



DOSSIÊ COMPOSIÇÃO,
DRAMATURGIA E PERFORMANCE
NA MÚSICA-TEATRO PÓS-1960

LISTENING | THE OPEN – MUSIC AS
DISRUPTIVE TOPOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects on the relation between music body(ies)¹, body(ies) of music² and notions of musical ‘space-time’ in the composition and performance process of **Listening | the open, a trilogy for disruptive bodies**, by Joana Sá. Bringing into discussion new possible notions of space of music as both intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of music body(ies), and of the body(ies) of music, it proposes approaching music as a disruptive topology. Presenting strategies that are beyond the dualities of control/out of control, self/other, it emphasizes the fragment or fragmentation as a crucial basic topological event for triggering the musical processes.

Keywords: Listening | the open, Disruptive body, Music topology, Phantasmal space of music, Fragment.

1 In the context of this article, the music bodies assigned are mostly music-making bodies, instrumental bodies and listening bodies.

2 Music (just as text, notion of *work*, etc.) can be regarded as a body in the sense that it is constituted both by a semiotic/ organized/narrative realm and a non-semiotic/unorganized/ disruptive realm, as well as the tension(s) arising from this paradoxical co-existence of realms.

FOREWORD

LISTENING | THE OPEN – TRILOGY FOR DISRUPTIVE BODIES

Composed and performed by Joana Sá, this trilogy of 'solos' is characterized by its transversality, multi-dimensionality and its drive towards exploring threshold zones of the music-making and instrumental body(ies). Developed in collaboration with cinematographer/film director Daniel Costa Neves, it is composed by the pieces/performances through this looking glass (2010/11), for prepared piano, toy piano, electronics, recorded tape, mobile & props, In Praise of Disorder (2013) for semi-prepared piano, installation of bells and sirens, toy piano, noise boxes & recorded tape and Listening: the open (2016/?), for piano, resonant metal plates installation & recorded tape. All pieces of the trilogy premiered at Maria Matos Theatre, in Lisbon. through this looking glass was released in DVD+CD by German label Blinker, Marke für Rezentos

(2010/11), and *In Praise of Disorder* was released in CD by Portuguese label Shhpuma (2013). The trilogy *Listening | the open* is the subject of Joana Sá's PhD research at Aveiro University (grant from FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia).

LISTENING, OPENING

PRELUDE FOR LISTENING | THE OPEN

The unutterable mechanism of disruption is a central element for musical creation in this trilogy: how a body falls apart, or how a body, suddenly, unexpectedly pulls itself together, urges, focused, into a direction. It is all about the electrifying process that provokes this falling apart or pulling together of the body, an energetic process that could be triggered by what we conceive as a seismic fault line of the body, of the being or of the music. It is the scope of this seismic fault line, which can usually only be felt in musical microtime, that I seek to take as a neuralgic element in my musical approach. It is not possible to predict when it occurs, nor to have control over the experience. But I would say it is possible to develop an arousal of senses, a *listening* state, which can capture this imperceptible, but disruptive, vibration. A *listening* state, beyond perception³, which is simultaneously a trigger point and which can relate to this fault line, feeding back its signal and enlarging its power and its scope for the musical output. A musical approach that brings to the foreground this energetic process is one that does not focus on the stable 'music material', on the narrative or semiotic realm, but searches for meaning mainly through the 'in-between' possibilities of relation, the possibilities of *touch*⁴ that these energetic processes create.

This can all mean, in this context, that the strategy for shaping, or the strategy for musical creation itself can, ultimately, be reduced to our initial movements of *falling apart* and *pulling oneself together*, along with the idea of *seismic fault line*: a body moving, a body being a body, a body meaning a body. But, in all cases, a body, within its invisible shaping and tracing, its velocity beyond itself, and either its *areality*⁵ (Nancy) or its *virtuality*⁶ (Massumi) as well as its unperceivable but sensing trigger points. A body is not an inside, or a closed entity, and I would argue that neither is it just spreading to other entities. It is *the* spreading itself, it is *a point triggering itself, detonation*. It is therefore beyond gesture, as it is approached by actual musical gesture studies, and beyond the subjective narrative of performance studies. It is a beyond, which is simultaneously a within, having a potential for forging multi-dimensional shapes and further multi-dimensional senses. Everything is, in this context, neither about an organized body against an unorganized body, nor the opposite. This means we're not in a logic of the quest of an 'I' against the 'Self' represented

³ In spite of what terms such as 'beyond perception', 'intangibility', 'unutterable', etc. might suggest, *this article never references any kind of mystic intuition or mystic thought, or any 'natural' or 'raw' conception of the body*. 'Beyond perception' refers to processes observed and theorized by Brian Massumi (2002) that are too quick to be perceived. These processes are theorized as being *virtual* and as being a suspension of the dimension of narrative and significance. On this subject see note 6 and Massumi (2002).

⁴ *La loi du toucher, c'est la séparation, et plus encore c'est l'hétérogénéité des surfaces qui se touchent. Si «entrer en contact» c'est commencer à faire sens l'un pour l'autre, cette «entrée» ne pénètre dans rien, dans aucun «milieu» intermédiaire et médiateur. Le sens n'est pas un milieu dans lequel nous serions immergés : il n'y a pas de «mi-lieu», c'est l'un ou l'autre, l'un et l'autre, mais rien de l'un à l'autre qui serait encore une autre chose que l'un ou l'autre.* (Nancy 2013, pp. 23-24)

⁵ Nancy (2000/2008) conceives the body, through his idea of *areality* (*aréalité*), as an extended and non-mediated concept, as a body to which a level of a suspended, 'areal' reality belongs: the body is referred as having a lack of reality which is real. In this suspended reality, a *mute* or *autistic* sense of the body seems to 'operate', failing however to make sense. It might be a sense for sensing this same discontinuity of sense/meaning, a sense which could be disruption of meaning itself. It is approached as having a seismic character or behaviour; Nancy formulates the body as the *archi-tectonics* of sense.

⁶ *Virtual* is used in the sense of Massumi's notion of it. Massumi (2002) theorizes the virtual in relation to his most important concept of intensity or affect, making reference, among other

by the internal conflict of the Romantic (and its paradigm of composer-performer). It is a multidimensionality of the body which, through disruption, resonance/feedback and interference/dampening of the different levels, moves towards the more organized or more unorganized experience, always creating either the new or the expected in a new perspective.... The way these levels relate is what shapes the plasticity of the expansion — how a body moves, how a body is being this body, how a body means this body, which could be the same as how the music moves, how the music is being music, how the music is meaning music. The seismic fault line felt in microtime can trigger towards organization or disorganization in an unpredicted way. Paradox occurs: in linear microtime the deepest expansion of time and space is shaped, plasticity again.

This does not mean that music and the body are *out of control*, going freely or randomly in whatever direction. It probably does not mean the opposite either: that music and the body are (totally) *in control*. It can mean, again, that the path of the trilogy is hinting for a notion of the body and of the music that puts the duality between organized and unorganized body aside, making the notions of *control/out of control* inappropriate. It does not make sense anymore to speak about the parameters the composer controls and the parameters that are left open. *Control* and *out of control* are reducing features for our notions of *pulling oneself together* and *falling apart*, because both movements of falling apart and pulling oneself together can be triggered by a process which is *out of control* and, simultaneously, *within* the realm of the body or of the body of the work. Again, this means we're not in a logic of the quest of an 'I' against the *Self*. It could mean: let a body be a body, or a body be music or music be body or

music be

music or

whatever body music body music music body

or

...and let this not represent a reducing factor, but on the contrary, an expansion of both concepts within and throughout another, for plasticity and possibilities for time-space, senses and meaning are endless and tasteful.

MUSICAL SPACE – HERE AT THE IMMINENCE OF NOWHERE

We will start by reflecting on musical space, adopting the strategy of Paul Craenen, of claiming that it might be more meaningful to start asking *where* this music is, instead of *what* it is (Craenen 2014: 44). Craenen's *where* refers to a space that does not correspond to linear space, but to an "emerging space that unfolds as the music progresses" (idem: 23). This unfolding is said to occur in a very specific moment, after the musician's procedures of arriving on stage,

things, to empirical studies. One of these studies is an experience made on patients who had cortical electrodes implanted in the brain for medical purposes. A surprising outcome was detected in this experience where mild electric pulses were sent towards the cortical electrodes and to points in the skin: when pulses occurred within a smaller time frame than half a second, patients would not feel the electric pulses in neither the cortical electrodes nor the skin. Furthermore, when the electric pulse was fired in the cortical electrodes half a second before the pulse was fired in the skin, it was reported by patients that the skin pulse was felt first. This fact suggests, after Massumi, that "sensation is organized recursively before being linearized" (Massumi 2002:28), before it is directed towards action-reaction circuits. "Brain and skin form a resonating vessel. Stimulation turns inward, is folded into the body, except that there is no inside for it to be in, because the body is radically open, absorbing impulses quicker than they can be perceived, and because the entire vibratory event is unconscious, out of mind". (idem: 29).

"Something that happens too quickly to have happened, actually, is 'virtual'. The body is as immediately virtual as it is actual. The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipiences and tendencies, is a realm of 'potential'. (...) The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt – albeit reduced and contained" (idem: 30).

taking the position for playing, and concentrating: at the precise moment where the body, manifesting its intention for playing, gives rise to the opening gesture of the music. This gesture, loaded with the shared tension, concentration and silence of all music-making, instrumental and listening bodies, is then responsible for producing a shift from 'real' space to the *phantasmal space of music*. Craenen proposes that there are different kinds of *phantasmal musical spaces* unfolded by this gesture, whose difference derives from different kinds of music conception, and compositional strategies/approaches. Different musical approaches are then said to afford different kinds of musical space experiences.

He then makes a distinction between three different kinds of musical spaces, three distinct arrays of *where*: music from *somewhere*, music from *here* and music from *there*. In tonal music, a phantasmal space of music is referred to as a *somewhere*, as an unfolding of a musical space that establishes itself as a *somewhere* "between the notes" (Craenen 2014: 30). A *somewhere* is a non-situated, ethereal and sublime space, as a result of a neutralization of the bodies: when friction is erased through discipline and an aesthetic purpose, as in this case, the music bodies are experienced as a perfect resonator for musical narrative and expressive content.

The second kind of musical space is the phantasmal space here, described as the unfolding of music that, instead of neutralizing the bodies, as an aesthetic purpose, tends to bring friction between bodies to the foreground, calling into question the established musical relations through the use of non-conventional performance techniques (of which the music of Lachenmann⁷ is given as example). This space is then described as the intimate space of the relation of performing body and instrumental body, a space within the reach of the bodies. It tends to be experienced as fascination towards the unexpected of this intimate sphere. *Here*, as a musical space, is not taken for granted and is hinting for a continuously rediscovering of this relation: aiming towards the disruptive and the surprising *capture* of the bodies. This phantasmal space acts, then, as fascination towards the concrete music bodies but also towards calling this concrete dimension into question.

As a last possibility of a phantasmal space, *there* is referred to as a musical space that acts in relation to *here*: *there* becomes fascination when the attention is focused on *here*. *There* is a strategy mostly connected to the spatialization possibilities enabled by electroacoustic music. *There* arises as fascination and is then the shift of perspective that renders *here* as potentially surprising again.

Circling back to the trilogy, one can say that all these kinds of musical space are present, in one way or another. However, it is my opinion that the space of music could be discussed further in this context. *Here* is, on the one hand,

⁷ Helmut Lachenmann, German composer (1935). In his 'musique concrète instrumentale' the way sound is generated and its implicit energetic impulse are considered as or more important than other musical parameters. Returning to a kind of sensorial musical approach, but through an aesthetic of refusal of conventions, habits and installed instrumental auras, Lachenmann opened a new path for thinking the body in music.

a very explored space in the context of the trilogy, since this intimate and concrete space of relation between the bodies is always put in perspective, and rethought as a potential for the musical unfolding. Thus, the way it is approached often has a paradoxical flavor: *here* can, through the various *spreading processes* be felt simultaneously as *here* and *there* or as *here* and *somewhere* or as an overwhelmed *here* which can be felt *everywhere*. On the other hand, *everywhere* as an overwhelming process of *here* can be an imminence of *nowhere*. This is done through unexpected and sometimes invisible interconnections, interactions, disruptions that tend to defy the linear space of performance situation in all the musical, instrumental, multidimensional realms.

In all these realms the magnitude or plasticity of this space, created through various means, gives the concrete experience of the bodies in performance a certain illusionary quality. And this is a crucial point to arrive at: there seems to be a musical space as experience of the concrete bodies as both tangible (as somehow situated) and intangible (as accelerating, spreading all over dimension). It is a paradoxical musical space: an experience of the concrete *here*, but *here* might be at the same time felt as *somewhere*, or put differently, the concrete *here* might be felt both as *here* and as dispersion throughout the bodies. But there might be a big difference between the *somewhere* of tonal music and *somewhere* in this context. *Somewhere* in the trilogy might not be a controlled phantasmal, resonant space, where the semiotic musical content resounds perfectly. *Somewhere*, here, relates to the 'formulation' of **Listening | the open**: a disruptive resonance or interference space, with high potential either for uncontrolled feedback or for uncontrolled noise. This *somewhere* is then a musical space as an overwhelming of the semiotic music material: it interferes, crushes, mutilates, but most importantly, disruption comes with this high potential for feedback and noise. The space from *here* is then also an *everywhere* at the imminence of its own explosion (again): this *everywhere*, as *overwhelming of 'here' is an imminence of 'nowhere'*, or, in other words, an *overwhelmed 'here'* can be felt as *'somewhere'*, and possibly as *'everywhere' at the imminence of 'nowhere'*. *Everywhere* and *nowhere* seem therefore to be important new notions of space for our context.

But there is no linearity or sequence of spacial events. The musical space can be sensed both as *here* and *somewhere/everywhere/nowhere* simultaneously: there is a relationship at the distance, which is not that of a continuity. *Here* does not fade into *somewhere/everywhere*. There is a simultaneity and an ambiguity of musical spaces that can be felt.

It is therefore important to define this musical space through an extreme and liminal sensitivity and its extreme affordance for feedback and noise. *Spreading* is sensing *'as' feeding the fuse spreading through, it is a point triggering*

itself, detonation. It is again a process that is out of control but within the realm of the music and of the bodies.

Again, this implies a strategy for overwhelming the senses: it implies a sensorial excess that tends to provoke disruption of senses towards other sensorial possibilities. Music is then conceived in this trilogy as this excess of elements, realms, bodies. This excess is an unleashing of liminal sensorial experiences towards and from different realms — performative, visual, verbal, etc. — and towards and from different personalities: performance as a multidimensional experience requires different perspectives, approaches, and know-how that are put in practice through steady collaborators.

MUSIC AS SPREADING OR MUSIC AS DISRUPTIVE TOPOLOGY

music as *spreading* could be:

not claiming for a nationalist homeland in the Royal State of Music –

music as *spreading* might not pertain to a defined there or this:

not claiming a plain territory,

borders separating *the other*

it is a *spreading* through different dimensions

of senses, extra-senses, ultra-senses, non-senses

bringing distances in *touch* –

a singular disruptive topology moving

in between expression

and inexpressible

either

engaging the divergent

or

disconnecting convergence

unfolding

It is important to bear in mind, regarding notions of space and body, that this particular perspective of music, besides assigning the body a central role, is a perspective that does not refer to a body as a body in linear space. It is an approach that not only assigns the body the possibility for spacing but that acknowledges the body *as the possibility for spacing itself*. Space is, then, a dimension of the body(ies) and it can, therefore, make sense to talk about this music as a topological experience.

We shall begin by saying that, in the context of **Listening | the open**, music can be formulated, in a certain way and through various perspectives, *as the*

spreading. Music is not regarded as something that spreads towards other dimensions, expressions, etc., but *as a spreading through different dimensions itself*. Music *as spreading* can then be approached through the notion of disruptive topology. This is an encompassing notion embracing all tangible and intangible movements, relations, forces and *touches* between all possible tangible and intangible music bodies. This disruptive topology is thus a conception of music as non-rigid shaping, a shaping that finds in the possibility for disruption of the music bodies a creative potential for music unfolding, distorting in multiple ways. Music *as spreading is not bridging* divergent and irregular elements, enabling or producing homogeneity. Music *as spreading* is the possibility for finding in disruption and separation of elements an opportunity for *engaging with: touching* implies different surfaces of contact.

The music bodies, regarded through their organized and disruptive, *virtual*⁸ levels, can be any kind of bodies, as long as they are taking part of this musical process. They can be composing bodies, performing bodies, listening bodies, instrumental bodies (musical instruments or props, or any object or interface used with instrumental purpose), body(ies) of music⁹, but also collaborators, working networks and spaces, performing actions/performing disruptions, etc.

Each solo of the trilogy, as a particular disruptive topology, has common features with the other solos, but is in fact, a very different shaping from one another. The three of them can be brought together, *in touch*¹⁰, as fragmentary shapes of a larger and more complex topology — the trilogy **Listening | the open**, which, successively, can be said to be part of an even larger topology — a major and possibly lifelong project *corpus (a poetic catalogue)*. Furthermore, each solo is not a single piece, but a gathering of different shorter pieces, as different and fragmentary perspectives on this multi-dimensional topology are shaped throughout the same solo.

It is curious, through no coincidence, to detect that although music *as spreading* is always approached as this gathering of all tangible and intangible music bodies in all solos, each solo might put different and specific music bodies, spaces, levels, topologies of topology in evidence. It is then clear that, in this disruptive topology as gathering of different bodies, *through this looking glass* puts in greater evidence the tangible and non-tangible instrumental body (as apparatus), bringing the instrument as powerful disruptive potential to foreground through various perspectives. As to *In Praise of Disorder*, what comes to the fore is mostly the relation between music-making body and instrumental body. In **Listening | the open** the topology is brought mainly through the perspective of the music-making body, as a music-making body *listening*.

⁸ *Virtual* is used in the sense of Massumi's notion of it. On this subject see note 6, 11 and Massumi (2002)

⁹ Again: music (just as text, notion of work, etc.) can be regarded as a body in the sense it is constituted both by a semiotic/organized/narrative realm and a non-semiotic/unorganized/disruptive realm and the tension(s) arising from this paradoxical co-existence of realms.

¹⁰ See note 4.

We will try to understand how music *as spreading* and multidimensional phenomenon can be, to a great extent, consequence of the *virtual*¹¹, as an empowered level, which seems to act in the musical process as an energetic realm that tends to overwhelm the musical narrative levels. In all topologies, as in multidimensional phenomena, we will find a persistent tendency for the magnetic overwhelming of the semiotic level.

Overwhelming semiotics are then created through strategies for unleashing a complex and liminal sensorial experience. Performance is not proposed as an experience for (passive) immersion, or just as an active involvement or enaction through a convergence of the usual senses, but it is also proposed as a certain affordance for *capturing* the disruptive level through **Listening | the open**¹². The performance strategies try, thus, to create this affordance for gathering *each other's* senses: again an intangible dispersion *in touch*.

But how to make this intangibility tangible? Making it tangible will mean trying to capture the intangible, through the composing and performing strategies used for its unleashing, and through the impacts it produces in the concrete or semiotic level. We will then try to analyze, through diverse perspectives, how both levels co-exist and function together as a process of multi-folded music shaping.

FRAGMENTATION AS A CRUCIAL AND BASIC PRINCIPLE FOR THE SHAPING OF DISRUPTIVE MUSIC TOPOLOGY

Regarding the body of music¹³, we will start by drawing a very general idea: music is, in this context, approached or conceived through this spreading or plastic character, more than through a musical thought that privileges a clear pre-established delineated musical contour, phrase, structure, etc.

Fragmentation is then the most crucial strategy for the shaping of the musical topology. Fragmentation as a strategy in itself is already hinting for a non-continuous, nonlinear or irregular topology: it is the basic principle of the disruptive. As a basic principle, it has been present in most contemporary music approaches of the 20th/21st Century, through various means. But what is special about the aesthetic of fragment? And how is it approached in this context? And how does it put the relations of organized and unorganized bodies in evidence?

Through a fragmented writing strategy, we will approach the *fragment* from various perspectives in an attempt to answer some of these questions.

FRAGMENT I – INTRINSIC OR EXTRINSIC STRENGTH

As mentioned by Craenen (2014), a strategy for having more direct access to the level of the body *out of law* is that of not establishing a clear narrative, that

¹¹ See note 6.

¹² *Affect* is theorized by Massumi (2002) as unqualified, as not being action, because it cannot be directed towards an intention or goal. But on the other hand, it is not regarded as passivity either because it is nevertheless vibration: vibratory motion and resonance. It is a “suspension of action-reaction circuits and linear temporality in a sink of what might be called ‘passion’ to distinguish it both from passivity and activity” (idem: p.28). Affect is described as a highly synesthetic process, which is not to be considered as a raw domain of the body, nor as a ‘natural’ dimension that would oppose a ‘cultural’ one. Affect is not to be considered a ‘lower’ function of the body, but a process in which higher functions feedback – a process which Massumi calls as *autonomy of relation*. Emergence is described as a two-sided coin: “one side in the virtual (the autonomy of relation), the other in the actual (functional limitation)” (idem: 35). Affect is then claimed to be this “two-sidedness, the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual (...)” (idem: 35). The autonomy of affect is then this independence from the limits of the actual or confined body, it is it having this virtual dimension: “Its autonomy is its openness” (idem: 35). Affect’s way of spreading through all dimensions and functions is then said to be through synesthetic processes, “implying the participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing’s potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another”.

¹³ See note 2 or 9.

of its suspending: the use of the fragment or the aesthetic of fragmentation is, therefore, a very obvious and useful tool. It was highly fomented in the Romantic, with the aesthetic aura of the unachieved, and brought to modernity, calling into question the centre and the equilibrium of the work. Nowadays, the fragmented, the disruption and superposition of information, levels, space, time are literally everywhere as the most usual way of accessing information in modern developed societies. In his formulation of *affect as intensity*, Massumi (2002) brings fragmentation to the foreground as a most important strategy for its unleashing.

But what is special or relevant about the fragment that helps unleash intensity? Gonçalo M. Tavares (Tavares 2013) refers to the fragment as a *distributor of beginnings* (idem: 41), as a point that begins something, a something which inevitably will have no end. And he refers to the beginning of something as having a special and condensed power: as if the beginning of a process could *concentrate the highest amount of a certain substance, which the development of the same process will only dilute or disperse through an extended area* (idem).¹⁴ But not only that: M. Tavares connects the fragment to movement and velocity, specifically to the acceleration both of language and of thought. The fragment is said to bring a certain urgency that is compared to the urgency of the verse. The use of the fragment seems, therefore, to be described again as interfering with the realm of time-space — through acceleration (time) and concentration of a certain substance (space).

The suggestion of acceleration can easily lead us to *Rasch* (the German word for *presto*, quick) and the title of one of Roland Barthes' essays on Schumann. Here Barthes extrapolates on the fact that Schumann had a fondness for short pieces and miniatures. Trying to go against critical opinions that conclude from the beginning that if Schumann did not compose very much for bigger forms, then this must have been because he did not know how to develop them, Barthes comes up with something else. For him, "the Schumannian body does not *stay in place*" (Barthes 1985: 300): it does not assume a narrative direction, it is a disruptive body that breaks down, falls apart, keeps dispersing, unable to pull itself together. We could argue that the body concentrates an excess of a certain substance that does not fit within the semiotic realm or the linear direction of the narrative. It disrupts, discharges, changes position, direction, accelerates, breaks, it is an unquiet body. And Barthes calls upon the *intermezzo* as a special character of musical fragment for this context: "The *intermezzo*, consubstantial with the entire Schumannian oeuvre, even when the episode does not bear its name, has a function not to distract but to displace: like a vigilant sauce chef, it keeps the discourse from returning obediently into the

14 Translation by the author: "Mas o início tem uma força suplementar: é muitas vezes no início de um processo que se concentra a maior quantidade de uma certa substância, que o desenvolvimento desse mesmo processo só vai diluir ou espalhar por uma extensa área". (Tavares 2013: 41).

culture of development; it is this renewed act (...) by which the body stirs and disturbs the hum of artistic speech. At the limit, there are only *intermezzi*: what interrupts is in its turn interrupted, and this begins all over again. (...) by its interruptions (...) the body begins to 'criticize' (to put in crisis) the discourse which, under cover of art, others have tried to put over on it, without it." (Barthes 1985: 300)

The fragment is therefore inevitably and directly connected to the theme of the bodies: we have assumed the impossibility of encompassing the multi-dimensional body through significance. It is uncertain whether *substance* could yet possibly be *captured*¹⁵ (Massumi) through a strategy of fragmentation... Ultimately, *capturing itself* is only possible *as* fragment.

FRAGMENT II – VERTIGO

But what is most significant about the experience of the fragment is the chasm that inevitably occurs through the body and the music for its abrupt, sudden disappearing before an 'ending'. This chasm is a space in between that creates the experience of vertigo: the body is rushed or rushes (because the experience is out of subject and out of object) towards free fall, obliged or obliging to act or react. But oddly enough, in my approach, this space, although not rationally or clearly defined, seems to be or feels quite precise. It is the strictly necessary space for keeping this level of the body unleashed, spreading through, the strictly necessary for keeping the multiple, complex levels of bodies and music aroused. The fact that this space feels quite precise does not, however, mean that it is (previously) strictly conceived, or that it is always a regular space: it means that in each situation this space unfolds as a 'precise' space. It is a contradiction: the unpredicted and the unmeasurable is approached and sensed as a precision of the bodies and of the music.

This means of course that the body does not simply disrupt and fall apart through an endless and non-reversing process of entropy. The body's falling apart is sensed, explored and even triggered through the body pulling together. The body's pulling together is forged through a new sensation of the body falling apart. And the space of this relation is then, in the end, the spacing of a body sensing itself, failing itself, getting to acknowledge itself, (re)creating itself.

Getting to know itself is then a relative idea that might mean sensing the limits, calling these limits into question, exploring and expanding them, surprising itself, finding new ways of being a body. As stated before, the body is not regarded as an integral unit: it can be dispersion, multiplicity, and divergence. However, in exploring these limits, although there are some more daring approaches, the 'integrity' of the body is called into question only up

¹⁵ "The escape of affect cannot but be perceived, alongside the perceptions that are its capture." (Massumi: 2002)

to a 'certain uncertain' point — never exceeding the limits that would put bodies (music-making or instrumental ones) in extreme physical danger through the performance experience.

16 *Out of law* refers to the disruptive, non-semiotic realm of the body(ies).

FRAGMENT III

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Regarding my approach, there is, again and again, no real explicit gesture for exposing the body(ies) *as they are*.

It is a poetic perspective (even if multiple, obsessive)

towards the bodies

– as in between

FRAGMENT IV – BEYOND DUALITY OF CONTROL / OUT OF CONTROL

– composing as working with the specific out of law¹⁶ mechanisms of the particular body

Although the disruptive, non-semiotic realm is difficult to define and impossible to access directly, I can acknowledge, by all means, that the music being developed in this context is taking into conscious account two very different kinds of musical levels: a semiotic musical realm and a non-semiotic or disruptive one. This does not mean that I can define the non-semiotic one clearly, or that I can clearly define a compositional method of working *with it*. Neither does this mean that this fact is reducible to the usual form of 'working with parameters that one controls and with other parameters that one does not control'. Because 'out of control' in this context is not any kind of 'pure random'. 'Out of control' pertains to the realm of (a) specific body(ies): it is an unpredictability that is however restrained to the realm of *this/these* body(ies). And belonging to the realm of the body implies the existence of a specific body, not an abstract entity of body (everything we're arguing against here). *The out of control* we're talking about is something which is produced *within the body, with the specific out of law mechanisms of this particular body*.

It is about creating another kind of self-reflection

(through this looking glass

and not just *any*

looking glass)

– one that

FRAGMENT V – A ROLE IS A ROLE IS A ROLE...

What is specific about the role played *here* by this level of the music and of the body?

The role as also being *in*. Not just *out*:
not just an *out*, putting *in* in question.
The overwhelming of *the open* regarded as an *inner mechanism*
It is a matter of conceiving the (music) world
(*wholier*
not holier).

17 As proposed by Craenen, “the experience of the composing body constitutes the most direct, and thus also the most critical, touchstone, for aesthetic evaluation. A corporeal excess can signal a wrong guess.” (Craenen 2014 p. 269).

FRAGMENT VI – AN EXACT AND PRECISE SPACE AS

This takes us back to the issue of fragmentation, as carrying within itself the abrupt ending before an ending, the power of vertigo and therefore the sensing/ exploring of fear as an opening of a necessary space in between: fragmentation as carrying with itself the possibility for spacing the realm of the body *out of law*. This brings us to fragment II and to the statement that this spacing is shaped as a strict and precise space within the music: what is or how does one define the strictly necessary space for keeping this level of the body unleashed, spreading through, playing its creative and performative role in the musical process?

The first answer is: I don't know exactly.

But there is a second answer that points to another kind of ‘knowing’ within the realm of my body, out of the usual senses, out of the nameable realm — this realm *knows in another sense of what knowing is*. And this is also where I would like to arrive: expanding the concepts of knowing to the unnameable, *to other kinds of knowing* within the realm of bodies. Emancipating these kinds of *knowing* beyond the negative connotations of idiotism, since they are anything but idiot, dumb or stupid: they are in many situations our most precise and trustworthy tools¹⁷.

Whether we can conceive this *out of control* dimension as *compositional thinking* might continue to be a question beyond our reach. But if the question is formulated as whether there is a *compositional strategy* for working towards this realm, my answer is then a certain and resounding yes. Because, although out of my direct control, it is ‘there’, it is expected to emerge through ‘there’. Even if in a kind of *outside*, it is part of the musical process as *inside*, playing an important role *inside* the musical process. My music-making strategy is counting on *something* produced by this realm, on *something* which is determinant for the unfolding of music.

And, although it might sound vague, this can be considered a precise and exact answer.

It is a matter of being comfortable with paradox
– *listening*.
(abolishing notions of inside and outside
in compositional strategy).

FRAGMENT VII – (IM)MATERIAL

material is *itself* also *listening*
as *vibration*, as *unknown*
known motion towards, *between*
as an *unexpected expected*
of *the body*.

Composing
Not forging with material in hands
But forging *through* hands and *through* material

this means that this forging, carving is of *another kind*.

FRAGMENT VIII – BASIC TOPOLOGICAL DISRUPTIVE EVENT AND SHAPE

Music ‘material’ – which is both material and immaterial as it is ‘uncertain substance’ or certain *intensity*¹⁸ – is a *multimodal*¹⁹ event or a topological shape with a high potential for disruption. It is not independent of shape since it is not a content that fits a form, nor a form that shapes content. This multimodal event is already and somehow shape, and shape has already and somehow a certain materiality (as a semiotic, organized realm) and *immateriality* (as a non-semiotic, disruptive realm). One does not exist without the other. And this means that it does not make sense to talk about ‘music material’, nor of the basic units of a musical structure, but possibly about *fragment as basic topological disruptive event*.

The musical shape is therefore not defined as a fixed structure but regarded as an imponderable topological experience. Consequently, it is not a rigid delimited form: the musical shape is the body of music composed by many divergent bodies, partitions, incongruences, paradoxes — behaving like a body, with its predicted unpredictability, with its tangible and intangible features. Just as claimed, *shape* and its basic topological disruptive events are brought to this context as having an unutterable quality *within its scope*.

FRAGMENT IX – PROCESSES FOR OVERWHELMING

This basic topological event tends to have an opening character: opening for the disruptive relation in between, which means in point of fact, between itself (materiality and immateriality) and between itself and *other* fragments. A fragment opens, resonates, the body and the music act and react opposing another related or unrelated fragment, opening again. Disruption, felt in microtime, either rushes towards the movement of *pulling oneself together*

¹⁸ It might be interesting to bring the notion of ‘uncertain substance’ together with Massumi’s concept of *intensity/affect*. See Fragment I and notes 6 & 11.

¹⁹ Multimodal in the sense of actual concepts of musical gesture that assign many dimensions to music, besides the ‘purely sonic abstract’ information: kinetic, visual, effort, dynamics, etc.

(related), or to the movement of *falling apart* (unrelated). This opens musical possibilities for spreading through divergent and simultaneous directions, for imploding divergence into a point, for falling into a trap of autistic circular or repetitive movements, etc. As such, disruption triggers towards experiences of complexity that put in evidence the multidimensionality of the music-making body(ies) and of the body of music. The way the different levels of the bodies (organized or unorganized) relate is strictly connected to the way fragments relate — they are the same event. Disruption can trigger resonance, dampening, interference, unlimited feedback towards the semiotic realm of fragments: the way organized and unorganized levels relate forges not only *the plasticity of expansion* of the music bodies, but the music bodies as *plasticity of expansion*.

Feedback as a relation between levels of the body (through different processes) is used as a common compositional strategy throughout my music. It leads frequently towards exploding the musical space: feeding back the musical semiotic realm is an overwhelming process that can make it get swallowed by the force of its own gravity. Music is then regarded as a kind of black hole: it is its collapse upon itself. The musical semiotic realm is then crushed, shaped as nothing but a hole — immaterial, unshaped — but again opening a new possibility for renewal of the music bodies out of liminal oscillation, arising from this process.

FRAGMENT X – (IM)POSSIBILITY TO CAPTURE – PHOTOGRAPHICAL QUALITY OF THE FRAGMENT AS FLEXIBILITY

But semiotically speaking, how is the idea of fragmentation put in practice in music?

I would begin by acknowledging that the semiotic music realm, despite being complex, tends to be relatively short, condensed. Complex, first, because the relations it establishes are often not quite conventional ones, bringing sounds from most distant proveniences, families, and categories (tempered and non-tempered sounds, etc.) together as intimate relations, and for simultaneously aborting the unity and integrity of closed sound categories through the opening of new divergent and *spreading through* sound possibilities.

It follows that the musical semiotic realm of topological events has a short, condensed and intense character: it tends to have a rather reduced musical information and its features are seldom introduced in music through a gradual process, but tend to appear suddenly, as crystallizations, often as glances. It seems paradoxical: on the one hand fragments as topological events seem quite inflexible and somehow obsolete towards notions of narrative development. On the other hand, their crystallized glance character seems to have a photographic quality that opens up other kinds of plasticity

and flexibility: the material is an opening towards intensification, or the material is already, through its opening character, and relations established, its own intensification. This immateriality is, therefore, a certain intensity inherent to the fragment. This intensity can be *captured* and possibly unleashed through an obsessive arousal of the bodies, as (im)possibility for both forging and freezing this photographic quality. The semiotic music realm of topological events cannot, therefore, be regarded without this inherent disruptive process, which I call *listening* (or *listening | the open*). A basic topological disruptive event is therefore not a 'straightforward material' that can be clearly 'presented': it is a relation between what is stipulated as short and condensed in the musical narrative plan and its resonance(s). In this context, it is never about *what* is presented or played but about the relations established in between as resonant space.

FRAGMENT XI – (DIS)USE OF HARMONY

The complexity of semiotic music material is also made evident through the constant use of atonality, as a strategy for creating an irregular musical space. Harmony is then explored as specific and often obsessive scrutinizing of a certain (mostly asymmetric) relation, a certain intensity: as an *agreement of intimate disagreements*. It is seldom used in a logic of sequential narrative, or as a driving force that directs or heads for, but often approached through the aforementioned photographic perspective: as a crystallization of this relation. The harmonic relation as crystallization often appears as a glance: it can be transposed ad infinitum, varied in endless types of figuration, fragmentation, but the intrinsic or extrinsic relation is mostly maintained. *This* relation is mostly explored in *itself* and in confrontation towards *other* harmonic relations through processes of superposition/juxtaposition/interference, etc.

Dissonance might then be often approached in a somehow consonant way: as if a certain comfort of the music and music-making bodies could be felt in not having a disciplined centre of gravity, in being dissonant bodies, in being this *agreement of intimate disagreements*. Being comfortable can mean, in this context, that the use of dissonance is not about a rejection of consonance and tonality just for aesthetic reasons, but about finding a new sensorial space where most 'usual' notions of dissonance and consonance do not feel meaningful anymore. A space where 'sad' can feel 'happy', etc, but mostly a space forging new sensations and possibilities for meaning. Enchantment as an obsession towards a certain intensity of relation can work as a strategy in this direction: it gives the atonal a certain tonal quality.

FRAGMENT XII – MELODIC BOYCOTT

Melodic gesture can be regarded as complex too, because it is usually an idea boycotted from the beginning: there is an appetite for melodic gestures that function as openings most of the time, as *élans*, acceleration movements that head for resonance. But the possibility of narrative continuity is constantly being boycotted through various processes of disruption — *listening*. Disruption can be then regarded above all as a triggering of feedback processes, interferences, dampenings. The disruption processes can be of different kinds: as a freezing of the resonance of the disrupted gesture towards itself, allowing an inflation of ‘initial substance’; as an obsessive irregular circularity of melodic gesture towards itself through neurotic oscillation; as ‘out of control’ circularity of melodic gesture towards itself through unlimited feedback – explosion of the gesture; as an abrupt entanglement with other gestures, through different possibilities of engagement, connection, superposition; as dispersion, texturizing, etc.

FRAGMENT XIII – METRICS, PULSE AND A BEATING BODY AS TIME-SPACE

The realm of metrics, rhythm, and pulse also tend to be rather complex for the extreme presence of this *other disruptive, beating* body. A *beating* body – a body that *cannot stay* (Barthes 1985) — and which is in this context not dampened by a strategy of domestication, but on the contrary, is incited and amplified through overwhelming *listening* strategies — is a constant producer of irregular, organic, and endlessly shifting non-linear time-spaces.

It is important to establish a relation to time conceptions of Romantic and structuralist approaches in order to understand the concept of time in this context of the trilogy. It is therefore relevant to acknowledge that within the Romantic and its rhetorical performance approach, it can be said that there is a ‘qualitative’ notion of time, whereas in structuralist approaches there is a more ‘quantitative’ notion of it. The ontological difference (Cook) points at two different notions of music conception: music is made *of* time in the case of rhetorical performance style and music is made *in* time in the latter case. This can mean that time is either an inherent dimension *of* music material in the rhetorical perspective or it is an objective and linear dimension outside the music, where the music as an abstract ideal must fit in through the process of performance. We have already made a point here against the concept of time as linear and objective: *the beating body* acts as plasticity of time-space, *it does not stay in linear time, it is a forger of shifting time perspectives*. Regarding the concept of time as a dimension of music in rhetorical approaches, it is important

to acknowledge that time is regarded as a dimension of expressivity of semiotic content. Time is then this breathing and resonating dimension of music as inherent expressive content.

It is not at all my intention to give an exhaustive overview of time conceptions in music performance, but it is fruitful to bring these perspectives in relation to a concept of time in the trilogy, as they forge different conceptions of musical performance and can help us forge an adequate conception for this context.

We may analyse Nicholas Cook's claim on both performance practices:

“My aim has been to make two general points: rhetorical performance turns on reference and is in that sense a semiotic practice, and that an approach that sees performance as a process of real-time semiosis is fundamentally different from one that sees it as reproduction of an ideal, essentially atemporal object.”
(Cook 2013: 119)

In this short and condensed statement, we can easily acknowledge that our context corresponds neither to one conception nor the other: performance is clearly not reproduction in time of an atemporal object (as structuralist approaches) nor is performance just a *real-time semiosis*, turning on reference (as rhetorical performance). Time is regarded not just as a dimension of music material, as a controlled, intentional or expressive parameter. It cannot be reduced to a dimension (or multiple dimensions) of the expressive musical content: time is a dimension of the music bodies, it is a complex dimension that encompasses expressivity/intentionality and simultaneously the unintentional, which is felt as acceleration through microtime. It is the complex co-existence and relation between the possibility of linear time(s), non-linear time(s) and its specific case of microtime, which can, however, be experienced as an organic and vivid dimension of music topology. Time is time-space. It is created and reformulated through each process of disruptive fragmentation. It is then also worked as friction and conflict between linearity and non-linearity, narrative and disruption of the music bodies.

FRAGMENT XIV – AS FREMDE UNSICHTBARE LÄNDER²⁰

touching, celebrating

4'33"

but going elsewhere

opening a new time, space

as *fremde unsichtbare Länder*

20 Reference to *Von fremden Ländern und Menschen*, the first piece of Schumann's miniature cycle *Kinderszenen op.15*, to which *through this looking glass*, the first piece of the trilogy establishes different relations.

distant to
dichotomy of
control/ out of control
as (H)uman (H)istory
story telling

the out of is folded an inside
off the body:
out of control as belonging
to

this particular
body

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