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## Musical Gesture as a Means of Composition in Recent Music: Some Observations

### ABSTRACT

#### Background

In musical scholarship a movement towards a broader focus on the musical corporeality has been developed actively through recent decades (Lidov, 1987; Hatten, 1993; Hatten, 2004). Gesture in music can be studied by different approaches: phenomenological, functional, physiological, cognitive, style-historical, performance practice, social-critical etc. (Gritten and King, 2006). Musical gesture itself can be considered from the viewpoints of 1) communication; 2) control; 3) metaphor. Metaphor is involved when gestures work as concepts that project physical movement, sound, or other types of perception to cultural topics (Alexander Refsum Jensenius, Marcelo M. Wanderley, Rolf Inge Godøy, Marc Leman, 2010). Using metaphor theory, we can argue that musical thought of a composer as well as of a performer is grounded in a bodily experience and thus a new concept of musical gesture emerges to fix a specific shift in understanding of composition. Now it can be regarded in the perspective of its energetic basis. R. u- sively as any energetic shapings through time that may be interpreted

The understanding of bodily basis of reason and imagination (Johnson, 1987) poses a question: is there any foundation for inter- m- position? The idea to conduct research in this direction was triggered by numerous statements by such composers as Luciano Berio, Pierre Boulez, Morton Feldman, Alfred Schnittke, Brian Ferneyhough, as well as their music. Since each of these authors has developed his individual approach to composition, it seems appropriate to analyze the coordination between u- personal means of composition.

universal language and introduces thereof

be viewed as an extension of Berio's involvement with Bertholt Brecht's idea on Gestus forming the kernel of his theatre ideas. Brecht's Gestus is a complex concept expressing the essence of a dramatic character through a symbolic bodily movement. According to Berio, performer's bodily movement is loaded with an overall historical experience of composer's and performer's interaction, which is embodied in a musical composition; thus, musical gesture is a sort of musical figure capturing artistic energy, forming indissoluble link with an instrument and all the plurality of historical styles that express themselves through performer's gesture, as in Sequenza XIII for accordion (Gartmann, 2007). Berio's approach to gesture could

*motor action*

-fold basis of instrumental

differs from conventional

development.

Pierre Boulez began to discuss gestuality in his late theoretical inspired by his own conducting experience and his contacts with Berio. m- portant for Berio and concentrates on the objective quality of a holistic phenomenon: the beginning, the middle and the ending are the most three harps and three percussionists (1996/1998/2003). We would *motor action* continual-discrete object.

Morton Feldman differs from his contemporaries, Berio and Boulez, by his deeply personal approach to instrumental attack. In his piano compositions, such as the *Vertical thoughts*, he pays exceptional attention to the very moment of attack, which has to be very soft, on attack makes it possible to interpret his gestuality as tactile, con- obviously is rooted not only in his taking lessons from Alexander Skryabin's classmate Vera Maurina-Press but also in his obsession with the art of abstract expressionists (Pollock, Rothko, de Kooning and others) in which the stroke of paint brush can serve as a counter- part to instrumental *visual-tactile* basis.

nature. n- ventional playing techniques using various novel modes of attack and and sound material. In such works as his String Quartets, articulation their exceptional variety aiming at a new *hearing*. As if negating

Lachenmann aspires for unfamiliar sound in order to shock his listeners by its very quality and thus to acquire a special content through uncomfortable aspects of l

nderstand the roots of his intentions.

Alfred Schnittke was obviousl

histor-

know whether Schnittke knew Berio's ideas on gesture or not, but in his Second Violin Sonata (*Quasi una sonata*) one could clearly discern some topical gestures of the classical sonata, such as the opening gesture with its dialogue between instruments and quickly developing n-

physicality of music-making. In this piece *artistic* gesture is prevalent.

The observations of musical gesture in recent and contemporary art music could be continued: such composers as Brian Ferneyhough and Olivier Messiaen, Kaija Saariaho and Harrison Birtwistle, Edison Denisov and Nikolai Sidelnikov represent different aspects of gestuality in their work.

Composers of different countries and background feel necessary to change their approach to composition from rather rational and abstract to more human, corporeal, bodily-based. Human body and its senses tactility, hearing, vision, motor actions in their different aspects form the basis of musical gestures. The nature of musical gesture in recent and contemporary composition seems to be that of quasi-spontaneous music-making which has become attractive for postmodern composers.

coherence at all, it lies in its spontaneity, immediacy, its fondness for subconscious decision-making. This is all a far cry from the rigorous intellectual control and pompous s (Osborne, 1984).

### **Aims and repertoire studied**

Study of musical gesture in the art music compositions of the second half of the XXth century:

Luciano Berio *Sequenzas*

Pierre Boulez *Sur Incises*

Morton Feldman *Vertical Thoughts*

Helmut Lachenmann *String Quartets*

Alfred Schnittke *Second Violin Sonata*

### **Methods**

Comparative method, hermeneutic, semiological analysis

### **Implications**

Musical gesture as a means of composition becomes a basic constituent of contemporary music analysis

### **Keywords**

corporeality, musical gesture as metaphor, recent and contemporary composition, human senses

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