3.   Intercultural Tension in Music by Chaya Czernowin and Isabel Mundry: Variations on Identity and Musical Meaning

A phenomenon crucial for the perception of new music, and which is featured prominently in Helmut Lachenmann's sound typology, is the transition between structure and texture: the more information is conveyed at once in a musical context, the more it is perceived in terms of "global" characteristics – that is, structure (conceived as an interaction of individual sound elements or "families") morphs into texture (in which one global characteristic dominates) – and the reverse process is, of course, equally relevant. Although this principle was particularly well-known and much explored in "sound composition" during the 1960s, it plays a certain role in listening to almost any polyphonic or multi-layered music. Complex and dazzling musical stratification was derived by many composers in the twentieth century from the legacy of Romantic orchestral magic (→ VI.1). Such a "dialogue" between layers can give rise to a morphological vividness that communicates itself directly, even without the framework of tonal harmony.

In the music that emerged from the fault lines of cultural globalization from the end of the nineteenth century, it was, as we have seen, a much-used procedure to conceptualize the differences between cultural idioms in the form of such a layered structure: groups of instruments and/or musical timbres were often arranged "culturally" (and usually differing compositional techniques applied to such groups mirrored this cultural segregation). In Tan Dun's *Ghost Opera* (1994), the string quartet was culturally "identified" by the C♯ minor prelude from volume 1 of Bach's *Well-Tempered Clavier*, the Chinese *pipa* by the Chinese folk song *Xiao bai cai*. The more such musically "cultural" layers are combined, the more they become "anonymized" in a global sound and dissolve into a "metacultural" texture, or else, if necessary, a "secondary" texture might develop out of hierarchies in which certain strata follow others or are clearly subordinate to them (→ III.5). A fundamental criticism of such processes could be made based on the argument that every stratification ultimately reflects a "politics of polarity" that Homi K. Bhabha sees overcome only by a "third space of articulations" in which cultural hybridity can arise (→ I.3).[126] Is it possible to create such a "third space" in music?

Chaya Czernowin's *Excavated Dialogues – Fragments*: Is Cultural Hybridity Musically Representable?

In Chaya Czernowin's *Excavated Dialogues – Fragments* (2003–04) for seven Chinese and nine Western instruments, cultural hybridity as a potential is presupposed, but at the same time deliberately limited. Using the compositional principle of fragmentation, the composer intends from the outset to leave no space for cultural idiomatics, even where it should appear unintentionally. The original cultural codes of the instruments can at best flash up as vague intuitions, characterized by instrument-specific performance gestures, for example. Czernowin's anti-essentialist approach first appears in the division of the ensemble into three groups – wind instruments, plucked instruments, strings – each containing both Chinese and European instruments. Indeed, the instruments are not subject to any polarized categorial separation. The four movements of different lengths, with a total duration of about ten minutes, are based on various "dialogues" within these groups: in the first movement – hardly perceptible – between the mouth organ *sheng* and the bass trombone, in the second, the most complex and longest movement, initially between the high bamboo transverse flute *bangdi* and the oboe as well as

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126   Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 38.

between the knee fiddle *erhu* and the violin, later between the dulcimer-zither *yangqin* and the piano, in the third movement between the bamboo flute *dizi* and the (Western) flute, later the trombone, and in the fourth movement again between *erhu* and violin.

It is obvious that Czernowin does not trust the concept of a balanced dialogue between equal partners and, consequently, cut and rearranged the dialogue sections during the compositional process. Against this background, one can hear an increasing "talking at cross purposes" in the second movement: a self-contained, elegantly complementary opening cadenza of Chinese and European string instruments (*erhu*, *zheng*, string trio, Ex. 5.17a) in the first three measures is soon followed by a wind instrument section (mm. 11–29, Ex. 5.17b) in which the *bangdi* and oboe try to drown each other out like "angry speech" and with "aggression" (instructions in the score, m. 13), but in the end synchronize in a "cadence-like" phrase. The dialogue layer between the *yangqin* and the piano, starting *ppp* at measure 20, finally disappears in a field of pure unpitched string noise before resuming from measure 38 (Ex. 5.17c), where the instruments now "aggressively" interrupt one another (note in the score, m. 38), surrounded by a "deafening" tutti chord that eventually silences everything.

In this way, Czernowin explicitly tries to disrupt the identity discourse: "The different dialogues between alternating instruments merge into one another and decompose one another – as though they had been buried in the ground for a long time where they had lost their original separate identities."[127] The composer explained that in this process, she deliberately ignored the East-West conflict temporarily in order to emphasize the "abyss" between East and West in the collision of the fragmented material.[128] She seems to want to make it audible in the music that hybridization – in the sense of Peter Burke's critique of this term (→ I.3)[129] – contains an element of violence, and intends to let the seemingly neutral-objective observer position collapse, from which the opposites appear to flow into each other naturally.

The perceived sonic experiences, not least based on "gestural types" in Robert Hatten's sense[130] (→ III.5), appear to be connected in a causal chain, with syntactic consequences: timbral blending, balanced dialogues, or independent monologues, divergence, conflicts, or even aggression between the instrumental or sound groups are detectable spontaneously and intuitively. Czernowin's archaeological idea of unearthing remnants of a former dialogic practice can be associated with the pre-linguistic character that Hatten presupposes for musical gestures as a whole and on which their immediacy rests.[131]

One may object that semanticizations of musical organization through fragmentation and montage are not directly comprehensible to the same extent as the gestural levels. They represent a conceptual sphere of abstraction, at least limited in its effectiveness by the cognitive relevance of hierarchically salient events. Although the attempt made by Czernowin to question cultural hierarchies may be successful at first sight, it cannot prevent the resulting work, its key events, and its arrangement of sound elements building a new hierarchical environment that overlays the culturally hybrid space of identities. This raises the question of whether harmonic, tonal, and rhythmic models, which refer to certain listening and intellectual traditions (such as contemporary, classical, Chinese, or popular music) do not again produce a new hierarchical

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127   Czernowin, "Excavated Dialogues – Fragments."

128   Czernowin, "Der Dialog als ein kompositorisches Modell," 168–170.

129   Burke, *Cultural Hybridity*, 54–55.

130   See Hatten, *Interpreting Musical Gestures*.

131   Ibid., 108–110.

Example 5.17: Chaya Czernowin, **Excavated Dialogues – Fragments**, *second movement,*
a. mm. 1–3 (string instruments); b. mm. 7–19 (bangdi/oboe); c. mm. 37–42 (tutti)

discussion of power and exclusion. Without them, however, musical articulation is hardly possible – a productive paradox that also applies to the following example.

Isabel Mundry's *Ich und Du*: Identity Riddle

Isabel Mundry sees her music as permeated by intangible layers of meaning characterized by blurriness, ambivalence, doubt, and suspension of time.[132] In Mundry's music, meaning arises from fleeting, passing, and unfinished states of sound, time, and space. If this aesthetic stance seems to resist any signification of music in a sociopolitical sense, a tendency in twentieth-century music criticized by Susan McClary and many other scholars,[133] it nevertheless goes far beyond a simplistic ideal of autonomy. Mundry evokes Nelson Goodman's concept of *metaphorical exemplification*[134] as a link to the desire in her music to open a horizon beyond "pure listening," to create musical situations that can be related to experiences, recollections, or emotions from everyday life. She quotes the piano accompaniment of the song *Die Krähe* from Schubert's *Winterreise* to illustrate this principle: the piano figure creates "an experiential correspondence between our sensory perception of the music and what we experience during a walk when birds circle above our heads."[135] More formally than Mundry, Christian Thorau describes the transfer of Goodman's concept to musical contexts as a "mode of reference that is linked to the exhibited sensual properties of the sign, i.e., implanted in the music [Mundry's reference to Schubert's piano accompaniment], while at the same time transcending it in the manner of a metaphor [the correspondence between musical structure and the experience of circulating birds]."[136] However, Mundry's intention is to relate to experiences of daily life *without* resorting to conventional musical gestures, figures, or topics such as Schubert's. Her attitude thus blends in with the image of numerous compositional approaches since the 1970s that combine a demand for their social relevance with the insistence on a certain degree of auto-referentiality (→ I.2).

The title of Mundry's 2008 composition *Ich und Du* for piano and orchestra clearly indicates her intention of referentiality. It stands for the construction and deconstruction of identity, the theme of the essay *Watashi to nanji* (I and You) by the Japanese philosopher Kitarō Nishida (1870–1945), first published in 1932, which Mundry references.[137] In his texts, Nishida, a princi-

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132 See Hiekel, "Über Isabel Mundry."

133 See McClary, "Terminal Prestige" and Born and Hesmondhalgh, "Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music."

134 See Goodman, *Languages of Art*.

135 Mundry, *Resonanzverhältnis zwischen kompositorischem Ich und Gesellschaft*, 21 ("erzeugt […] eine Erfahrungskorrespondenz zwischen dem, was wir in der Musik sinnlich wahrnehmen, und dem, was wir von einem Spaziergang kennen, nämlich daß über unseren Köpfen Vögel kreisen.").

136 Thorau, "Interagierende Systeme," 77 ("Referenzmodus, der an die gezeigten sinnlichen Eigenschaften des Zeichens gebunden, also in der Musik verankert ist, und diese zugleich nach Art einer Metapher übersteigt."). In this text and other publications Thorau has connected Goodman's theory of symbols with a coherent theory of musical analysis. See above all Thorau, *Vom Klang zur Metapher*, 85–116.

137 Nishida's philosophy has received considerable attention in recent contemporary music (→ II.6). It exerted a major influence on Hans Zender (one of Mundry's teachers), who in turn acquainted Helmut Lachenmann with Nishida. The latter referred to Nishida's philosophical positions (→ IV.2) and quoted text fragments in *NUN* for flute, trombone and orchestra (1999/2002) (see Hiekel, "Interkulturalität als existentielle Erfahrung," 77). Independently of Zender and Lachenmann, I realized a 40-minute composition based on Nishida's essay *Place* [*bashō*] (1926) termed *Site* (2001) for *gagaku* ensemble and live electronics during a two-month residency at the Akiyoshidai International Art Village.

pal exponent of the Kyoto school, explores classical topics of Western philosophy such as logic, subject-object dichotomy, knowledge, and identity, with his later texts (after *I and You*) increasingly reflecting on cross-cultural thought figures in these fields. The key ideas of *I and You* are succinctly summarized by Rolf Elberfeld:

> The question of the relationship between I and You is dealt with at different levels. [...] Since we encounter the absolute negation at the bottom of our self-determination, we encounter in ourselves the absolute other, where a You or an absolute Other is already given within myself, so that the absolute Other in myself opens up access to the You of the other person. That is, the absolute difference between I and You becomes animated, as we both realize within ourselves the absolute Other, and thus I become I and You become You.[138]

Thus, as in Czernowin's work, complex philosophical-aesthetic premises are juxtaposed with a purely instrumental work, which, in contrast to *Excavated Dialogues - Fragments*, is based on an ensemble and genre – the piano concerto – with a long and influential historical background. Mundry's introductory text plays in a characteristic way with this interlocking of philosophical-semantic and music-immanent levels:

The composition is not about a biographical I and You, but rather addresses the I as a place of centered perception and You as a place of projection. [...] The frame suggests thinking of the solo instrument as the I and the orchestra as the You, but the music is about shifts and reinterpretations, about demarcations, encroachments, attributions, or self-determination. In this respect, the piano can become You while the orchestra stands out in front of it as an I, or it can become alien to itself by mutating from intimate sound to an externally determined machinery.[139]

To approach such musical processes, a morphosyntactic approach[140] seems particularly appropriate: the contrast between the concentration of the overall sound on a single point in time and space, as well as the "drifting out" of the sound through the three almost identical orchestral groups, take on the force and precision of physical gestures. The connection between these two basic events, which already clearly emerge on the first page of the score (Ex. 5.18), is completed by a third, which can be added to the other two events as an echo. Point, proliferation, and echo form an equally simple and productive material that almost forms the sole basis for the nearly 15-minute work.

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138 Elberfeld, "Einleitung," 11 ("Die Frage nach dem Verhältnis von Ich und Du wird auf verschiedenen Ebenen bearbeitet. [...] Da wir im Grunde unserer Selbstbestimmung auf die absolute Negation stoßen, treffen wir in uns selbst auf das absolut Andere, wodurch in mir selber bereits ein Du bzw. ein absolut Anderes gegeben ist, so daß sich durch den absolut Anderen in mir selbst ein Zugang zum Du der anderen Person eröffnet. Das heißt, die absolute Differenz zwischen Ich und Du wird lebendig, indem wir beide in uns selber den absolut anderen realisieren und so Ich Ich werde und Du Du wirst.").

139 Mundry, "*Ich und Du*" ("In der Komposition geht es nicht um ein biografisches Ich und Du, sie thematisiert vielmehr das Ich als einen Ort zentrierter Wahrnehmung und das Du als einen Ort der Projektion. [...] Die Disposition legt nahe, das Soloinstrument als das Ich und das Orchester als das Du zu denken, doch die Musik handelt von Umschichtungen und Umdeutungen, von Grenzziehungen, Übergriffen, Zuschreibungen oder Selbstbestimmungen. Insofern kann das Klavier zum Du werden, vor dem das Orchester sich als ein Ich abhebt, oder es kann sich selber fremd werden, indem es vom intimen Klang zur fremdbestimmten Maschinerie mutiert.").

140 For the foundations of the morphosyntactic analytical method, see especially Utz, "'Liberating' Sound and Perception" and "Time-Space Experience in Works for Solo Cello by Lachenmann, Xenakis and Ferneyhough."

The composer distinguishes five sections that pass through "Ich" and "Du" in five modes: intersection, self-interrogation, landscape, attribution/loss of self, and permeability.[141] Is this narrative thread plausible? From a morphosyntactic point of view, three phases in particular can be distinguished. Several times in the course of *Ich und Du*, a pizzicato impulse appears, a symbol of coherence, synchronicity, and identification, which can be assigned an energetic "trigger" function. The opening piano pizzicato (G4, m. 1, Ex. 5.18) first triggers a sequence of four further pizzicato points of increasing intensity (m. 2/III, m. 3/I: vla., vc., Bartók pizzicato, m. 4/I, left: Bartók pizzicato behind the bridge, m. 5/I–III: pizzicato in high position[142]), the latter of which finally causes a first cascade-like proliferation (m. 5). In the first phase, the sound cascades derived from the proliferation in measure 5 become increasingly dense (after an initially hesitant release from measure 10) and from measure 51 blend into a continuous virtuoso figuration in the solo instrument, shaded by the orchestral groups in an extremely fragmented instrumentation. This impression is often reversed, and the piano appears as the shading of a dominant orchestral sound – a complex, field-like sound transformation in which no sharp delimitation of individual "sound events" can be identified.

After this figuration is slowed down by quarter-note pulses marked by chords, the second phase begins in measure 140, again marked by a piano pizzicato in measure 142 (now F4). It is characterized by long, resonant single tones (and thus by clearly marked sound events) over a noise-saturated background, has a reflexive character, and transfers the echo principle from the micro- to the macroformal level. The third phase begins in measure 167 again with the piano pizzicato (now A4) and is characterized by the attempt of the piano to pick up the cascading figurations from the first phase again. It seems essential that, in the now more chamber-musical environment, the colors of the cimbalom and the vibraphone, which are "competing" with the piano (m. 174), are more pronounced than in the tutti constellations of the first phase, and the energetic gestures of the piano are increasingly deformed. With the expansions in measures 243 to 244 and 249 to 250 the music ends in a long composed-out echo (mm. 253–269), thus again transferring this central morphological principle to the macroformal level.

In conjunction with the title of the work, it is undoubtedly appealing to play with the identities given by Mundry and Nishida's text in relation to this musical unfolding. One aspect in particular seems to stand out: that of ambiguity. For whether the interlocking proliferations of piano and orchestra in the first phase are now seen as mutually reinforcing their respective identities (in one case "Ich"/piano, in another case "Du"/orchestra – or vice versa) or their doubts in the sense of a "permeability," as Mundry puts it only for the end of the work, can certainly not be decided unequivocally. In any case, Mundry's identity discourse has found a suitable area for the concept of metaphorical exemplification, in which referentiality can be held sufficiently in limbo and an overly clear symbolic assignment of the material is avoided.

It does not seem coincidental that Thorau also explains the "referential complexification" of metaphors in art through the interlinking of reference levels between a work's title and the musical structure.[143] An interpretation of Mundry's "piano concerto" – and *concertante* in the sense of "competing" is what the solo instrument and orchestra are all about in this work – would certainly lead in different directions without the title. The rather ephemeral character of Mundry's referentiality is thus fundamentally different from Czernowin's attempt to convey

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141 Mundry, "Ich und Du."

142 Roman numerals designate the three orchestral groups.

143 Thorau, *Vom Klang zur Metapher*, 201–205. Thorau here discusses Robert Schumann's piano piece *Vogel als Prophet* from *Waldszenen* op. 82.

Example 5.18: Isabel Mundry, **Ich und Du***, mm. 1–5*

cultural conflict through a gesturally effective vocabulary. What is common to both compositional designs, however, is the effort to prioritize the emergence of musical meanings from an interplay between referential and transcendental levels, and with the help of morphosyntactically tangible musical elements.

The Limits of Musical Signification

The contradictions arising between the musical contexts that emerge from Czernowin's and Mundry's sound events and the possibilities of signification, of "worldliness,"[144] demanded and approached by the composers, can generally become productive for a theory of intercultural composition in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. These conflicting lines should not be surprising, as they point to a fundamental music-specific ambiguity and a persistent riddle character of the musical work of art, which no cleverly equipped theory should try to dissolve. The context of reflexive globalization (→ I.2) and the references to metaphor theory and semiotics also show that such a theory faces quite different challenges than, for example, a theory of common practice tonal harmony. The intensified concern of many composers for perception and meaning since the 1980s, as well as an insistence on the (much-debated and doubted) social relevance of contemporary music, pushes the necessity of interdisciplinary networking into the foreground. It also becomes obvious that there can be no more "historically informed" analytical practice or theory, in the sense that recently emerged for music of the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries based on source criticism and period theory. For apart from a problematic reduction to authorial perspectives (→ II.1), the "sources" of the composers, the traces of the compositional process, however minutely they might be reconstructed, can always elucidate only a small portion of the processes that take place in the intermediate domain of structure, perception, and meaning – domains increasingly emphasized as essential also by the composers themselves. Nevertheless, structural analysis will continue to form an essential component in the theory of post-tonal music. Linking it to music psychology, ethnomusicology, and related fields appears to be a deciding factor, enabling an expanded, contextual understanding of new music in a global context.

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144   See Wellmer, *Versuch über Musik und Sprache*, 166–218 ("Welthaltigkeit").