

19, 20 and 21 May 2010

How to compose electronic music for poetry which language you do not understand: *Ajip Rosidi, as test case.*

Abstract

One of the main questions during my composition process has always been "what balance is there between the conceptual and the intuitive". In the first part of this article I will show some techniques of composing electronic music using influences of comparative philosophy from the Belgian philosopher Ulrich Libbrecht. In the second part I will showcase some compositions I made for the Indonesian poet Ajip Rosidi, its Sundanese language I do not understand and raise the question "what means musical intuition to me?".

Part 1

During my Sonology study (1976-1980) I was trained to use a statistical machine for musical composition.

Two distinct kinds of programs were used: Composition and sound synthesis programs.

I used Gotfried-Michael Koenigs Projekt 1 and Werner Kaegi's MIDIM/VOSIM¹ as sound-synthesis and composition programs. Both programs use statistical methods of inputting data: numbers are used for parameters like Pitch, Duration and Articulation. The ability to use chance operations were of particular interest to me.

Composing to me was to fill buckets of *itches*, *durations* and *articulations*, still unrelated to each other. All kinds of operations like classical methods of mirroring were used but also to use pitch domains like Pythagorean intervals or Gamelan intervals. In the same time, I was doing research into duplicating gamelan instruments through VOSIM sound-synthesis.²

Because of studying electronic music and gamelan music I became aware of the eastern ways of thinking. Questions arose like: "what are the differences and similarities between western and eastern ways of music composition?" A more comparative view.

I became interested in the comparative philosophy of Ulrich Libbrecht, a Belgian Sinologist. I was struck by his definition of what music is:

"...To make clear what we understand by *Being, we start with an analogy. What is music? If I try to give an answer then I ascertain that music breaks up in three dimensions: **Becoming, Being and Not-Being**. Music is in its process of Becoming a complex unity of vibrations, a kind of sound. But it is clear that not every sound is music. Music requires also a rational structure. These are put in a score. This is the aspect of Being. But a performed score would only be ordered noise if there would not be the experience-dimension which brings about in the listener a resonance with the musicians or composers experience. This emotion is the Not-being aspect of music. It is conceptually empty. These three dimensions are in their own necessary but not sufficient. None of these approaches to the nature of music can bring me

¹ Minimum Description of Music and VOice SIMulation developed at the Institute of Sonology Utrecht

² <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a793740682&db=all>

to the heart of Music. But I know that music is a unity. That's why it is a mysterious *Being, which I can encircle without being able to penetrate the secret of it.”³

Comparative music example: Morandi's clarinet

My first piece of comparative electronic music was Morandi's clarinet⁴.

It was inspired by the work of the Italian painter Morandi. My first idea was to make a sonological work, dark in color with a sparkling middle part. I wanted to integrate the comparative music dimensions, *Becoming*, *Being* and *Not-Being*.

Through the intensive use of an intonation/glissando the sound is *becoming*; this is even more so in the use of more layers (layers of becoming)

Morandi's clarinet: the first 3 lines of ANHI01.vos

	T	ΔT	M	ΔM	D	A	ΔA	C	N	S	Mf	Np	dimensions 1-12	
{ 0 }	600	0	250	0	0	0	500	100	5	0	120	30	{0.098}	Prefix Track 1
	284	0	142	0	14	0	285	100	1	0	120	234	{0.100}	Prefix Track 2
{ 1 }	80	0	204	-23	0	285	-57	75	1	1	352	7173	{2.052}	Body Track 1
	284	0	142	-150	14	285	-57	100	1	1	352	4782	{1.779}	Body Track 2
{ 2 }	80	0	180	0	8	228	-228	75	1	1	352	528	{2.190}	Suffix Track 1
	284	0	142	0	14	228	-228	100	1	1	352	352	{1.929}	Suffix Track 2

From the basic MIDIM/VOSIM file “ANHI01.vos” (first 3 lines shown), 23 seconds long, the whole composition is derived. An intonation contour (ΔM, the 4th dimension of the midim/vosim score) becomes a very long glissando after transposition. In the final score 14 layers are used.

In the middle and end part duplications of Javanese Gamelan instruments are used (Gendher starting at ca. 11:30 minutes and Bonang starting at ca. 23 minutes); in this piece the typical Javanese tone-systems are not used.

Part 2

Els Bogaerts (independent researcher) asked me a few years ago to make a recording of some poetry of the Indonesian writer and poet Ajip Rosidi (NIOD Dec, 2003). He recited in Sundanese language from his bundle *Jante Arkidam*⁵

While listening to the recordings, I thought “I will try to make a composition to each poem even if I don't understand its language” and as title call them “a la maniere de...”, inspired by Maurice Ravel. As an extra stimulation I also thought about giving a birthday present to my friend the composer Hanna Kulenty. She won the Unesco prize for her Trumpet concerto. So for me to use the trumpet sound was fixed. Within ca. two months the piece should be finished (birthday March 2004). The final version is called “A la maniere de Kulenty”, consisting of the poems “Tanah Sunda and Bendera Ikin” and a third poem “*Jante Arkidam*” I named “a la maniere de Koenig”.

³ An introduction into comparative Philosophy, part 1, Dr. Libbrecht

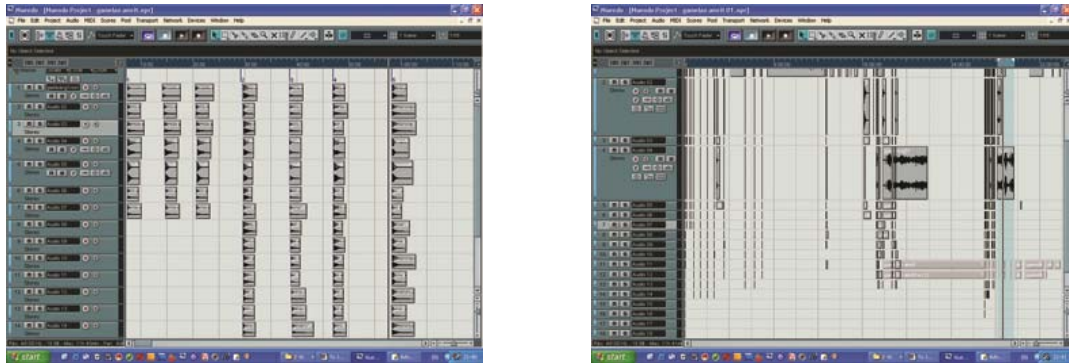
⁴ Musical example: <http://www.studiojhwjanssen.eu/about.htm>

⁵ Jante Arkidam, Tjupumanik, 1967

Comparative music dimensions

In general I use material from my musical diary, notated in the computer. A technique learned during my study with Werner Kaegi.⁶

Becoming: First I started with a preparatory study into the sound concepts I wanted to use: Trumpet/Tuba and Gamelan. For the Trumpet and Tuba I used sustained samples from the Vienna orchestra. The gamelan sounds I wanted to use in an unusual way: Each sound is part of a cluster sound⁷.



Each pitch of a gamelan instrument is put vertically under each other creating one complex sound. The resulting sound can be used as a basic sample/instrument for the piece. So, for instance, the 7 pitches of the Saron Slendro or the 13 or 14 pitches of the gendher Barung are put under each other.

Being: I used two bars from the introduction of Hanna Kulenty's Trumpet concerto. I used a program to change the pitch into Midi events and to do some chance operations. I cut the horizontal bars in pieces and put, after down transposing, the result under each other (a cluster of parts).

I used the gamelan sound concepts like mentioned above: cluster of sounds put into a pre-montage.



Not-Being: After intensive listening of the material, *the basic ingredients are put like a chef in a very intuitive quick way together into a final montage.*

⁶ Werner Kaegi learned this during his study with Paul Hindemith

⁷ Use is made of the sound library of Amrit Gomperts



I think with *Tanah Sunda* it took me 2 hours to finish 90 percent of the piece. Remember that I didn't understand the meaning of the poetry. Like in a trance I put the elements under the text. It is like editing a documentary. You try to feel the energy of the moment, in this case the sound of the poem. At these moments I'm very sensitive for details in the sound, for instance like the following:

In Tanah Sunda there is a line "Kuring tungtung teuteupan ..." For me this sounds like the gamelan instrument Bonang (a small set of gongs laying on a wooden frame). In the piece I paraphrased the text with a bonang part. The meaning of the line was "I at the end of my gaze".

Second example: Two months ago I asked my friend the Jazz drummer Pierre Courbois to play a few parts on his drums for my documentary "Water of gold": A marching rhythm, instead of 4/4 he played it in 5/4; a part on his hi-hat and cymbals, a part on his Balinese small Gongs and a tremolo on one of his gongs. The recording took 1 hour; I listened at home and within 15 minutes I put the piece together. At these moments I'm absolutely sure it is good, there is no doubting.

Conclusion

I mentioned the following concepts from Comparative Philosophy in a music context: *Becoming, Being and Not-Being*.

The concept of Not-Being is I think very strange to most Westerners but I realize that while writing this article I must come to the conclusion that for me using my intuition is very close to the concept of Not-Being. A mental state of utmost sensitivity, open to subconscious things happening. At moments I must have felt another layer or layers (deeper layers) than conventional communication. The fullness of emptiness.⁸

⁸ <http://www.studiojhwjanssen.eu/musical%20encounters%202010.html> for audio.
<http://www.studiojhwjanssen.eu/water/water%20van%20goud.html> for audio and video.

Tanah sunda

The Sundanese Country

by
Ajjp Rosidi

Hejo pagunungan

Green the mountains

Paul lautan

Blue the ocean

Hejo

Green

Paul

Blue

The sky in my heart

Langit 'na hate kuring

Masing di mana kuring nangtung

Wherever I stand

Masing ka mana kuring leumpang

Wherever I go

Tanah lemboh matak bêtah

The prosperous land gives pleasure

Angin nyeot nyiuman tarang

The rustling wind kissing my forehead

Masing di mana anjeun nunjuk

Wherever you point

Masing iraha anjeun cumêluk

Whenever you call

Kuring mo mungpang kuring rek datang

I shall not refuse, I shall come

Neueulkeun tarang neueulkeun jantung

It is inscribed on my forehead, engraved in my heart

Kuring tungtung teuteupan

I at the end of my gaze

Kuring tungtung

I at the end

Teuteupan

Of my gaze

Tungtung bêdil

The tip of the gun

Ngmcêr dada

Aimed at my chest

Kuring geus nyaksian gêtih ngabayabah

I have witnessed streaming blood

Kuring geus nyaksian panon carêlong tanggah

I have witnessed sunken eyes looking upwards

Maranehna nu mikacinta lêmah caina

Those who loved their homeland

Ngalalungsar teu walakaya

Lie motionless on their back

Kuring geus nyaksian rajapati teu pilih wanci

I have witnessed murder at any time

Kuring geus nyaksian nu ngarinah beuki gênah

I have witnessed deceit ever more easy

Maranehna nu ngabela tanah karuhunna

Those who defend their fathers' country

Diparaksa kudu aringkah

Are compelled to leave

Langit hibar lêmbur musnah
Walungan banjir ku gêtih
Sawah ruhay huma burahay
Angin ngahiuk peurahan pitnah

*The sky aglow the villages in ruins
Rivers flooded with blood
Rice fields glowing red
Howling wind leading to slander*

Hejo pagunungan paul lautan
Taya kamarasan ngan katugênahan
Hejo pagunungan paul lautan
Taya katêngtrêman ngan ancaman

*Green the mountains blue the ocean
No peacefulness only displeasure
Green the mountains blue the ocean
No security only threatening*

Kêmbang beureum buah biru
Kêmbang wera kêmbang jayanti.
Tanah têmpat kuring sidêku
Ngurugan mun kuring têpi ka pati

*Red flowers blue fruits
Hibiscus flowers jayanti flowers
The land where I am kneeling
Filling in when I reach my death.*

Jatiwangi, 1956



Aji Rosidi

Bendara Ikin

Lord Ikin

by
Ajjp Rosidi

Kami Bëndara ikin
Nu salawasna teu wêleh yakin
Hirup mah ngadodoho nu bongoh
Ngintip-ngintip milik nu baris nêpi
Sangkan bagja ragrag ka awak
Ulah sungkan maen-mata jeung nu ngawasa

I am Lord Ikin
I'm ever sure
Watchful against dereliction of duty
Spying out wealth
That I might acquire
Unashamedly making eyes at those in power

Nya kami Bëndara Ikin
Nu salilana teu wêleh pêrcaya
Hirup kudu lolondokan
Titip diri sangsang badan
Bari teu këndat waspada
Bisi pangeunteupan robah warna

Yes, I'm Lord Ikin
I'm ever certain
In life a chameleon
Watching out for my own safety
And keeping my eyes peeled
Lest my perch should change its colour

Taya kayakinan
Nu pêrlu dipageuhan nêpi ka tumpur
Taya bêbênêran
Nu pantês ditebus ku umur

There is no certainty
That needs to be defended to the death
There is no principle
Fit to be paid for with your life

Najan ka lêmahcai
Teu kudu babàkti pati

Even for this homeland of ours
You need not give your life

Taya gunana.
Sosoroh kojor ka pelor.
Ènggoning ngabela bangsâ
(Cara Ki Saluki nu tungi
Manan daek ngawula ka Walanda
Mihapekeun hirup nu hiji
Kalah milih rarabi ka pati
Majar maneh tanda satia
Ka nagara nu hayang mêrdika)

There's no use
Serving until your body 's riddled with bullets
Defending the nation
(Like Saluki who had no mind of his own
Instead of serving the Hollanders
To save his only life
He chose death
He said, as a token of his loyalty
To a country that wanted its freedom)

Teu pêrlu
Ngabela kamêrdikaan
Nêpi ka tega ka nuawa sorangan
(Cara Ki Angkat
Leuleuweungan gugunungan

Beurang-peuting seubuh nyaring
Kaanginan kahujan
Karêmbêsan reumis tiis
Angkeuhan Walanda
Kalah badan eleh wowotan
Teu walakaya
Katarajang batuk gangsa
— Sarta ayeuna saha nu ingêteun
Najan keur hirupna teu boga kasieun?
Dalah nu dibelana
Geus hênteu mirosea)

Tapi ka kami
Saha nu kiwari wani kurnaki?

*(Najan geus pada têrang
Korbanna hênteu kawilang
Patriot jeung pêjuang
Diparabkeun ka Walanda
Minangka ngajual jasa)*

Walanda indit
Londok ge nyaho di pawit
Tapi sima aing
Mo kagêbrag ku nu caringcing

Sanajan teu milu gêriilya
Nya karni nu dipêrcaya
Najan teu milu bêtêmpur
Kami di angkat jadi gubêrnur

It's not necessary
To defend freedom
To the point of one's own death
(Like Angkat
Who went into the forests and climbed the
mountains
Going without sleep by night or day
Whipped by the wind and the rain
Soaked by the cold night dew
He hoped to drive out the Hollanders
Instead his body broke
And he was done for
Wracked by a hacking cough
— And now who remembers him
Though in his life he knew no fear?
The very ones he defended
Pay him no heed)

But who dares
Be heedless of me?

*(Even though everyone knows
The victims were innumerable
Patriots and heroes of the struggle
Were sacrificed to the Hollanders
In hope of reward)*

The Hollanders went away
And the chameleon knew his own true worth
My strength is
The equal of those who seek to do me down

Though I never fought as a guerrilla
I am the one they trust
Though I never lifted a weapon of war
They made me the governor

(Ngan awahing karni bisa
Ngawula ka nu ngawasa
Pada sili pihapekeun diri
Da hirup dina revolusi
Diatur ku nu boga korsi)

(Only because I'm so good
At serving those in Power
Always getting and giving support
Because life in this world of revolution
Is still organised from a desk after all)

Nya kami
Bëndara lkin nu mashur
Pangsiunan gubêrnur
Saban sore ngalantung
Ngajah lulurung

I am
The famous Lord lkin
Pensioned governor
Every evening I take a walk
From lane to lane

Lain lantung kaduyung layung
Lain langkah asal ingkah
Da kami hênteu ngalindur
Jadi gubêrnur beunang ngatur
Diparapehan para pamuda
Nu teu ngarti jalanna dunya
Angkeuhan hayang mêrdika
Cita-cita ngabela bangsa,
Pajah nyaah ka Republik
Tapi kapalingan têlik
Kacêrêk waktu rek nyulik
Isukna dijajarkeun di pasar
Dilalajoan ku nu balanja

Not going out just for the evening air
Not even for walking's sake
I don't walk in my sleep
I was governor because I ordered it
With the sacrifice of young men
Who didn't know the ways of the world
Their spirit drove them on to freedom
They wanted to defend the nation
They said they loved the Republic
But they were wrong
Captured when they went out on a raid
The next day paraded through the market
As a spectacle for those out shopping

Ditangtayungan pakarang samagrang
Ngajaga bisi aya maung ngamuk
Gajah bisi aya nu mêtâ
Kami nangtung
Ngabêndeng neuleu nu rea:

With a full military guard
In case one of them should run amok
Or one of them put up a fight
And I stood there
Arms akimbo facing the crowd

"Saksian! Ieu kabeh kaorn estremis
Ulon-ulon kakacowan. Mawa ribut
Ka dayeuh pageuh nu dijaga kalawan tapis
Ku angkatan pèrang karajaan. Kabeh kabukti salah
Ngalawan ka téntara pëndudukan. Upahna:
pelor sahowêr
Sing nêpi ka modarna pisan!"

Barang repeh, bren ngadereded.
Haseup ngêlun. Lir pacing ditilas
Para pamuda tiwas. Teu arnpun!

Dasar nu kaedanan ku angkeuhan
Memeh paragat sakarat
Kalah ngagorowok: "Mêrdika! Mêrdika!
Tumpês-ludês anjing Nika!
Perenan pênghianat bangsa!"

(Eta sora
Nêpi ka kiwari
Sakapeung masih nongtoreng
Ceuli mani asa saheng
Jantung motah kékêtégan
Matak kabur pangacian)

"See them there! They're a bunch of fanatics
Trouble makers. Disturbing the peace
In this peaceful city kept so
Abyly by the Armed Forces. They're all guilty
Of armed uprising. They'll pay with a shower
bullet.
Shoot them!"

Silence, then the sound of the long barking of
bren guns
Smoke rises. As cut down bush
Those young men died. No mercy!

But deluded by their dreams
Before their souls left their bodies
They cried out, "Freedom! Freedom!
Down with the running dogs of the Dutch army!
Wipe Out the traitors of the nation!"

(Those voices
Even now
I can hear them clearly
So loud they split my ears
My heart races
And I almost faint)

Jatiwangi, Januari 1965.