan Vitale, Janez Schafer, C.M. Von Hauswoss (Floating Foundation, volume 1, 2, 3, Sub Rosa).
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According to certain sources Jelle Meander is a poet and a musicologist. He wonders what Khlebnikov meant with “scrape language and you will see space and its skin”.

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Prof. dr. em. **Herman Sabbe** was a professor at the Musicology department of the University of Ghent and the Université Libre in Brussels. His major book publications include Het Muzikale Serialisme als Techniek en Denkmethode (1977), monographs on Stockhausen (Karlheinz Stockhausen…wie die Zeit verging…, 1981) and Ligeti, and Stille Muziek! Een antropologie van de Westerse muziekcultuur (2003). Recently, he published a collection of scientific essays on music as an evolutionary adaptation under the title Homo Musicus (2010).

**Serge Verstocket** is a thoroughgoing exponent of modernism. He strongly endorses the new technologies, which he believes will lead to new ways of expression. He has systematically explored the possibilities of the computer. In recent years he has been active with computer graphics and video. His compositions are connected with various branches of the art world and he rejects being categorized solely in terms of the narrow music world. His works can better be understood as general ‘works of art’.
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