

ISOLA for ensemble

Introductory remarks

Isola for chamber ensemble departs from a rich material for each individual instrument which I have been gathering for a period of about three years, but here put in motion in a formal way which orients itself to what could be considered a hermeneutical interpretation of material. One in which each singular part (ideally) reflect the whole, and in which each singular part has the ability (or this was rather the aim) to transform or *become* any other part of the piece. The relationship between temporalities (the *moment/newness* and the constructed form) is pushed towards a non-linear consideration. The final proposition of its evolution in time, I propose, is the one which the *forces* of sound established by their “own” accord, but in reality, the parts could easily have been placed in a completely different order.

Inspiration and method

Man kindles a light for himself in the night-time, when he has died but is alive. The sleeper, whose vision has been put out, lights up from the dead; he that is awake lights up from the sleeping.
- Heraclitos, fragment 77. ¹

Heraclitus writes in fragment 77 (sometimes referred to fragment 26, depending on translator) enigmatic – as ever – about a state of transition, between life and death, between the sleeper and the one awake, about the light and the darkness. Each state excludes the other one, yet – in the fragment - they both meet. Philosopher Hans Ruin notes: “*the meeting in itself is intangible, it occurs only a seizing*”. ² [*my translation*]

In the piece *Isola* for ensemble this fragment position itself as metaphor for the composition. A metaphor which in the end is realized by yet another metaphor which is implied in the title of the piece, *Isola* (island(s)) The material is based on a vast musical material. Each instrument is considered its own *island* of autonomous material:

Rall. ----- $\text{♩} = \text{ca } 48-52$
21 $\frac{2}{4}$ ca 5"
III/IV P XP
IV
pppp

25 $\frac{3}{4}$ quasi solo
molto rub. (lento) XP
P XP
XP
>pp pp pp

27 $\frac{4}{4}$ accel. ----- $\text{♩} = \text{ca } 68-74$
VS. P
III P
IV
pppp < pp < pp < pppp >

Example bar 21-28 in Cello

In this sense, every phrase of each instrument could be considered (and is from a compositional point of view) as one long line consisting of a number of unnumbered phrases interrupted by

¹ John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 138.

² Heraclitos, *Fragment*.

pauses of varying lengths. The phrases are not chronological, but instead each phrase is considered to be an island of its own possible to be preceded or succeeded by any other:

Example clarinet as in the final score (bar 39-42) (the two bottom examples is successive)



Could as easily be articulated as:



Or, if manipulated, as:



The musical fragments are placed (imagined) in a vast space. Arbitrary at first and then focused from a force of gravity induced by the formation of the different fragments. In the finished piece the forces of each phrase are slowly re-imagined and immersed in one another:

The image shows a complex musical score for Example, bar 92-96. It consists of several staves, including vocal lines and instrumental parts. The score is marked with 'Piu mosso' and 'Rall.' (Ritardando). A tempo marking of '♩ = ca 60-64' is present. Dynamic markings range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *pppp* (pianississimo) and *f* (forte). Blue arrows point to specific notes across different staves, indicating interactions or relationships between parts. A circled area on the right side of the score highlights a specific dynamic change or performance instruction.

Example, bar 92-96

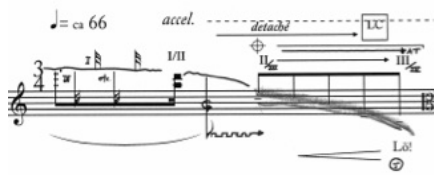
The immersion of the material changes the stability in each part, meaning that a stable pitch might begin to fluctuate, change its dynamic or extend or become shortened. As if each autonomous part begins to listen and react to its surrounding.

The method is as long as possible one of imagination: one phrase hovers solitary, then by imagining another phrase (in another instrument), the two sources are slowly forced closer and closer (or further and further away) from one another. The compositional process is then one of imagining the tangible point between the different energy levels of the phrases.

By retaining the autonomy of each instrument (and by the independence of writing each instrument one by one) the construction of notation (in the fixed score) is delayed as long as possible. The fixing of synchronicity (in time) in each moment means on the one hand a harmonizing of two (or more) parts, but also imposing a limitation on the material (each individual instrument shouldn't be considered – ideally – as existing in the same temporality).

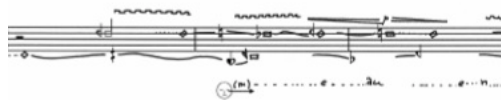
A particular method of harmonizing materials is also used. The voice, or the acknowledging of the body-instrument connection. The voice functions as reappearing point of reference and as a point of stability in each instrument:

- The voice is used as an exaggeration of energy/dynamic/articulation:



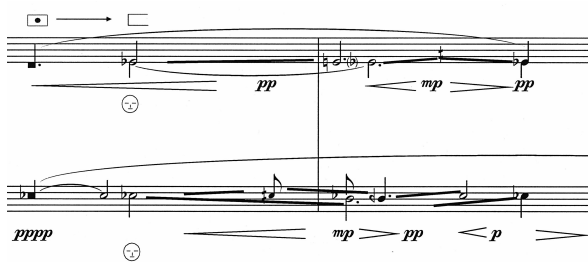
example viola bar 49 (the drawn head indicates the use of the voice, here as an exclamation of "Lö!" balancing with the timbre of the crushed viola sound.

- The voice is used as an inflection or timbre quality of a sustained, unstable sound:



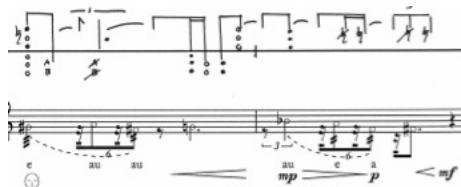
example viola bar 164-166 in which the viola imitates the grainy sound of slow bow movement.

- The voice is used to disturb and immerse the sound quality with an ambiguous quality. A quality which shows the connection of body – instrument, but also allows for the general presence of voice, not as a mere effect, but as a unifying quality of sound, a glue, if you wish:



example, bass flute and bass clarinet bar 170-171 in which the flautist and clarinet performer adds an almost unison singing to the normal sound of their instrument.

- The voice is used as an additional extension of the instrument, essentially in ISOLA in the parts of the flute and the violin in which the voice not only emphasizes the relationship between the performer and his/her instrument, but instead integrates and use the voice as an extension. Transforming the instrument:



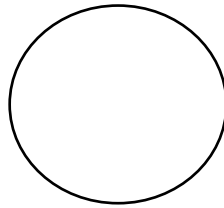
example bass flute bar 111-112 in which only the voice is used with covered mouthpiece. The sound (and essentially the perceived pitch of the voice) is manipulated by the legato movement of the fingerings.

This is what I consider the first articulate attempt of my work to deal explicitly with a compositional process in which:

- Each individual material essentially is completely autonomous and doesn't rely on the context for its (possible) existence.
- Each individual part is constructed, improvised and notated in a form in which the usage of chronology is avoided. Each phrase is a new beginning, but possible to view as intermediary, final or, simply, a part of a holistic whole.
- Each individual part is in almost all instances possible to contain all other parts, each part is also possible to immerse or detach from the existing other forces (parts). Which means – again – that each cell is a mirror of the whole and that inclusion is the dominating constructive force – the compositional process seeks to avoid exclusion of possible existences to the very last occasion (the fixation of the score).

This method is the first step of what the research project *techniques of ecstasy* seek to explore through various means and attempts.

It deals with an approach to the traditional categories of *harmony, melody, temporality and time* by instead posing the idea of circular, re-negotiating, compositional process:



FINAL WORDS and CRITIQUE

The liminal point between life and death, the sleeper and the awoken, which Heraclitus poetically describes is in *Isola* the manifestation of the imagined constellation of musical (sounding) materials. They immerse, repel, but never fully integrate. They remain autonomous and elusive. It is a continuous sound, articulated and made dynamically present in a specific space, in a specific temporality. The meeting is also here intangible, but nevertheless possible to *hear*. They (the sounds) exist (or is imagined as such) in different dimensions, possible to locate in their intersection, their tangent points, their liminality.

The idea of immersion in the piece, or the *becoming* through the combination of material is essentially underdeveloped in the piece. It is true that the different material effect each other: they extend or transform (or as is often the case in the string parts – one part is often slowly distributed in three), but they remain too much limited by their pre-requisite notational identity. For future pieces the idea of becoming, immersion and transformation has to be imagined and re-imagined vis-a-vis the pre-existing phrases (the material). For instance, if a sound is extended through suspense – as in the example above, page 4 in this article – a bigger degree of sensibility

should be practiced. The *interference* of the achieved sound (to the left) clearly in the acoustic space infers a moment which represents an opening of the sound which I consider the piece unable to develop. Instead, it always returns to the skeleton of the piece (the possible phrases existing within the material, the islands). It is clear

example bar 94-96 in the score (flute and clarinet)

– for me – that a further development of this method needs to extend the work on sounds *pre-notation*. Possibly also, the question of space should be further elaborated in the construction. As of now, the placement of the musicians in space, is only a realization of an abstract but practical geometry in which I assume is the best acoustical distribution of the used musical material. However, with a pre-imagined space (regardless of if it will ever be performed in such), some of these issues could have been developed further. It does not mean that a fixation of space would make the material poorer, rather that the material could have transformed further through a more established inner (imagined) and outer (practical) reality. To end with a quote by Dorothea Baumann:

“the spatial aspect of music has, in fact, two sides: music creates its own inner world with its own time, which is passing even if only in our imagination. A simple stream of sounds creates a

*sensation of space. But “musical” space is strangely ambiguous. Still, by means of thinking and sensation we can move within this virtual space, which has fullness and depth.”*³

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Baumann, Dorothea. *Music and Space: A Systematic and Historical Investigation Into the Impact of Architectural Acoustics on Performance Practice Followed by a Study of Handel’s Messiah*. Peter Lang, 2011.
- Herakleitos, 5/400-talet f Kr. Fragment. *Kykeon*, 8. Lund: Propexus, 1997.
- John Burnet. *Early Greek Philosophy*. 4. ed. London: Adam & Charles Black, 1945.

³ Baumann, *Music and Space*.