

Playing with transformations:
Boulez's *Improvisation III sur Mallarmé*

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I have never been quite convinced by the way the story of 'high modernism' has generally been told. More often than not, it has been a saga of radical ruptures and new starts—a 'progress narrative' involving limitless constructivism and the increasing rationalisation of musical language and compositional technique. In short, the simplest historiographical tropes seem to have prevailed. Moreover, technical analyses of the music in question often fail to account for the actual listening experience. The hegemonic language of structural analysis and modernist historiography from the last fifty-odd years falls short of the musical imagery, poetic sensuality, and strangeness present in works by Messiaen, Stockhausen, Ligeti, Xenakis, Berio, Saariaho, or Sciarrino.

Even though the general textbook image of European post-World War II modernism as a predominantly rationalist era of strictly 'logical' composition is gradually changing, it appears to be changing rather slowly. During the last six decades, mainstream structural analyses of music by Pierre Boulez (b. 1925)—a prominent figure in postwar modernism and a co-founder of so-called 'total' serialist composition—seem to have taken for granted a certain notion of serialism that emphasises the need for structural unity and rational compositional control. To a surprising extent—aside from certain valuable exceptions in more recent decades—the general analytical literature on Boulez's music resorted to a terminology of such concepts as structural coherence,

unity, consistency, order, strictness, rigour, discipline, deduction, logic, necessity and rational compositional control. I call this the ‘unity and control model’ of serialism.¹

A similar idea informs readings of Boulez’s theoretical writings, from *Relevés d’apprenti* to *Leçons de musique*.² This lopsided understanding of serialism was intertwined with the hardcore structural analysis of ‘formalist’ musicology from the 1950s onward.³ Closely related to the ‘unity and control model’ of serialism is the often unmentioned historiographical figure who construes postwar high modernism as a break with the past—one that tries to obliterate any traces of the classic-romantic tradition of Western art music.

It is true that Boulez’s own rhetorical strategies as theorist and polemicist have themselves contributed to the rationalist optics that has governed our picture of Boulez the composer. Boulez even emphasises ‘coherence’ and ‘control’ in his articles on compositional technique, particularly the earlier ones, though his texts are undoubtedly ambiguous on this point. From the start he also signals the presence of other aesthetic

¹ See references in Erling E. Gulbrandsen, ‘New Light on Pierre Boulez and Postwar Modernism: On the Composition of “Improvisation I–III sur Mallarmé”’ in Søren Møller Sørensen (ed), *In the Plural: Institutions, Pluralism and Critical Self-Awareness in Contemporary Music* (University of Copenhagen, 1997), pp. 15–28

² Pierre Boulez, *Relevés d’apprenti* (Paris: Seuil, 1966), English: *Stocktakings from an Apprenticeship*, collected and ed. by Paule Thévenin, trans. Stephen Walsh (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); *Penser la musique aujourd’hui* (Genève: Gonthier, 1963), English: *Boulez on Music Today*, trans. Susan Bradshaw and Richard Rodney Bennett (London: Faber and Faber, 1971); *Points de repère* (Paris: Éditions Christian Bourgois, 1985); *Jalons (pour une décennie)* (Paris: Éditions Christian Bourgois, 1989); *Regards sur autrui (Points de repère II)*, collected and ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez and Sophie Galaise (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 2005); *Leçons de musique (Points de repère III)*, collected and ed. Jean-Jacques Nattiez (Paris: Éditions Christian Bourgois, 2005).

³ See Joseph Kerman’s diagnosis of Western musicology and structural analysis in his seminal *Musicology* (London: Fontana Press, 1985).

and artistic influences on his compositional thinking, and especially the powerful inspiration of poetry and literature, visual arts and architecture, and non-European musics. These sources of inspiration indeed appear to mark the stylistic and aesthetic surfaces of works throughout his œuvre, from the gestural eruptions of the *Second Sonata* (1948) and the estranged orientalism of *Le Marteau sans maître* (1955) to the suggestive archaism of *Rituel* (1975), the introverted murmurings of *Dialogue de l'ombre double* (1985) and the austere darkness and grandeur of the ostensibly hypermodern live-electronic surfaces of *Répons* (1981–84). Far from communicating a cold and calculated 'rationalism', his works come forward as poetic statements, ringing through the echo chambers of orchestral labyrinths and evoking—as it were—fictitious imageries of forgotten rituals and futuristic splendour.

From early on, too, Boulez noted an unpredictable dimension to his serialist procedures. Though it is hard to distinguish between earlier (generative) and later stages in his compositional process, given his constant back-and-forth movement between them, an irruption of free elements characterises both. On the one hand, Boulez makes striking free aesthetic choices in later phases of his musical articulation, constantly moulding and rephrasing his final textures.⁴ On the other hand, even more interestingly, the serialist procedures that he develops in the early stages of the compositional process—inside his very laboratory of technical generation—are marked by an intentional renunciation of compositional predictability and control.

Unpredictability and free choice do not stand in opposition to his serialist writing (as in commonplace dichotomies of strictness 'versus' freedom); rather, they are constitutive

⁴ See Erling E. Guldbrandsen, 'Casting New Light on Boulezian Serialism' in Edward Campbell and Peter O'Hagan (eds.), *Boulez Studies* (Cambridge University Press, in press)

conditions for the workings of the system itself. In my view, the non-rationalist leanings that work at the centre of his compositional practices have been largely underestimated in the analytical and historical renderings of what Boulezian—and indeed, European—high modernism was, or is, all about.⁵ In Boulez’s case, one might label these leanings a ‘poetics of practical musicianship and taste’, one that forms an indispensable criterion for his compositional choices. Also, over the past four decades, the interplay between his work as an orchestral conductor and his modes of compositional writing has become increasingly apparent. I suggest that these experiences have contributed to a new take on musical articulation, phrasing and form in his compositions after the mid-1970s, as well as his later revisions of earlier scores.⁶

In this chapter I will take my examples from Boulez’s ‘Improvisation III sur Mallarmé—A la nue accablante tu’.⁷ The piece is the fourth and the longest of the five movements in *Pli selon pli—portrait de Mallarmé* for soprano and orchestra, which stands as a milestone in Boulez’s development as a composer.⁸ While other movements of *Pli selon pli* have been more widely analysed, the grand and complex ‘Third Improvisation’ still awaits an in-depth international study.⁹ I will here consider different kinds of

⁵ See Erling E. Guldbrandsen, ‘Pierre Boulez in Interview, 1996 (Parts I–IV)’, *Tempo*, 65/255–58 (2011)

⁶ See Erling E. Guldbrandsen, ‘Modernist Composer and Mahler Conductor: Changing Conceptions of Performativity in Boulez’, *Studia Musicologica Norvegica*, 32 (2006), 140–68

⁷ First version (composed 1959), Universal Edition, London 1963, withdrawn; second version, Universal Edition, London 1983 (the score says 1982, but the publication date appears to be late 1983—see Dominique Jameux, *Pierre Boulez* (Paris: Fayard, 1984), 400–401).

⁸ *Pli selon pli—portrait de Mallarmé* (composed 1957–60; 1962; 1982–83; 1989), London: Universal Edition.

⁹ Brief accounts include Raphaël Brunner, ‘L’“Improvisation III sur Mallarmé” de Pierre Boulez: Éléments pour une mise en perspective’, *Dissonanz/Dissonance*, 50 (1996), 4–14; Luisa Bassetto, ‘Orient—Accident? *Pli selon pli*, ou l’“eurexcentrisme” selon Boulez’ in Pierre Albèra (ed), *Pli selon pli de Pierre Boulez: Entretiens et études*, pp. 37–44 (Genève: Éditions Contrechamps, 2003); and Arnold Whittall, “Unbounded

‘transformations’ that can be traced in the long-term process of composing, playing, recording, revising and re-recording this movement in the years from 1959 to 1983 and onward. One by one, in a kind of generalist effort, I will address the following five kinds of ‘transformations’ that are at large in the musical becoming and understanding of this particular movement:

1. Performative transformations: revisions of the score from 1959 to 1983
2. Generative transformations: from serial structures to musical form
3. Transformations of Mallarmé’s poetics into music
4. Transformations of Mallarmé’s poem into music
5. Historiographical transformations of current images of postwar modernism

From the outset, these five points will be discussed chronologically—although the first one, labelled ‘performative transformations,’ inevitably intersects with all of the other ones by invoking a deeper level of methodological impact throughout the following discussion.

Performative transformations: revisions of the score from 1959 to 1983

As is well known, Boulez frequently rewrites his scores as seemingly unending ‘works in progress’—a term he borrowed from James Joyce’s original publication of the novel *Finnegans Wake* as a *feuilleton* under the title, ‘Work in progress’. As a conductor, Boulez likewise frequently offers new performances and recordings of the same ‘canonical’

visions’’: Boulez, Mallarmé and Modern Classicism,’ *Twentieth-Century Music* 1/1 (2004), 65–80.

‘Improvisation III’, along with the rest of *Pli selon pli*, is analysed across 630 pages in Norwegian in my dissertation, *Tradisjon og tradisjonsbrudd: En studie i Pierre Boulez: Pli selon pli—portrait de Mallarmé*, unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Oslo (1995) (published Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).

works of the twenty-first, twentieth and late-nineteenth centuries, including his own. While his presentation of Webern's complete works, for instance (recorded 1967–72) set a new standard in the structural understanding of this music at the time, in the 1990s he eventually re-recorded it all, with a strikingly new take on the romantic gestural agogics of Webern's music.¹⁰

Far from setting him apart from the common practices of Western art music, this process of incessant reinterpretation actually ties Boulez quite closely to the classic-romantic tradition. Though this is not the place to dig into recent reconstructions of the concept of the artwork, suffice it to say that the idea of *Werktreue*—emerging around 1800¹¹—has been challenged by the growing scholarly conviction that the musical work of art was never really considered a closed entity, like a marble sculpture or printed book, but instead always regarded as something in need of constant renewal. (Of course, sculptures and books are likewise subject to new readings and interpretations.)

Boulez's 'Improvisation III' was written in 1959 and revised mainly in 1982–83, producing two 'completed' versions of the musical score. In addition, non-printed amendments have appeared outside the processes of completing (1959) and revising (1983) the work, probably during rehearsals at different occasions over the past five decades.¹² Amendments aside, there are significant differences between the two main versions of the score, a few of which I shall mention here.

¹⁰ See *Webern Complete Works*, opp. 1–31, Sony Classical, recorded 1967–72; and *Complete Webern*, Deutsche Grammophon, recorded 1992–96.

¹¹ Lydia Goehr, *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

¹² Minor revisions were made during Boulez's recording of the piece in 1969 (with Halina Lukomska and the BBC Symphony Orchestra). Further changes were made during his recording with Phyllis Bryn-Julson and the BBC Symphony Orchestra in London in 1981, resulting in deviations between these two

In the 1959 version, the piece opens with four distinct musical episodes. After a brief statement in two harps (the first episode), the soprano delivers a long vocalise passage (the second episode) on the vowel ‘A’, which is the first word of the text that Boulez sets here. Then comes a brief passage in the mandolin, guitar and cowbells (the third episode), followed by a rapid exchange in two xylophones (the fourth episode). Together, these four textures (pp. 1–2 in 1959) constitute what I label ‘Episodes I’ (see figure 1, below). Another aspect of the 1959 version is its reliance upon an open form, comprised of several variants or *ossia* textures, among which the performers—or the conductor—can in principle choose freely over the course of the performance. Thus only a limited portion of the written material will actually be performed on any given occasion.

The musical contrasts among the four initial episodes are striking, and related episodes return in the piece’s middle and ending sections (‘Episodes II’ and ‘Episodes III’, respectively). Remarkably, Boulez made two recordings of the 1959 version, thereby confirming its authoritative work-status, only to then withdraw the score completely. Below, I present an overview of the main formal sections in the 1959 and 1983 versions (see figure 1):

Figure 1:

1959:			1983:		
	Text:	Pages:		Text:	Pages:
Episodes I	‘A-’	1–2	Episodes I	Verses 1–8	1–7

recordings of the 1959 score. The 1983 version was recorded by Boulez in 2001 (with Christine Schäfer and the Ensemble InterContemporain), again with deviations from that score.

<i>Alpha</i>	No text	3–21		<i>Alpha</i>	Verses 9–14	8–16
				<i>Alpha</i> (cont'd)	No text	17–31
Interlude	Verse 1	22–24		Interlude 1	Verse 1	32–35
Episodes II		24		Episodes II		36–37
<i>Beta</i>	Verse 2	25–34		<i>Beta</i>	Verse 2	38–57
<i>Gamma</i>	Verse 3	35–48		<i>Gamma</i>	Verse 3	58–84
				Interlude 2 (new)	Verse 4	84–87
Episodes III		49		Episodes III		88–90

In 1983, not least the exposition ('Episodes I') has been profoundly changed. Several parts have been added and the formerly distinct episodes have been merged into a much more continuous musical flow. Added material is mostly played by instruments with sustained notes (trombone, five violoncellos, three double basses), as opposed to the predominantly attack-resonance instruments of the other textures (harps, mandolin, guitar, xylophones, other percussion). Moreover, all of the traits associated with the 1959 'open form' have been abandoned in 1983.

In addition, a lot of new text has been accommodated in the work. In the place of the opening vocalise, all fourteen verses from Mallarmé's sonnet have been added, and a flute quartet now accompanies the voice in a new kind of heterophonic texture in an expanded musical exposition of. Throughout this new exposition, the musical phrasing has been changed and the transitions have become more fluid, amid much more ornate musical figuration. In the first harp episode on page 1 of the 1959 version (example 1A), there are a relatively barren six attacks, compared to the flurry of notes we find in the 1983 version (example 1B).

EXAMPLES 1A–1B

The very few 'structural' notes from 1959 have been enriched by repetitions, arpeggios and 'diagonal' gestures in the 1983 version. The same goes for the revised episodes for voice, for mandolin and guitar, and for xylophones. This enrichment of texture is, broadly speaking, the way Boulez generally works when he revises and expands on his earlier pieces, and he has wrought similar changes in the middle and final sections. To sum up, the opening section sees a profound transformation from its 'punctualist' articulation and early, 'French-Russian' episodic form (in 1959) to processes of more gradual musical transitions (in 1983). The earlier episodic form was possibly related to the influence of Messiaen's conception of musical form or to Stravinsky's musical cells in *The Rite of Spring*; Boulez's revisions, on the other hand, appear to reflect the more 'Austro-German' approach to continuous formal processes that characterises the later stages of his development as a composer.

I refer to this as a 'performative transformation', since I suggest it can partly be seen in light of Boulez's experiences as an orchestral conductor through the 1960s and 1970s. His abandonment of open form may be read as a quite pragmatic decision. In an interview with Boulez that I attended in London in 2011, he stated clearly and simply that in this case 'the conductor's experience overruled the composer's experience'.¹³ His practical experiences with a broadening repertoire, in tandem with his increasing focus on musical perception in his writings of the late 1970s and onwards, likely motivated the stylistic changes he made in the later version of 'Improvisation III', and in other pieces. In the early 1950s, Boulez was mainly analysing and conducting recent scores by composers like Webern, Stravinsky and Messiaen, as well as his own work and that of

¹³ Author's notes from the Southbank Centre in London, 1 October 2011.

the composers of his generation.¹⁴ In the following decades, though, he gradually immersed himself more deeply in the Austro-German repertoire of early modernist and even late Romantic music. The general trajectory went back in time from then-contemporary scores to the music of Berg, Debussy, and Wagner.

A similar transformation—or broadening of scope—took place in his theoretical writings. In his early articles, he distanced himself from Berg as the ‘romantic Viennese’ in favour of Webern (in 1948, Boulez wrote that certain traits of Berg’s *Lyric Suite* ‘spring from the bad taste of romantic effusion carried to the point of paroxysm’).¹⁵ Later on, however, he came to appreciate Berg’s ‘organic’ compositional procedures,¹⁶ as well as the long-range musical processes of the late Wagner, which he compared to the writing style of Proust. Whereas Wagner himself called his *Tristan* music ‘die Kunst des Überganges’, Theodor W. Adorno later referred to Berg as ‘der Meister des kleinsten Überganges’.¹⁷ In addition, in Boulez’s theoretical output there is a gradual shift of perspective from an early focus on problems of compositional technique (in the early 1950s) to an increasing interest in questions of musical form and text–music relations (in the late 1950s), then in musical performance and aesthetics (the 1960s), and then in issues of musical perception contemporary with the founding of IRCAM and the Ensemble InterContemporain in the late 1970s and articulated throughout his lectures

¹⁴ Jésus Aguila, *Le Domaine musical: Pierre Boulez et vingt ans de création contemporaine* (Paris: Fayard, 1992)

¹⁵ *Stocktakings of an Apprenticeship*, p. 185 (*Relevés d’apprenti*, p. 238)

¹⁶ *Boulez on Music Today*, pp. 71–73 (*Penser la musique aujourd’hui*, pp. 79–80). See also his affirmation of the composer in the articles on Berg from 1977 to 1979 (in *Points de repère*), and later in his Collège de France lectures (in *Leçons de musique*).

¹⁷ Letter to Mathilde Wesendonck, 29 October 1859, in *Richard Wagner: Briefe* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995), p. 365. Theodor W. Adorno, *Alban Berg: Der Meister des kleinsten Überganges* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995).

at the Collège de France between 1976 and 1995. With his increasing commitments as a conductor in the 1960s and 1970s (particularly with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic and the Wagner Festival in Bayreuth), there is a decline in his commencement of new compositions. But it is during this time—up to the beginnings of *Répons* (in 1980) and the revision of ‘Improvisation III’—when his compositional style gradually changes, and his revisions of earlier scores come to almost outshine the production of completely new works.

However, this narrative, suggesting a linear historic development in Boulez’s conception of musical phrasing and form—from Webernian pointillism and French-Russian episodic form towards Austro-German flow and Wagnerian gradual transitions—may very well be too simple and straightforward to account for the intertwined complexities of the actual historical facts. Notably, Boulez deplored Webern’s excessively ‘compartmentalized forms’ and instead sought an imagined future music which Jonathan Goldman summarizes as follows: ‘Its forms would be more Debussian than Webernian, since Boulez admires the formal unanalysability of certain pieces by Debussy’ (such as *Jeux* for orchestra).¹⁸

And, upon closer examination, we find that both tendencies coexist (in palpable tension) in Boulez’s large-scale pieces, and oppositional thinking—between Schoenbergian ‘organic’ continuity and Stravinskian ‘segmented’ episodes—is too blunt an instrument to account for the third way for which Boulez seems to be searching. Lastly, the transition from the micro-level of the series to the macro-level of musical form became a pressing compositional issue very early on in his career. Toward the mid-1950s, Boulez

¹⁸ Jonathan Goldman, *The Musical Language of Pierre Boulez: Writings and Compositions* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 48

already appears to reject direct deductions from series to form. Still, things are not always as clear-cut as one might hope. Instead of continuing to speculate in the abstract, then, let us look a bit more closely at 'Improvisation III'. Interestingly, in the 1959 version there is already considerable suppleness to the musical phrasing and form, not least in the long sections that have been labelled *Alpha*, *Beta* and *Gamma* in the composer's sketches (I will retain those names here). We see that these long sections, with their more flexible phrasing and general sinuosity, are *not* changed much from the 1959 version, which already had this quality of overall musical flow.

In the respective long sections, we hear a flexible play with elastic musical phrases and a flowing continuity to the musical development. When we analyse them in turn, we find that, for all of their suppleness, they were generated using a rather crude and mechanical process that seems to contradict the pseudo-'romantic' allure of the result. In what follows, I shall briefly recapitulate the main steps in the generative process of these weighty musical sections, or what I earlier referred to as a 'transformation' from (tiny) serial structures to (large-scale) musical form.

Generative transformations: from serial structures to musical form

I will present the generative process behind Alpha, Beta and Gamma in nine steps, referring to Boulez's very brief description in *Boulez on Music Today* (pp. 135ff), supplemented by my studies of his sketches at the Paul Sacher Foundation.

Step 1. The generation starts with the extremely basic figures of 1, 2, 3 and 4 (example 2), represented in durations.

EXAMPLE 2

Steps 2–3. The order of these four numbers is freely permuted and placed into a table (Example 3, left column). Notably, these free permutations have decisive musical consequences later in the process. Multiplications over the permutation ‘4-2-3-1’ produce an expanded table (Example 3, middle column).

EXAMPLE 3

The important point, methodologically speaking, is that each group of numbers now comes to represent a durational series of musical notes (Example 3, right column). This is the Columbi egg—the brilliant yet simple idea—underpinning Boulez’s method since 1951 at least: in his serialist structures, he supplants the pitches, durations, dynamics and so on with abstract numbers, and instead of working with his musical material directly, like Schoenberg and Webern did, he manipulates the numbers to produce this material.¹⁹ One might say that the overall modernist tendency towards abstraction reaches its peak at this point.

Steps 4–5. Superposition and displacement. Next, the four durational series are superimposed in a durational grid, producing a kind of four-part polyphony. The entrance of each new part in Alpha is then postponed (as Boulez describes it) by ‘observing the distances 1–2–2 as their linking principle’.²⁰ (In Beta and Gamma, in turn, the linking formulae are 2–2–1 and 2–1–2, according to the sketches.) In Alpha, this means that the second group (6, 4, 2, 8) will enter after one duration is presented by the

¹⁹ Robert Piencikowski seems to have been the first researcher to pinpoint this carrying principle in Boulez’s technique. See, for example ‘Nature morte avec guitare’ in Josef Häusler (ed.), *Festschrift Pierre Boulez* (Mainz: Schott, 1985), pp. 66–81.

²⁰ *Boulez on Music Today*, p. 135.

first group (4, 12, 8, 16); the third group (3, 12, 9, 6) will enter after two durations of the second group; and the fourth group (1, 2, 3, 4) will enter after two durations of the third group. The result is the following table of superimpositions (Example 4).

EXAMPLE 4

Steps 6–7. Reduction of polyphony. Instead of exposing this polyphony directly, the four voices are then reduced to a single part ('reduction' being another typical trait of modernist formalism, on a par with 'abstraction'). Only the last part to enter is exposed at any given time, and the deleted parts are indicated by grace notes (example 5).

EXAMPLE 5

As a result, only one part is presented at any one time. The reduction produces the following Alpha series, according to Boulez's sketches (example 6).

EXAMPLE 6

In the 1959 score, this little series is extended over more than four minutes of musical time, filling the entire Alpha section. In fact, the fourteen 'main notes' of this series are directly represented by the fourteen static chords that one can readily hear in the winds and strings. The 'grace notes' of the series are turned into brief staccato chords, vividly marking the shifts in the aforementioned progression of the static chords. Thus this durational row, generated by the crude arithmetic manipulations that I have presented, is almost directly responsible for the temporal process of the grand Alpha section at the macro-level of musical form. The first stages of this procedure are presented in *Boulez*

on *Music Today*, but true to form, Boulez does not show it all. The sketches reveal a considerable amount of free choice throughout this procedure, not least in subsequent stages of composition that are not mentioned in the book.

Steps 8 and 9. After several additional superimpositions, reductions and other amendments, the durational series for the Beta and Gamma sections come out as follows (example 7, Beta; example 8, Gamma). In examples 6–8, as well, I have entered the rehearsal numbers from the musical score of 1983 (see numbers framed in squares).

EXAMPLES 7 AND 8

The entanglement of Boulez's generative techniques (of which I have only shown the beginnings here) leads to the following question: is the large-scale form actually determined directly by these mechanical procedures? Certainly the durational grid is mechanically produced, generating 'automatic' results whose proportions and order of elements must have been unforeseeable at the start. However, the sketches reveal how Boulez subsequently changes the durations at free will. Some of them are multiplied by four, some by eight, and others again by sixteen, something that changes the internal proportions. On a principal level, the question of musical form cannot in any case be reduced to a spatial representation of sections in a durational grid. The formal process is a result of the actual interplay among the textural elements over musical time. Likewise, we must distinguish between the generation (*production*) of the elements and their placing (*mise-en-place*) throughout the piece.²¹ Astonishingly, here we see that not only

²¹ Boulez stresses this distinction in *Boulez on Music Today*. See also Pascal Decroupet, 'Comment Boulez pense sa musique au début des années soixante', in Pierre Albèra (ed), *Pli selon pli de Pierre Boulez: Entretiens et études* (Genève: Éditions Contrechamps, 2003), pp. 49–58

the durational grid but also the placing and superimposition of the four distinct groups are strictly regulated by the generative mechanics (the four groups being comprised of ‘harps’, ‘voice’, ‘mandolin/guitar’, and ‘xylophones’).²² Nevertheless, free choice is in play on every level. First, the generation of the piece’s ‘timeline’ itself inevitably depends on an abundance of minor choices that are freely made during the process. Second, the ensuing musical result depends not least on the musical gestures, phrasings, textures and articulations that are painted onto the mechanically framed canvases, as it were, thereby transforming the formal process into an expressive musical result.

We are therefore forced to rethink the relation between the micro-level of the series and the macro-level of musical form, as well as the ‘transformation’ from one to the other. Charles Rosen has briefly discussed this relation with regard to the piece ‘Structure 1a’ (1951): ‘The musical events created by the interaction of the series do not in fact constitute a musical form, if by “form” we mean strictly a temporal order of events in which the order itself has an expressive significance’.²³ This is clearly the case with ‘Improvisation III’ as well, despite the drastic developments around Boulez’s rethinking of musical form from 1951 to 1959.

²² The musical textures for each group are generated separately (cf. ‘production’), whereas their ‘placing’ (cf. ‘mise-en-place’) is regulated by the mechanical grid and is furthermore transformed in the sketches labeled ‘Sectionnements polyvalents’. The generative sketches of material for the four groups (‘harps, voice, mand/guit/cowbells, xyl’) are collected in separate folders that Boulez labels ‘Bulles de temps’, ‘Echiquiers’, ‘Paranthèses’ [*sic*], and ‘Hétérophonies’, respectively. This goes for the aforementioned groups in Alpha, Beta, Gamma and the ‘Episodes I–III’, whereas the rest of the parts (mainly winds and strings) are generated independently. Furthermore, the sketches to ‘Interlude 1 and 2’ are found in the folder named ‘Enchaînements multiples’. See *Sammlung Pierre Boulez*, film 137 (n.d.), pp. 325–477, mainly.

²³ Charles Rosen, ‘The Piano Music’, in William Glock (ed), *Pierre Boulez: A Symposium* (London: Eulenburg, 1986), pp. 85–97, p. 94

If Boulez makes many free choices during his generative processes, he makes even more in the final forming of his stylistic surfaces during the later phases of composition. Regarding the early phase of arithmetical generation, it is crucial to realize that the results of the procedures are largely unpredictable at the start, and in Boulez's texts, the dimension of 'the unpredictable' (*l'imprévisible*) is underlined from early on. These texts have been widely read and referenced but still manage to leave few apparent traces in the analytic interpretations of his music. Strictly morphological analyses have prevailed instead, setting serialist music apart—as it were—from the musicological practices of music analysis, listening and 'criticism' (in Kerman's sense of the word) that have developed in most other fields of music study over the last three or four decades. However, there is no obvious reason to treat postwar modernist pieces completely differently from all other kinds of music. It goes without saying that modernist pieces are also written mainly for performance and listening. The question of musical relevance (or, as Schoenberg once put it, of 'what it is') needs to be raised for them as well vis-à-vis the painstaking analyses of how their structures 'were made.' Moreover, without falling into the trap of 'intentional fallacy', it is of interest to see what Boulez says about analysis himself. While he always requires analyses to be technically penetrating and sound, he also preserves an untainted space for non-rationalist, non-controlled dimensions that he variously labels, for example, the 'non-formulated' (*l'informulé*, with reference to Adorno) or the non-analyzable (*l'inalysable*).²⁴ The motivations for such a choice of words bring me to my next 'transformation': the aesthetic transformation of Mallarmé's poetics into a veritable world of new procedures for musical composition.

Transformations of Mallarmé's poetics into music

²⁴ Pierre Boulez, 'L'informulé', *Revue d'esthétique: Adorno*, 8 (1985), 25–30

Along with Boulez's concepts of the unforeseeable (*l'imprévisible*) and the 'non-analyzable' (*l'inanalysable*), there is the Mallarméan concept of *l'anonymat*—the anonymity of the author's voice, which allows the voice of the compositional subject to step back and 'give away the initiative to the words'.²⁵ In the case of Boulez, this would probably mean giving away the initiative to the procedures of serialist composition, and he says as much during his work on *Pli selon pli* (1957–62). In 1960, for example, he writes:

The great works of which I have been speaking—those of Mallarmé and Joyce—are the data for a new age in which texts are becoming, as it were, 'anonymous', 'speaking for themselves without any author's voice'. If I had to name the motive underlying the work that I have been trying to describe, it would be the search for an 'anonymity' of this kind.²⁶

Boulez apparently encountered these ideas by reading Jacques Schérer's publication of Mallarmé's 'Book', *Le 'Livre' de Mallarmé*, in 1957. He seems to reference Schérer's preface more closely than the actual text by Mallarmé (which is little more than an amalgam of scattered notes and sketches). The ideas presented by Schérer struck Boulez 'as a revelation', even though he had been a passionate reader of Mallarmé's poems since the late 1940s.²⁷ The ideas he found in *Le 'Livre'* inspired his ideas about open form (first realized in his *Third Sonata* and rephrased in his essay 'Alea' in 1957). He also

²⁵ Stéphane Mallarmé, 'L'Œuvre pure implique la disparition élocutoire du poète, qui cède l'initiative aux mots' in *Œuvres Complètes* (Paris: Pléiade, 1989), p. 366

²⁶ 'Sonate, "que me veux-tu"' [1960], English edition; *Orientalions* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 154 (*Points de repère* (Paris: Éditions Christian Bourgois, 1985), p. 175)

²⁷ Pierre Boulez and Célestin Deliège, *Par volonté et par hasard* (Paris: Seuil, 1975), p. 64; Erling E. Gulbrandsen, 'Pierre Boulez in Interview, 1996 (III) Mallarmé, Musical Form and Articulation', *Tempo*, 65/257 (2011), pp. 11–21), p. 13

formulated notions about ‘the unforeseeable’ and the renunciation of total serialist control from very early on. In his article ‘Possibly...’ [*Éventuellement...*] from 1952, Boulez writes, for example, ‘From the prescriptions we have been examining in detail arises the unforeseen’.²⁸ In 1957, he writes in ‘Alea’, ‘In my experience it is impossible to foresee all the meanders and virtualities in the material with which one starts’.²⁹ Much later, Boulez admitted that his search for an ‘anonymity’ for the composer’s voice mainly applied to the structural results of serial generation, whereas the final articulation of that material was always clearly marked by his own, highly profiled musical choices.³⁰ In my view, this fact should encourage analysts to go not around but into, through and beyond the technicalities of serialist procedures in their efforts to understand this music.

Mallarmé famously considered the poem to be not a fixed result but a strategy for reading.³¹ In this sense, reading a poem almost amounts to rewriting it, presenting a striking parallel to the act of interpreting a score by playing it. Applied to serialist composition, this idea would involve a shift in perspective from regarding the work as a fixed result to regarding it as a performative procedure—for playing, for analytical interpretation, for further compositional writing. This idea of an always-unfinished ‘unfolding’ lies, as far as I can see, at the heart of Boulez’s construal of musical composition, revision, conducting and playing, and it directly informs the conception of *Pli selon pli—portrait de Mallarmé*. The notion of ‘fold’ or *pli*, taken as an incessant unfolding or ‘becoming’, is not coincidental here. The Mallarméan impulse may also

²⁸ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, p. 133 (*Relevés*, p. 174)

²⁹ Boulez, *Stocktakings*, p. 29 (*Relevés*, p. 45)

³⁰ Guldbrandsen, ‘Pierre Boulez in Interview, 1996 (III)’, pp. 11–12 and 17–18. See also Guldbrandsen, ‘Casting New Light on Boulezian Serialism’.

³¹ Mallarmé, *Œuvres Complètes*; Jacques Scherer, *Le ‘Livre’ de Mallarmé* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957)

represent additional motivation for Boulez's use of Joyce's concept of a 'work in progress' and points towards the French textual theory—*théorie du texte*—that would later be developed by Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes in the disciplines of philosophy and literary criticism. It is interesting to note that Boulez anticipated Derrida's reading of Mallarmé in *La dissémination* (1972), for example, by at least fifteen years. While it could be argued that Boulez, during the early 1950s, installed himself within the French structuralist movement that was so characterized by classic 'oppositional' thinking, it would be a mistake to overlook his gradual undermining of dichotomies in general and his movement in the direction of post-structuralist thinking.³² The influence of Mallarmé's poetics means that we ought to rethink the aesthetic base of Boulez's serialism from its very beginnings. His serialism is basically a set of procedures for generating structural 'raw material' from which he can later choose freely. Then follows his artistic formation, articulation and rephrasing of the musical surface. Whereas the result of the generative processes may be unpredictable at the outset, Boulez intervenes and makes free aesthetic choices during the compositional process.

If the Mallarméan impulse is manifest primarily in a musical performativity of free choices, it also prompts the introduction of non-European stylistic elements into Boulez's scores. His choices of instruments and twisting of idiomatic modes of playing are topics that remain to be systematically studied.³³ Luisa Bassetto suggests that the

³² While Goldman (2011) primarily sees Boulez as structuralist and gives documentation for such a reading (see pp. 18–30), Edward Campbell discusses Boulez's relation to post-structural thinkers such as Deleuze and Foucault: Campbell, *Boulez, Music and Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³³ Brunner (1996) and Bassetto (2003) discuss these aspects of Boulez's music in some detail. Campbell (2010), pp. 23–25, presents Boulez's early interest in music ethnology as influenced not least by André Schaeffner.

treatment of the voice in 'Improvisation III' recalls the mode of sung declamation characteristic of Japanese *nô* theatre; likewise, the striking glissando entrances of the flutes invokes the traditional flute playing of eighth-century Japanese court music, as it is described to us. The sonorities of his wooden percussion can be associated with Mexican xylophone playing, and his treatment of the harps—with their microtone tuning, 'guitarist' style of playing and absence of traditional arpeggios—evokes playing techniques from Peru and Bolivia. Following Raphaël Brunner, Bassetto claims that this is far from a simple indulgence in musical exoticism or 'orientalism' on Boulez's part. Though the elements are highly stylized, they are also confronted with Western generative techniques at the highest level of abstraction—contradictions that are taken directly into the music itself. Also, there are instances of outgoing melodic gestures and 'romantic' phrasing in the cello and trombone, particularly in the Beta and Gamma sections (see the cello solo after [35]). To sum up, examples concerning Boulez's moulding of sounding surfaces and modes of playing fit quite well into the dynamics of what I have here labeled the 'performative transformations' of his compositional writing. Concerning the striking use of distinctive instrumental sounds and 'formants' directly related to the ingenious pattern of phonemes in Mallarmé's sonnet text, I defer to the closer study presented in my book on *Pli selon pli*.³⁴ This brings me to the fourth kind of 'transformations' in this chapter.

Transformations of Mallarmé's poem into music

Many of Boulez's works have remained incomplete, partly because the material has continued to grow due to generative techniques that seem to multiply their own elements, and partly because he may have always intended to revise the musical form and rephrase the surface after 'testing' his works in performance. Processes of ongoing

³⁴ Guldbrandsen, *Tradisjon og tradisjonsbrudd* (1995/1997), pp. 351–57

revision and expansion can be associated with works stretching from *Douze notations* (1945) to *Dérive II* (2006).³⁵

Accordingly, ‘Improvisation III’ started out in 1959 with an approximate length of less than sixteen minutes (the duration is 15:51 in Boulez’s 1969 recording), only to be expanded to well over eighteen minutes (18:29) in his 1981 recording and to just over twenty-one minutes (21:09) in 2001. Notably, these expansions are mainly confined to the material in the opening section of the piece. Had they also been applied to the main sections of the movement (such as Alpha, Beta and Gamma), the revised work might very well have been much longer. As for serial generation, the sketches to ‘Improvisation III’ contain material for several further sections (Delta, Epsilon, Zeta, Eta, and so on), suggesting that the original plan may have been to transform not just verses 1–3 but all fourteen verses of Mallarmé’s sonnet into like sections. With fourteen such sections, Boulez might easily have ended with a movement of one and a half hours in duration—and this, again, to occur within the frame of the larger, five-movement work that was the entire *Pli selon pli*.

In 1959, Boulez obviously had to pause his generative processes—or excesses—after the third verse of the sonnet (‘verse’ is here equivalent to ‘line’). Then in 1982 he added the fourth verse, ‘Par une trompe sans vertu’, in a section inserted towards the end of the piece. Then came the addition of all fourteen verses on top of the existing musical

³⁵ This list only hints at the many revisions that have been going on for decades: *Douze notations pour piano* (1945)—*Notations I–IV* (1977–80)—*V* (1997); *Le visage nuptial* (1946; 1953; 1986–89); *Livre pour quatuor* (1954–65–); *Le troisième sonate* (1955–57; 1963–); *Figures-Doubles-Prismes* (1957–58; 1963; 1965–68; 1988); *Éclat* (1965)—*Éclat/Multiples* (1966–70–); *Livre pour cordes* (1966–68; 1988); *cummings ist der Dichter* (1970; 1986); ... *explosante-fixe* ... (1972–74)—*Mémoriale* (1985)—*Anthèmes* (1991–92)—*Anthèmes 2* (1997); *Répons* (1980–84–)—*Dérive* (1984)—*Dérive II* (1988, 2002, 2006); *Dialogue de l’ombre double* (1983–85; 1985–95); *Incises* (1994; 2001)—*Sur Incises* (1996–98).

textures. Single phonemes, words and verses, and complete renderings of the sonnet proliferate simultaneously on different levels of the musical unfolding—‘pli selon pli’—and create a *mise-en-abyme* structure of unprecedented complexity (the spiral or the labyrinth might be suitable metaphors for the ensuing result). In this dialectical play, there seems to be no synthesis or final closure. The Mallarméan concept of mobility (*mobilité*) deconstructs the opposition between *écriture* and performance (between vision and listening, or space and time) by ascribing to the poetical text a double existence, one split between the written signs on a page (like Mallarmé’s labelling of the poem as a ‘constellation’) and the sonic performance of those signs (like Mallarmé having his poems read, as in a musical performance).

The complexity of musical form clearly takes its rationale from Boulez’s express interest in the formal structure of the sonnet itself, *in casu* the poem ‘A la nue accablante tu’.³⁶ This late sonnet (completed in 1895) is arguably one of the most equivocal and enigmatic poetic texts that Mallarmé ever published, in terms of its semantic meaning, its pattern of phonetic play, and its finely calculated and irreducible ambiguity of grammatical syntax. The reader cannot even determine with certainty the grammatical subject or object in the single long sentence that runs without stop through the sonnet.³⁷

The formal, phonetic, syntactic, and semantic ambiguities of this poem were to a large extent retained and even reinforced in Boulez’s music by 1959, not least through all of the different—and mutually exclusive—alternatives and *ossias* in the score. This plenitude of trajectories represented an extremely rich combinatorial set of possible

³⁶ Mallarmé, *Œuvres complètes*, p. 76

³⁷ Robert Cohn, *Towards the Poems of Mallarmé* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 229–36; Jean-Pierre Richard, *L’univers imaginaire de Mallarmé* (Paris: Seuil, 1961), pp. 276ff; Michel Butor, ‘Mallarmé selon Boulez’, *Melos*, 28 (1961), 356–59

choices. As this open form was transformed into a fixed version in 1982–83, moreover, things were not simplified, as one might have expected. On the contrary, when most of the *ossia* textures were reused and integrated in the new score, they produced an increased multiplicity of possible readings of the text-music relation on several new levels.

In 1959, Alpha, Beta and Gamma clearly constitute the main sections of the movement in question, and only the first three of the sonnet's fourteen verses are sung. In 1983, a new section is introduced ('Interlude 2'—see figure 1 above), presenting verse 4, the music of which is nothing other than the second variant of verse 1 from 1959, now furnished with the text of verse 4 instead of verse 1. In addition, the complete sonnet text is sung at a comparatively high speed during 'Episodes 1' and well into the first half of the Alpha section. This new text presentation arrives in two parts. First, the soprano sings verses 1–8 (the sonnet's two quatrains), accompanied by the four flutes, followed by an interlude comprised of expanded versions of the earlier episodes for two xylophones, for two harps, and for mandolin, guitar and cowbells. Second, the soprano sings verses 9–14 (the sonnet's two tercets), supported by various instrumental textures. Then, from 'Interlude 1' onwards, the soprano starts from verse 1 again and much more slowly works her way to verse 4.

With its initial vocalise on the vowel 'A,' the entire 1959 piece can—on one level—be heard as a single, vastly prolonged elaboration of the sonnet's very first word (and the first letter of the alphabet), or, indeed, of the dark phoneme 'a,' which is the central vowel in the poem. On another level, the 1959 version falls largely into three parts, clearly gravitating around the Alpha, Beta, and Gamma sections, each of which corresponds structurally to one sonnet verse (in fact, Alpha is without text, and verse 1

is dislocated to 'Interlude 1'). The piece thereby corresponds to the sonnet's first three verses, and a tripartite form ensues.

In contrast to all of this, the 1983 version falls more clearly into two parts, like the sonnet's form, as divided between quatrains and tercets. With the new installation of verse 4 (in 'Interlude 2'), the musical form turns in the direction of representing the first four verses of the sonnet, or, indeed, the four strophes of the complete sonnet form as such—thereby miming the direct rendering of sonnet form in the two preceding movements, 'Improvisation I & II'. Furthermore, the insertion of all fourteen verses at the start is—astonishingly—placed across the otherwise deep-structural divide between 'Episodes 1' and the Alpha section. This placement of the text completely disregards the constitutive logic of the musical structures that underlie these fourteen verses, since the four episodes of the former 'Episodes 1' were constructed with methods that differ completely from those that generated the Alpha textures.³⁸ Hence Boulez obviously does not care much about the earlier, generative 'construction', or the problem of 'structural unity', when he sets out to recompose his own piece. He deliberately ignores the generative deep structure in the rephrasing of the musical surface. As a consequence, by adding the complete fourteen verses in this manner, another level of complexity is reached in the interplay between poetic and musical text.

How do all of these complexities come across to the listener? Arguably, the text and music are perceived less as a set of structural labyrinths than as a directly accessible

³⁸ See sketches, 'Sectionnements polyvalents', 'Bulles de temps', 'Echiquiers', 'Paranthèses [*sic*]', and so on.

musical-rhetorical flow.³⁹ In his conversations with Deliège, Boulez proposes two opposite readings of the text-music relation in *Pli selon pli*: the music may represent a ‘complete osmosis’ or (at the same time) a ‘complete transformation’ of the poetic text.⁴⁰ This is a fairly good account of what happens in ‘Improvisation III’. On the one hand, in both versions of the piece, the formal, syntactical and phonetic patterns of the poem are—so to speak—retained and analysed by the music in a kind of ‘complete osmosis’ of the text. On the other hand, precisely by being extremely ‘true’ to its formal structure, the poem is also transformed into something completely different. This forms a paradox—at one and the same time, there is a ‘complete osmosis’ and a ‘complete transformation’ of the text.

At this point, a thematic reading of the semantics of Mallarmé’s sonnet and Boulez’s interpretation of it might contribute to our discussion of the text-music relation. The connections go from the sonic renderings of consonants and vowels—not least of the more significant phonemes (*a, b, u, ab, ba, tu*, etc.) and their ingenious distribution throughout the poem—to the readings of the poem’s ambiguities in syntax and poetic meaning and their transformation into Boulez’s highly differentiated orchestration of the formal elements of the music. On a semantic level, as is often the case in Mallarmé, nothing actually happens within the scenery that the poem suggests. His text is centred around a ‘nothingness’ or an absence. In a kind of failed Odyssey of modern poetry or art, the ‘abolished’ shipwreck, with its muted horn and its broken, ‘phallic’ mast, has gone under, leaving behind little more than some whitish foam among the floating wreckage in the dark waves, conjuring the image of a muted siren, once perhaps deadly

³⁹ The formal process of the piece is described through auditive categories of musical listening (articulation, phrasing, timbre, allure, density, gesture, texture, and so forth) in Guldbrandsen, *Tradisjon og tradisjonsbrudd* (1995/1997), chapter 4, pp. 381–506.

⁴⁰ *Par volonté*, pp. 121–28

but now probably drowned or in any case no longer singing. This absence at the poem's centre evokes the similar function of the poem as 'centre and absence' in the music, particularly in the 1959 version.⁴¹ The truly vertiginous play between textual and musical meanings I have elaborated on elsewhere.⁴²

Historiographical transformations of current images of postwar modernism

Finally, the analytical findings and aesthetic readings that I have briefly presented here also call for a historiographical revision of the current image of what Boulezian serialism of the 1950s (and later) was and is all about, including the dimensions of compositional unpredictability and free choice. As far as I can see, the full methodological consequences of these findings—or readings—still remain to be developed, regarding the interpretation of Boulez's poetics, his compositional proceedings, and the historiographical understanding of his role in high modernism in post-World War II Europe. Boulez's frequently repeated suggestion to break with tradition by 'burning down the library every day', thereby forgetting the past, must of course be read metaphorically (in one case, he refers to René Char's poem 'La bibliothèque est en feu'),⁴³ whereas the idea of modernist rupture, conversely, is historiographically difficult to maintain.

⁴¹ See Boulez's references to Henri Michaux at the time he completes the first version of *Pli selon pli*, in 'Poésie—centre et absence—musique (Poésie pour pouvoir)' (written in 1958). *Points de repère*, pp. 183–200.

⁴² See Guldbrandsen, *Tradisjon og tradisjonsbrudd*, (1995/1997), chapter 3, pp. 251–380, and chapter 5, pp. 507–88

⁴³ See Boulez's statement: 'Je pense qu'on doit mettre le feu à sa bibliothèque tous les jours, pour qu'ensuite la bibliothèque renaisse comme un phénix de ses cendres, mais sous une forme différente. Pour moi, ce qui est intéressante, c'est justement de ne pas être étouffé par la bibliothèque.' Goldman, Jonathan, Jean-Jacques Nattiez, and François Nicolas, *La Pensée de Pierre Boulez à Travers ses Écrits* (Paris: Delatour, 2010), p. 250.

The concept of the musical work, as it has been active in Western art music since at least 1800, carries the constitutive implication that a work has to be played in always new versions. Boulez undoubtedly inscribes himself into this tradition, both as a composer and as a conductor.⁴⁴ Also in this regard, we cannot sustain the notion of a clear-cut modernist ‘rupture’ with tradition. Boulez’s practice of making free choices in the course of his musical composition only ties him more firmly to that same tradition, pointing back to the early German Romantic philosophers and to Immanuel Kant’s concept of the aesthetic judgment—as presented in his *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment*, all the way back in 1790. Two centuries later, in 1986, in Boulez’s significant article ‘The System and the Idea’ (*Le système et l’idée*), he writes that the system of generative procedures is nothing more than a crutch (*une béquille*), a help for the imagination in order to get started.⁴⁵ By this accounting, he requires serialist writing only to furnish him with the raw material of structural objects, and then in the next round he chooses from these objects. And what does he choose? ‘I choose’, says Boulez in 1986, ‘what I judge to be good, beautiful, necessary’.⁴⁶ To some music historians, this kind of statement may still come as a surprise. In a conversation in Paris in 1996, Boulez confirmed this point at several instances, however; here is one of them:⁴⁷

E. Guldbrandsen: Mr. Boulez, this is not the picture of serialism that has survived in normal, ordinary textbooks, and not even in the general output of musicological

⁴⁴ See Guldbrandsen, ‘Modernist Composer and Mahler Conductor’

⁴⁵ ‘Cela revient à considérer le système comme une aide, une béquille, un excitant pour l’imagination’, *Jalons*, p. 378. Reprinted in *Leçons de musique*, p. 407.

⁴⁶ *Jalons*, p. 378: ‘Je choisis, donc je suis; je n’ai inventé le système que pour me fournir un certain type de matériau, en moi d’éliminer ou de gauchir ensuite, en fonction de ce que je trouve bon, beau, nécessaire’.

⁴⁷ Guldbrandsen, Erling E., ‘Pierre Boulez in Interview, 1996 (II) Serialism Revisited’, *Tempo*, 65/256 (2011), 18–24, p. 23.

analyses of your work. [...] Everybody seems to talk about some kind of logical positivism of composition.

P. Boulez: Yes! But I mean, that is exactly the point where they are totally wrong.

Totally wrong!

According to the findings above, we must abandon the ‘unity and control model’ of serialist composition and allow—or persuade—formalist music analysis to be integrated into a much wider perspective on interpretation, or, indeed, on criticism. In Boulez’s case, the modernist project is obviously carried by a fundamental poetical vision—one that includes notions of free aesthetic choice and of the reinterpretation of the musical past. There is a need to look and see how he actually reads poetry, how he regards painting and architecture, how he listens to non-European musics, and how he conducts musical works from the great Western tradition of the last 150 years, in order to understand his music more richly. And in order to grasp what happened to Central European art music in the precarious decades after World War II, we need to open up the full context of the performative, aesthetic and cultural dimensions that made this music necessary—or at least, possible—thereby paving the way for new musical experience.