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(De)Composing Immersion

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Chapter 4

On *A Bao A Qu*



Figure 1 *A Bao A Qu*(M) (2012). Performance at Korzo Theater, The Hague, November 2, 2012. In the picture, the audience can be seen entering the hall while the performers are already playing. *A Bao A Qu*(M) was commissioned by the Dutch ensemble *Modelo62* for the program "Stranger Than Fiction" performed at Korzo Theater on November 2nd, 2012. In this program, the ensemble intended to break the conventional settings of a traditional concert space, having as a main question: what separates fiction from reality?

4.1 Introduction

On the stairway of the Tower of Victory there has lived since the beginning of time a being sensitive to the many shades of the human soul and known as the A Bao A Qu. It lies dormant, for the most part on the first step, until at the approach of a person some secret life is touched off in it, and deep within the creature an inner light begins to glow. At the same time, its body and almost translucent skin begin to stir. But only when someone starts up the spiraling stairs is the A Bao A Qu brought to consciousness, and then it sticks close to the visitor's heels, keeping to the outside of the turning steps, where they are most worn by the generations of pilgrims. At each level the creature's color becomes more intense, its shape approaches perfection, and the bluish light it gives off is more brilliant. But it achieves its ultimate form only at the topmost step, when the climber is a person who has attained Nirvana and whose acts cast no shadows. Otherwise, the A Bao A Qu hangs back before reaching the top, as if paralyzed, its body incomplete, its blue growing paler, and its glow hesitant. The creature suffers when it cannot come to completion, and its moan is a barely audible sound, something like the rustling of silk. Its span of life is brief, since as soon as the traveler climbs down, the A Bao A Qu wheels and tumbles to the first steps, where, worn out and almost shapeless, it waits for the next visitor ⁴⁸ (Borges 2002: 15).

The A Bao A Qu is an imaginary being whose development and awakening depend on the presence and spiritual evolution of the visitor. For this reason, the A Bao A Qu can be thought of as an extension of the visitor more than just as an individual being. The creature A Bao A Qu can also represent the resonance of the visitor's self as an external manifestation. In Borges' narration, it is not clear if the visitor is able to watch or see the creature. The imaginary being appears to be a sort of luminous entity that follows the visitor as if it is the visitor's shadow. However, in this case the shadow produces light instead of a darkened form. Commonly, a shadow obscures a portion of our external reality, projecting a transformed contour of our body. This phenomenon can lead to the perception of an enhanced and separated self-awareness as a result of the external reality being covered by shadowy blurred images. In this sense, I observe dark shadows as boundary definitions. On the other hand, the luminous "shadow" of the A Bao A Qu illuminates the external world, projecting our own diverse personal capabilities. In an A Bao A Qu-kind of experience, our diverse aesthetic and emotional responses, mediated by an aesthetic proposal (such as a musical performance), transform and enhance our perception of reality.

In the *A Bao A Qu* story, the development of the creature represents a gradual transition from a normal conscious mode towards a transformed perceptual state. Transformation in this case refers to an opening more than to an augmentation or a quantitative perceptual improvement. The "spiritual potential" already exists within the visitors. The A Bao A Qu presents a manifestation of that spiritual potential, it doesn't have an ability to grow on its own. The visitors are responsible for the level of development of the creature. The spiritual potential of the visitor is released during the ascending process and displayed in the creature. By correlating the spiritual potential in the *A Bao A Qu* story with an aesthetic

⁴⁸ Fragment of *A Bao A Qu* from *The Book Of Imaginary Beings*

potential in *A Bao A Qu*(M)⁴⁹, the transition in *A Bao A Qu*(M) represents an immersive process that is conditioned by the ability of the listeners (as representing visitors to the tower) to interact with an aesthetic presence. This conditioned interaction can be related to the experience of any artistic event. However, the *A Bao A Qu* does not show itself suddenly, but develops gradually without establishing a clear point of origin. It is common to recognize spatial and temporal borders in art works. On the other hand, the *A Bao A Qu* has no beginning. An *A Bao A Qu*-kind of experience does not occur as the appreciation or conscious acknowledgement of an aesthetic event external to reality, but as a continuous process of perceptual and aesthetic transformation of reality.

The process of the *A Bao A Qu* can also be compared to the phenomenological description of mirrors in Chapter 1 "On *What About Woof?*". When perceiving one's reflection in a mirror, one first experiences the phenomenon of the reflection before recognizing the mirror as an object. The reflected image can only occur in the presence of the one who is observing. The existence of that reflection will always depend on its external referent. In the same way, the *A Bao A Qu* takes form and can only exist as an interaction with its referent. While climbing the stairway of the tower, the manifestation of the *A Bao A Qu* (as described in the narration) does not appear as a frontal nor a confrontational experience as it happens when one looks at oneself in a mirror. The creature is progressively released from within the visitor, gradually appearing as an external manifestation of the visitor's spiritual development while simultaneously blending with the surrounding environment. This process describes a continuous transformation where experiential borders are not clearly defined.

In my composition, I observe these characteristics of the *A Bao A Qu* as a metaphor of the concert experience. Instead of taking into consideration the potential spiritual evolution of the visitor, I imagine that each listener has a potential for aesthetic experience. This potential can be understood as the relative ability that each listener has to emotionally and aesthetically relate to the artistic stimuli. The way in which aesthetic events are perceived is always conditioned by the specific and varied forms of interaction that arise from each listener. The personal history and cultural experience of each listener produces an uncountable variety of perceptual responses.

From this perspective, musical experiences can always be thought of as a form of self reflection, the music being reflected through the listener. Music listening can be compared to the experience of the visitors that awake the *A Bao A Qu*. However, musical works are generally still perceived as separated and self-contained entities. This can be compared to one's ability to think of the reflection in the mirror as an other. As mentioned in Chapter 1, we are able to separate and identify the reflected image of ourselves as a representation. Despite the possibility of consciously separating the musical work from the experience, listeners cannot escape their referentiality. The dependence between the reflection and its physical referent (human observer) elucidates a state of plural resonance where one is only able to "think" of oneself individually, but where one can only "experience" phenomena in coexistence.

⁴⁹ As I already wrote in the Introduction, I will refer to my piece as *A Bao A Qu*(M) to differentiate it with the *A Bao A Qu* from the story. The M thus stands for music.

Although experiential coexistence can be thought of as a human trait that is a *sine qua non*, it is common and habitual to assign a “false objectivity” to aural events. When listening to music, we experience a simultaneous interaction between an artistic stimulus, ourselves, and an environment (social and physical). However, we are able to identify the aural events of a musical work as belonging to a self-contained work of art and as a consequence of this identification we can think of ourselves as receivers who are separated from that aural event. We can assign the responsibility of our sensory experience to an external object; “the work” is that which makes us experience something. It is common to give names to sounds, motifs, musical pieces, and to speak about them as independent objects which are separated from our experience. Jorge Luis Borges comments in *A History of Eternity* that “(...) we all do Nominalism *sans le savoir*: it is like a general premise of our thought, an acquired axiom” (Borges 1953: 10). Borges refers to Nominalism as a form of assigning concrete meaning to the objects and events that we perceive. In this way, these objects and events can be seen as having an individual and particular existence. He suggests that Nominalism introjects in our way of relating and thinking about the world; it is a cultural habit. By tagging objects and events with a name, we persuade ourselves to have this Nominalist perception of the world where objects and events are seen as particular self-contained beings. When I give a name to a musical work, I inevitably fall into the same axiomatic behavior that Borges’ refers to. Moreover, the conventions and habits within the concert context persuade the listeners to perceive the musical work as a framed object. The conventions – e.g. the dichotomy between public and stage, the clear temporal frame of each piece, the clapping, the almost compulsory and deeply internalized ritual – interfere with the natural experience of resonance. In *Heidegger: an introduction*, the philosopher Richard Polt comments on Heidegger’s criticism towards this problem:

(...) we normally take our inherited interpretations as self-evident. We assume that our own way of acting and thinking is the only way, and we suppress the fact that it has historical origins. In this way, the past gets petrified into a ‘tradition’ in the narrow sense: a rigid, unquestioned conceptual structure (Polt 1999: 37-38).

The quote above poses a phenomenological problem: our introjected habits restrict our ability to perceive the world beyond the frame of these acquired and established significations. This creates a separation and confrontation between what we “already know” and what we perceive. Generally, we experience this “tradition in the narrow sense” as our reality. As a consequence, it does not appear to us as a limitation or problem to experience the world. Our habitual understanding of reality exists as an independent layer of experiencing the world that can be thought of as separated from our sensorial reality.

We typically set up a dichotomy that Heidegger combats throughout his writings: we oppose the way things show themselves to the way things really are in themselves – we treat appearance and reality as radical opposites (Polt 1999: 38).

What remains, are our individual experiences of reality. “What things really are in themselves” refers to an authentic sensory experience. For Heidegger, Being is not the entity in itself, but Being is the sense that reveals the entity’s open relation with the world. Further on, he argues that: “...the Being of the entity is found only in encounter” (Heidegger 1992: 217). This notion prepares Nancy’s argument that existence can only be experienced

in coexistence. In this way, perceiving “what things really are” can be understood as a “being-with”. “Appearance” in Polt’s quote above refers to the subjective objectivity that is constructed by associating seeing and being as stated by Frances Dyson (quoted earlier in Chapter 1, page 22).⁵⁰ The abstracted objectivity assigned to that which we see is also related to the notion of Nominalism described above. The objectification that results from appearance is an obstacle in the perception of being as a shared experience. It is simple to formulate and think: “I am here” and “that is there”. However, through the experience of an artistic event, the subjective characteristics of art tend to subvert this dichotomy. Despite this, it is essential to acknowledge that the dichotomy described by Polt is a deeply introjected trait that affects our sensorial and psychological experiences.

How is it possible to transform this dichotomy present in the concert context in my piece *A Bao A Qu*(M)? Does it already contradict itself by having a name? It is not possible to avoid that the piece has a kind of particular identity. The experience is associated with the composer’s name and the name of the piece. Some kind of characteristic sonic outcome is expected.

In *A Bao A Qu*(M), as in *Eufotica*, these questions persuaded me to start focusing on convention as a departure point, more so than complete originality. In this chapter, I will describe how new sonic and spatial approaches came out from the transformation of the performative and concert context conventions.

4.2 Entering the space: Immersion as transition

In *A Bao A Qu*(M), I avoided the presentation of a clear beginning. The musicians start playing at an almost imperceptible dynamic level a minute before the doors of the hall are opened for the audience to come inside. When the audience starts entering the hall, the performers are already in a performative mode and the almost inaudible music is already softly resonating in the space. The sounds of the musicians, the hall, the people speaking, their movement, and the sounds from outside the hall blend into a homogeneous sonic texture of heterogeneous content.

The process of entering the space works as an analogy to Borges’ narration. The musical presence is active but in a dormant state that is represented in the soft dynamic level. The music starts developing as the audience comes in. This process also resembles submersion into water. Fluid environments are already present and available before we decide to enter into them. The presence of air and water appear in coexistence. Submersion and emersion are experienced as transitions between coexisting environments that are always available. When the door of the hall is opened, the musical texture comes out of the hall blending with the external space. This sonic blending can be imagined as the experience of standing in front of the sea or when being close to any body of water that has a clear sonic presence. The fluid environment already resonates in the air. We are able to listen to its presence.

⁵⁰ This association “has been fundamental to the construction of a subjectivity where the eye and I coincide—where vision, abstracted, becomes the ground for all objectivity, certainty, and inspiration” (Dyson 2009: 13).

In this way, *A Bao A Qu*(M) intends to give the sensation that its aesthetic presence is always available. This availability can be perceived as a result of the continuous overlapping and transitioning between virtual and concrete spaces. The act of approaching the sea can only be experienced as a transition and not as a framed event. If one walks towards the sea from inland, the sounds and presence of the sea gradually start to appear. Then we have the possibility of voluntarily submerging into the water. As we emerge and later walk away from the sea, we again experience a gradual perceptual transition. These notions refer to immersion as a continuous transformation, and not as a dissociative or framed event. The immersive environment exists as a continuous presence.

The idea of continuous presence can be related to John Cage's work *Organ²/ASLSP* (As SLOW as Possible) from 1987. As the title says, the instructions for this organ work suggest it to be played "as slow as possible". On September 5th 2001, a performance of the piece was started at the St. Burchardi church in Halberstadt (Germany) and was decided to be played for 639 years. It is possible to visit the church, or to listen to it online on the website of the project (<http://www.aslsp.org/>), which will be active until the end of the performance, if the internet still exists by then. In this performance, the listeners still acknowledge the frame of the work. There is a clear beginning and an expected ending. The question of a perceived eternity relies on the fact that none of the listeners who are and will be aware of this performance will be alive to listen to its end. As a consequence, listeners will experience the work as an eternity in relation to their lifetime.

The temporal dimension of the performance at St. Burchardi also opens up a notion of sharing. It is a performance that cannot be heard individually in its totality. The piece presents itself as a work that will be shared across generations. As a consequence, the sense of an individual experience that can be perceived from a "complete" musical event is made impossible in the 639-year version of *ASLSP*. This performance of *ASLSP* reflects coexistence and plurality through time. However, this sense of sharing only appears as a result of knowing about the length of the performance and not from one's sensorial relation to the work itself. Therefore, this work offers the possibility for one to perceive a sharing of its aesthetical qualities through this meaning (knowing the temporal characteristics of the work). This can be related to one of the main arguments of Nancy's being singular plural:

There is no meaning if meaning is not shared, and not because there would be an ultimate signification that all beings have in common, but because meaning is itself the sharing of being. Meaning begins where presence is not pure presence but where presence comes apart [*se disjoint*] in order to be itself *as such*. This "as" presupposes the distancing, spacing and division of presence (Nancy 2000: 2).

According to Nancy's argument, every attribution of meaning reveals coexistence. In the case of Cage's performance, the meaning is represented in its temporal exposition. The performance of *ASLSP* at St. Burchardi is not so much perceived as a shared meaning, but rather as an elaborated musical representation of Nancy's argumentation. Very often, pieces by John Cage are considered in this conceptual framework. When we know about the conceptual ideas behind a musical work our psychological and sensorial experiences are conditioned. From this perspective, the experience of *ASLSP* can be understood as built on the understanding of its meaning more than on its sensorial characteristics. The aesthetic

experience is enhanced by the recognition of the temporal dimensions and frames of the piece. As a consequence, the performance is first understood as a framed work.

The recognition of Cage's *ASLSP* as a work of art that is extended to an amount of time that surpasses our life span suggests a Platonic sense of eternity. In *Timaeus*, Plato thinks of eternity as an archetype where past, present, and future exist simultaneously. For Plato, "time is a mobile image of eternity" (Borges 1953: 3). From Plato's perspective, eternity is static while time represents the movement within eternity. This notion suggests that something that it is objectively recognizable and always available is timeless in spite of being built within the notion of time. This can be perceived as a universal notion or as an archetype. Cage's piece might be understood as a temporary reflection of the archetype of eternity. The long performance of *ASLSP* becomes for us an archetype in the way that we are informed of its boundaries and we recognize its presence as a finite line spread out through time. As a result, we are able to perceive the work as a closed entity. When informed of the temporal characteristics of the performance, the listeners are confronted with the fact that the event will exceed their lifespan, but presents itself as finite. As a result, the supposed perceived continuity of the piece contradicts with the motionless theoretical understanding of the piece. We can acknowledge that the work is a work, but we cannot experience its totality. This implies an experiential impossibility which imposes and exposes a distancing between the work and its experience. This distancing can be related to any form of recognition and objectification.

How is it possible to dis-objectify a work of art? It is almost impossible to not perceive an artistic event with a certain degree of phenomenological objectivity that reminds us of the work as a self-contained particular identity. Conventions and habits are bonded to one's recognition of art as art. As mentioned in the introduction, the name of the piece, composer, venue or hall will psychologically establish the presence of some sort of nominal identity. This kind of framing creates an identity regarded as a system of in – and exclusion. The cultural conventions and their psychological effects are always present. For this reason, the dis-objectification of a work can only be approached as a result of a sensorial experience. As a result, my focus as a composer points towards rethinking sonic, visual and spatial conventions and avoiding conceptualizations in order to aid a new way of perceiving the musical contexts.

In *A Bao A Qu(M)*, the audience is not informed about my intention of creating an experiential continuity.⁵¹ The continuous presence results from the transitional characteristics of the music and a lack of clear borders. While the long performance of Cage informs and openly exposes the question of time through a clearly framed composition, *A Bao A Qu(M)* intends to create its effect through a musical experience that gives a sense of continuous presence. In this way, after the performance of *A Bao A Qu(M)*, listeners do not necessarily think that the work is continuing. At the same time, they neither can clearly identify its sonic borders. This does not mean that the piece will not be remembered as a

⁵¹ To not inform the audience about the intentions of the composer or of the conceptual thoughts behind the piece is something common. However, I consider necessary to mention this to differentiate this common uninformed approach with an informed case as the one of Cage's *ASLSP*.

framed event, but it may leave an unconscious aesthetic echo or the sense that whatever was experienced is still in motion and in transformation. Therefore, I am cautious to provide listeners with too much information about the intentions of the work before they experience the musical performance. Too much information may condition the kind of attention that the audience gives to the music. The piece is left open for a multiplicity of interpretations and perceptions.⁵²

From this perspective, immersion is approached as a continuation of reality and not as a detachment from one reality into a different or new reality. As argued by Nancy, art works expose the plural disposition of the world. The dissociative nature of many immersive technologies and art makes Nancy's argument appear as a theoretical idealization. In virtual media, "full-immersion" refers to a fully self-sustained and separated experiential space. The term immersion in relation to the development of technology and media mostly emphasizes the experience of a self-sustained virtual space. In an artistic context, it is important to take into account notions such as those of Nancy's to rethink immersion, not as a dissociation from reality, but as an experiential exposition to coexistence.

4.3 Polytemporality and communication

One of the most common and traditional characteristics of ensemble music is that the musicians share the tempo that the conductor indicates. This can be seen as a feature of classical tradition. Polytemporality exists in compositions that share a same reference tempo. Already in vocal polyphonic renaissance music, it is possible to listen to ternary tempi against binary beats. The level of polytemporal complexity with a shared reference beat increased and developed in compositions of the 20th century. In these cases, the figure of the conductor represents an intercommunicating and unifying element. It is also important to consider 20th-century pieces composed with different simultaneous tempi. The polytemporal feature of these works cannot be considered as a tradition, but as a feature or collection of particular cases.

For *A Bao A Qu(M)*, I focus on traditional and conventional elements for developing the musical material. The polytemporal nature of my composition is not the result of an intentional originality or of a purely musical idea, but the result of a reflection that came out of observing conventional elements. In this case, the traditional element that was observed and transformed through the piece is the shared common tempo between the conductor and performers. I will refer to this common tempo as *synchronicity*.

Polytemporality can produce diverse sonic results. In the case of my piece, I was interested in generating a homogeneous and nervous texture. My main focuses were the sonic effects that may result from a total miscommunication between the conductor and players, and the transformation that may occur by gradually increasing the levels of communication and *synchronicity*. In this way, the sonic texture serves as a common resonant space from which listeners and performers are able to move their attention towards diverse and multiple

⁵² If the piece is performed more than once, I imagine that the later performances appear as a continuation of the previous version staying open for the listeners' musical experience.

experiential layers. I idealize that the audience will perceive similar sonic results in different ways if the attitude of the performers has a different focus. This notion aims at achieving a sense of openness where the musicians and audience share a sonic space that is more related to sensorial and emotional responses. The idea is to avoid a musical result that is experienced through structural and formal associations.

As already mentioned, all musicians play in their own individual tempi for almost the whole piece. The process of the piece develops towards an increasing synchronicity between players as well as between the players and the conductor. Synchronization and communication are analog; as the synchronization gradually increases, the communication between the musicians increases as well. The initial individuality of the performers is intended to mirror the experience of the audience. The listeners enter with their individual expectations, and as the work evolves and increases in synchronicity, they start to be part of a shared and interconnected space. My experiential goal is that as the communication between the performers and the conductor increases, the listeners gradually perceive themselves more involved and becoming more a part of a shared experience. In the following subchapter I will describe the way in which I composed this increasing synchronicity to contextualize the notions presented here.

4.3.1 Communication steps

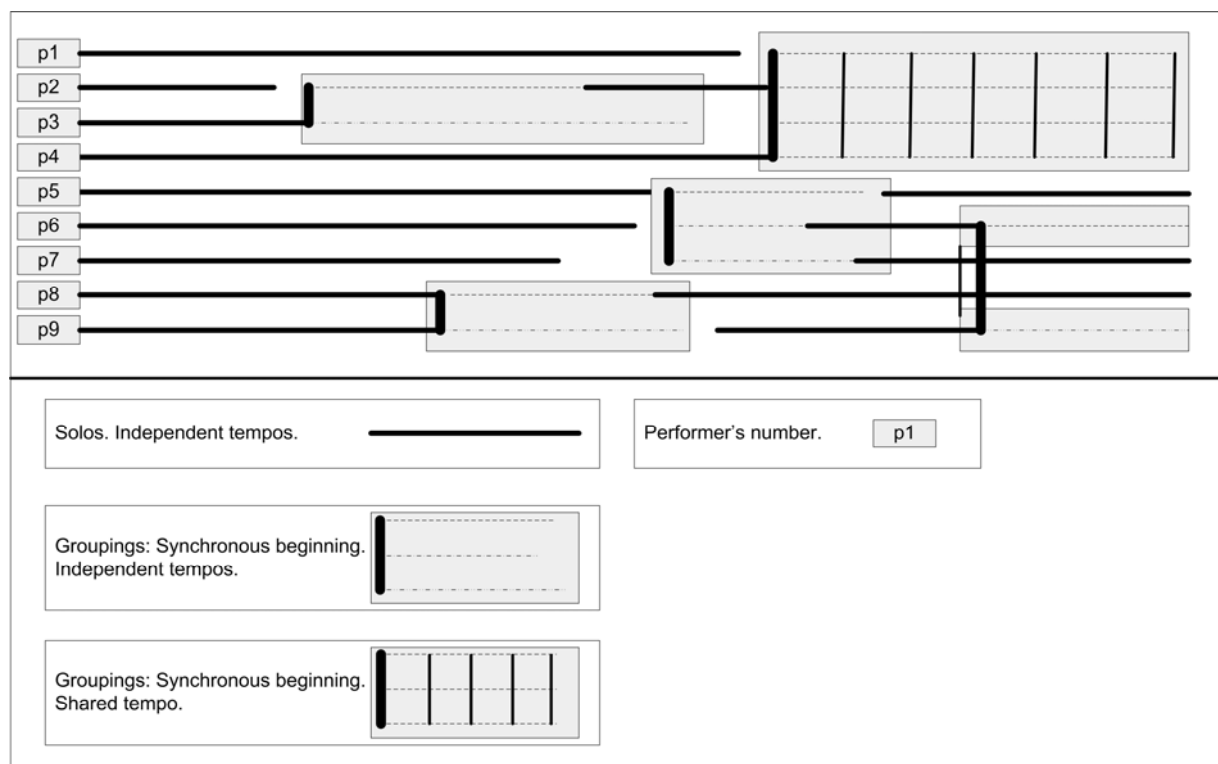


Figure 2 This graphic illustrates the order of appearance of the diverse communicational steps.

4.3.1.1 Singularities within a plural context

In the beginning of the piece, all the performers play their solos simultaneously (Figure 2: bold lines). Each solo has its own particular tempo. In this stage, the musical texture is nervous and homogeneous. This homogeneous sonic outcome results from multiple individualities, in other words, from a heterogeneity as well as from the uniform dynamic level and the continuous character of the instrumental parts. Each player focuses on his/her own individual part. The performers do not need to know what other musicians are playing. The only instruction that connects the performers is the necessity for keeping the dynamic level of the whole group as soft as possible. This also functions as a controlled aspect of how the performers listen to the surrounding music. A controlled way of listening occurs more generally in musical works where the performers already know the sonic result. In the case of this section of *A Bao A Qu*(M), the controlled aural focus of the group is mainly concentrated on the dynamic aspect. On the other hand, the irregularity and continuous transformation of timbral, harmonic and rhythmic elements within the sonic texture allow the performers to listen from the perspective of the audience. In addition to this, the different tempi and diverse starting points of the individual lines create different overlaps in every performance. The performers cannot memorize specific segments of the texture. As a consequence, the audience and the performers share the curiosity for the unknown aspects of the sonic outcome. The mobile mechanism at the beginning of the piece transforms the performers' more traditional focus towards the score to a different aural experience. The sonic outcome does not correspond to the meticulously notated score, that is, to the pitch-based music seen in the score. This non-correspondence occurs as a result of the special instructions given to the performers on how to read the score. Each performer represents a singular identity that participates in a plural context. This results in a different form of belonging where individuality is projected into a shared sonic environment. The sharing of that space transforms the isolated sense of individuality into multiple and shared singularities. Jean-Luc Nancy describes singularity as different from individuality:

At this point, one becomes most aware of the essence of singularity: it is not individuality; it is, each time, the punctuality of a "with" that establishes a certain origin of meaning and connects it to an infinity of other possible origins. Therefore, it is, at one and the same time, infra-/intraindividual and transindividual, and always the two together. The individual is an intersection of singularities, the discrete exposition of their simultaneity, an exposition that is both discrete and transitory (Nancy 2000: 85).

From this perspective, it is possible to understand that acknowledging individuality is an exposition of plurality. The sonic result of the intermingled singularities in the beginning of *A Bao A Qu*(M) can be understood as a sonic being-with, as an experiential exposition of being singular-plural through sound.

In a traditional musical score, where the tempo is shared by the conductor and performers, the role of each participant is more functional to the needs of the structure. This can be seen as a more passive form of belonging. Each player is part of the whole, but, in my opinion, their individual identities are less relevant for the completion of the sonic result. In *A Bao A Qu*(M) the score instructions encourage the performers to find individual solutions.

This means that if one performer of *A Bao A Qu*(M) is replaced the overall sonic outcome will substantially change at timbral and formal levels. As described above in *A Bao A Qu*(M), the musical texture results from the overlap of singular identities. With this, I intend to musically create a space that is experienced as being singular-plural. Nancy describes listening and the sense of being singular-plural as an ontological condition which is a *sine qua non*. Nevertheless, the frames and traditions of musical practice describe a more segregated and evident separation between music and audience, between a piece of art and its physical surroundings or between the score and the performer. The addition of the diverse singularities that occurs in *A Bao A Qu*(M) intends to redefine these conventional automatisms through the musical experience. Through this, I intend to differentiate a work such as Cage's *ASLSP*, where the acknowledgment of the work's characteristics conditions the listeners' and performers' way of perceiving it, from a kind of work which hides its conditioning conceptual connotations, therefore offering a less psychologically conditioned sensorial experience.

4.3.1.2 Groupings

As the solos of the beginning continue (creating a flowing sonic texture), the conductor starts cueing the entrances of duets, trios or quartets that overlap with this ongoing texture.

A. Synchronous beginning of a grouping where all the players have individual tempos (As seen in Figure 2, each player is shown with different kinds of dashed lines. Each line represents a different tempo).

The conductor only cues the entrances of the musical fragments. I composed these groups as independent musical segments. Each player within a group plays a different tempo from the others. The music composed for each grouping has its own particular contrapuntal relations. This differs from the musical texture that results from the solos heard earlier in the work where I do not control the counterpoint of the outcome. These groups can be metaphorically compared to small groups of people talking about the same subject with the individuals of the group still keeping their own singular identities. In this case, the singular identity is associated with an individual tempo. On the other hand, the overlapping solos from the beginning can be seen as a mass of people where each member expresses its own singularity without necessarily sharing the same subject.

The groupings start to approach a more traditional ensemble behavior. However, it is still difficult to recognize the unified musical character of each group, as these fragments appear overlapping with other groups and with the solos (Figure 2). Moreover, each player within a group ends at a different point in time. A player of a group can stop, pass to another group, or begin a solo before the fragment ends (Figure 2). As a result, these fragments might have asynchronous endings. The endings of each group can be perceived as transitions towards the overall musical texture and not as closed musical fragments. These transitions represent continuous layers of immersion. Each group appears as a growing wave that dissolves into the overall texture. This can be compared to a figure that approaches from underwater and we are almost able to identify its form but it never reaches the surface, so we never recognize its complete form. So the groups never completely reveal their identity.

The musical fragments of the groups do not show themselves as closed, but as boundless fragments. This characteristic maintains the immersive process as a continuous flow, and does not reveal the music as an objective or virtual space separated from the experiential reality.

B. Synchronous beginning of a grouping where all of the players share the same tempo (these groups are shown with connecting bar lines in Figure 2).

In these fragments, the conductor marks the corresponding bars for a specific group. When these groups appear, the audience and the performers can see for the first time a traditional way of marking beats. As a consequence, a familiar element is strongly amplified through a visual relation (the conductor's gestures). However, this relation appears as an illusion with respect to the overall sonic outcome due to the overlapping of asynchronous groups and solos. These overlappings do not correspond with the visual objectivity created by the conductor marking specific beats. The synchronic groupings appear as an objectivity that contrasts with the rhythmic diversity of the sonic texture. The aural-visual interaction allows the audience to perceive (or imagine) different sonic layers. The familiar image of the conductor marking beats emphasizes the presence of the other, non-conventional elements, and accentuate the multiple sonic fields. I use the word "field" to deconstruct the distinction between the more traditional use of foreground and background. The acknowledged visual objectivity that could be associated with a specific group does not transform the rest of the layers into a background. The acknowledged visual familiarity appears as a point of focus that interacts with other fields in a resonant manner.⁵³ The visual familiarity amplifies the perception of other experiential layers and of our contextual environment.

4.3.1.3 Full ensemble synchronicity

A. Synchronic attacks / individual tempi

The conductor cues the entrances for the whole group. Each player has her/his own individual tempo. These characteristics are the same as for the asynchronous groupings mentioned earlier. However, in this case, the whole ensemble reacts to the cue so that all players start together. This results in no overlapping sonic layers. When this kind of event occurs, the visual cue made by the conductor corresponds with the beginning of the overall sonic outcome. For the first time in the piece, there is a clear and recognizable correspondence between the conductor and the performers. As a result, the audience can perceive these events in a more traditional way. Nevertheless, in this case the performers play fragments of their solos with different tempi from one another. In the score (Figure 3), the conductor marks the seconds (quarter note = 60), while the players begin their own fragments in their own tempi. The performers still have to enter according to the beat of the conductor for the overall synchronicity. As seen in the figure below, each of their fragments is framed in boxes that appear as windows relating the performers to their solos. The players relate to this part of the score as a reminder of their own singular identity (also associated to their own particular tempo as mentioned earlier).

⁵³ Later on, I will discuss the term "field" in relation to paintings by Francis Bacon.

Figure 3 shows a fragment of a musical score for a five-piece ensemble. The score is divided into two measures, 18 and 19. The conductor's part (Cond.) shows a tempo change from 60 to 82. The flute part (Fl.) has a tempo of 82 and a 4:3 ratio. The clarinet part (Cl.) has a tempo of 76 and a 7:5 ratio. The trumpet part (trpt.) has a tempo of 60 and a 3:2 ratio. The maracas part (Mar.) has a tempo of 82. The guitar part (Gtr.) has a tempo of 90 and a 5:4 ratio. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings (f, mf, sfz).

Figure 3 Fragment of *A Bao Qu(M)* score. Synchronous entrances with independent tempi. This figure does not show the full ensemble.

These synchronous entrances appear as complex polyrhythmic waves. This polyrhythmic characteristic avoids the perception of real rhythmical synchronicity. Throughout the silent fragments, I intended to evoke a reminiscence of the texture created by the overlapped solos from the very beginning of the piece. Due to this, I imagine the interruptions of sound after the short synchronic events as transitions. The rhythmical fragmentation between the sonic moments and silences are approached as a perceptual continuity. This relates to the idea of continuous presence mentioned earlier.⁵⁴ I imagine the relation between sound and silence that occurs in this section of *A Bao A Qu(M)* as myself looking through a window

⁵⁴ As described in subchapter 4.2, continuous presence refers to a musical performance or environment that is perceived as always available and in continuous transformation.

from where I can see a band playing. The band cannot be heard while the window is closed. When I open the window, I suddenly hear the sound. After a short amount of time, I close it again. In the silence of the moments with the closed window, I am still able to see the band, and after having listened to the music, I have a reminiscence of what the music sounds like. The reminiscence blends with the sounds inside of the room, influencing and transforming my aesthetic perception of the sonic environment.

This can also be associated with the notion of “virtual counterpoint”. “Virtual counterpoint” refers to the perception of multiple voices in music played by one voice. Some movements of the partita for solo traverso (BWV 1013) by Johann Sebastian Bach can serve as an example. In these movements it is relatively easy to identify multiple overlapping voices displayed in one melodic line. If I do not consider reverberation as an aural factor, then the performance of these partitas can only be physically perceived as one melodic line. This monody is perceived as separate voices due to the cognitive processes helping us recognize rhythmical patterns that correspond to the different pitch ranges. The temporal gaps are virtually filled by a continuous presence that occurs in the relation between the notes in one voice. In the case of *A Bao A Qu*(M), I intend the long silences to be filled with the musical reminiscences transforming our perception of the environmental sounds. The notion of virtual counterpoint just described above allows me to imagine the fragmentation in *A Bao A Qu*(M) as a continuity. During the silences that participate in this fragmentation, our memory of the sounds just heard, will, on an imaginary level, blend with the real sounds of the environment producing a sensation of continuity.

In this section of the piece, the sounds produced by the musicians stop completely for the first time. A musical silence (or ending) reveals a fragmentation within the linearity of time. What happens during this silence? Does it increase the need to listen? Does it create a sense of dependency on being in a sonorous environment? Or does it create a feeling of uncertainty as the listeners were belonging to a sonic reality that suddenly has disappeared?

The moment of silence after music implies absence. To phrase this differently, the absence that arises during this moment becomes present. However, the space of absence is *always* present and available, although not necessarily consciously. “Presence in absence is not illusory presence; it is rather a special kind of availability. The world is present, in perception, not by being present (e.g. represented or depicted) in consciousness all at once, as it were, but by being available all at once to the skillful perceiver” (Noë 2012: 58). The skillful perceiver that the philosopher Alva Noë refers to here is able to perceive a sense of plurality, to perceive multiple and coexisting “presences”. The alternation between silence and sound transforms the perception of each of these layers of reality. The perceptual transitions that occur through these alternations expose every new experiential layer as presence. In a musical context as in the one of *A Bao A Qu*(M), the experience of absence that arises during the sudden stop of sound transforms into awareness and to attentiveness. This suggests that silence becomes sonic presence. Absence during a musical silence amplifies listening, and as a consequence, the listeners immerse in the sounds that are revealed within the silence while simultaneously perceiving themselves as an active identity. A continuous alternation between silence and sound can also induce listeners to perceive a

sense of absence from the sounding fragments, thus they are able to enhance their immersive sensations in both silent and sounding fragments.

These relations between absence and presence can be compared to John Cage's approach towards silence and sound. For John Cage, silence is the continuous and transforming sonic environment of the world. Silence is the continuous presence of sound. In an interview, Cage describes this notion of silence using as an example the sound of traffic: "The sound experience which I prefer to all others is the experience of silence, and silence almost everywhere in the world now is traffic. If you listen to Beethoven or Mozart, you see they are always the same. But if you listen to traffic, you see it's always different" (Cage in Sebestik 1992). Cage's differentiation of listening attitudes, as mentioned in this quote, refers to his notions of "nothing" and "something". Listening to Mozart is a circumstance, a "something". "Nothing" refers to the continuous presence that Cage perceives, in this case, in the sound of traffic. "Nothing" is the continuous and transforming sonic environment of the world from where "somethings" arise.

This relation of something and nothing can also be metaphorically related to astronomical approaches. As the astronomer Carl Sagan describes:

(...) I stress that the universe is mainly made of nothing, that something is the exception. Nothing is the rule. That darkness is a common place; it is light that is the rarity. As between darkness and light, I am unhesitatingly on the side of light. But we must remember that the universe is an almost complete and impenetrable darkness and the sparse sources of light, the stars, are far beyond our present ability to create control. This prevalence of darkness, both factually and metaphorically, is worth contemplating before setting out on such an exploration (Sagan 2006: 2).

The constant presence of darkness and its spatial prevalence as described above relates to Cage's perception of silence. However, in the physical reality of our world, the continuous nothing from which circumstances arise is active, in motion and it can transform into something. For Cage, "Nothing" (which correlates with silence) is always present and in motion:

It is nothing that goes on and on without beginning middle or meaning or ending. Something is always starting and stopping, rising and falling. The nothing that goes on is what Feldman speaks of when he speaks of being submerged in silence. The acceptance of death is the source of all life. So that listening to this music one takes as a springboard the first sound that comes along; the first something springs into nothing and out of that nothing arises the next something; etc. like an alternating current. Not one sound fears the silence that extinguishes it. And no silence exists that is not pregnant with sound (Cage 1999: 135).

In this quote, Cage refers to a non-antagonistic relationship between sound and silence. The awareness of sound and music arises from silence. We become aware of sound events and silence through their mutual exposition through time. This exposition reveals their simultaneity and coexistence. In this simultaneity, they both have the potential to become, or to lead to what the other is (a something or a nothing). This relation can be related to my idea, given shape in *A Bao A Qu(M)*, that immersion occurs through transitions and

expositions of multiple coexisting realities. During the composition process of *A Bao A Qu*(M) I thought of the initial texture built up by the overlapped solos as a continuous presence, similar to the working of silence that Cage refers to in the quote above. As a consequence, two layers of “nothing” are proposed: the sounds of the environment (commonly perceived as musical silence), and the continuous musical texture underlying the whole piece. The overall music result played by the musicians is not conceived as the particular “something” that rises from the environment. “Somethings” can arise from the musical texture, from the sounds of the environment or from the interaction between both. At the same time, musical silence resonates in time, blending into the environmental soundspace. In this way the “somethings” that arise from the music not only relate to a musical silence but to multiple layers of reality. During the musical pauses, the sounds of the environment expose the musical texture as well as its reminiscence, and vice versa, the reminiscence of the musical texture amplifies and exposes the environmental sounds around the listeners. The alternation of sound and silence plus the reminiscence of previous musical textures immerse the listener, not only in the virtual characteristics of the musical dimension, but in a space where different layers of reality interact and coexist.

The awareness and aural attention that John Cage gives to silence comes from the interaction between silence and sound. This awareness arises from musical experience. The “submersion” in silence, that Morton Feldman refers to in Cage’s quote above, does not come from simply being immersed in the everyday sonic environment. This comes from the exposition to the environment through music. The transitional nature of *A Bao A Qu*(M) aims at creating this exposition through the musical experience. The performance of the piece does not intend to be a contrasting and framed event separated from reality. Because the audience enters the hall while the musical texture is already present, the pauses that occur within the music are the first moments during which the environmental sounds take over. This amplifies the perception of the environment and intends to work as a musical negative, where the immersive approach is not towards the virtuality of the musical time-space, but towards a transformed experience of reality which brings a new world to light.

B. Traditional synchronicity: excluding the piano, all players share the same tempo following the conductor’s marking. In this section, the pianist plays the final solo which has changing tempos independent from that of the group (see the bold line of the piano part in Figure 4 and a fragment of the solo in Figure 5). As a consequence, in the piece there is never a moment of real full synchronicity. Moreover, the musical texture that is performed by the ensemble does not express a rhythmic synchronicity. Each performer plays long sounds to create a continuous harmonic texture (Figure 4). My intention is that the long sounds first start to appear as resonances and echoes of the pitch material of the ongoing piano solo, and as the dynamic level of the harmonic texture grows, the piano solo blurs and blends into this texture. As a result, the audience listens to a continuous flow that has no clear rhythmic synchronicity. However, they are able to see the conductor marking the bars in a conventional way and the beat can be visually perceived. The non-corresponding relation between the individual tempos of the piano solo, the image of the conductor marking beats and the continuous harmonies lead the listeners to reflect about the performative events at the same time that these relations open a new aural space. This opening occurs because of the interaction between the familiarity and the comfort of the perceived visual convention with the seemingly unrelated sonic outcome. The visual

convention is used to open multiple listening attitudes. The marking of the conductor is what we usually would expect to see. The sonic outcome appears as unrelated to these visual conventions. The familiarity and comfort of the convention persuades listeners to openly receive the sonic experience.

15

41

Cond.

Fl.

Cl.

trpt.

Mar.

Gtr.

piano

Vln.

Vc.

Cb.

Figure 4 Conductor's score (fragment). The music of the piano part is not visible in this fragment.



Figure 5 Fragment of final piano solo.

For the performers, this section appears to be a relief. Entering into a traditional way of following the conductor makes the performers feel more comfortable. The multiple levels of attention that are demanded in the previous sections are released. This resembles the problem that occurred in the reading of the score of *What About Woof?* when inverting the left-right logic of the score. As mentioned in the first chapter, the performers of *What About Woof?* felt uncomfortable with the inverted score. When I changed the score into a traditional left-right logic (as in a piano score), the performers felt more at ease and comfortable to perform. Less conventional communicational steps at the beginning of *A Bao A Qu(M)* also produced a similar discomfort to that which was perceived by the performers of *What About Woof?*. The main difference with *What About Woof?* is that in *A Bao A Qu(M)* the idea of producing a discomfort was a deliberate move. I was aware of the discomfort that the score and practice process were going to produce, as different and new levels of attention were demanded from the performers. The traditionally conducted section of *A Bao A Qu(M)* releases the performers from the tension that they had to undergo initially.

4.4 The final piano solo

The piano solo (Figure 5) comes from an unfinished trio (2008) for bassoon, piano and guitar. All of the pitch material from *A Bao A Qu(M)* comes from the piano solo, which itself is built from the pitch content of three bassoon multiphonics. When I was composing the trio, I chose this limited number of multiphonics for no specific formal reason. I liked the timbre and harmonic color of each multiphonic, and I imagined an interesting harmonic color by combining them. With Grzegorz Marciniak (Polish composer and bassoonist), I recorded and experimented with multiphonics that appear on the website www.leslieros.net. On this website, the Canadian bassoon player and builder Leslie Ross

published a thorough study on bassoon multiphonics. She developed a tablature system connected to fingering diagrams where she classifies the different kinds of pitch content of the multiphonics (i.e. frequencies that appear in a spectral analysis, resulting tones that are not visible in the analysis, and notes related to the fingerings). Leslie Ross has continued to work on and improve the pitch analysis of each multiphonic presented. For this reason, the pitch material that I used in 2008 does not fully correspond to the updated multiphonic diagrams. On the website of Leslie Ross each multiphonic has a recorded example. Despite the clear relation between the written and the heard on Ross's site, when I experimented and recorded these multiphonics with Marciniak, the resulting noises and dynamics of each pitch within the multiphonics were different from those registered by Ross. Marciniak's recordings also gave me different sonic references from which to approach the pitch material. I internalized the pitch material by listening to Marciniak's recordings and not to the ones on the website. In the pitch material that I used in 2008, I quantized the microtonal pitches to equal-temperament to be able to use them on the piano. As a consequence, the reference material can be seen more as an excuse to gather material than a true emulation of the full content of the multiphonic. In any case, the tempered approximations resemble the harmonic colors of each multiphonic.

The clearly notated pitch content of each multiphonic (in Ross's diagrams) contrasts with the rich timbral texture and beatings (which occur in the three multiphonics) that are heard through the instrument. The sonic result contains the pitch content that is shown in the diagrams, but it produces a timbre that does not simply correspond to a traditional timbre of the bassoon. While playing multiphonics, the instrument produces other, more complex, sound textures than shown in Ross's diagrams.⁵⁵ The representational objectivity that is communicated through the score does not correspond with the complexity of the sonic result. In other wind instruments, it is also common to feature a new timbre during the playing of multiphonics. The beatings represent a musical element that results from the overlap of two close frequencies. The rhythm and speed of the beatings are no musical elements which can be intentionally articulated by the performer. Further on, I will describe how this contrast is related to the conflict between the objective and traditional clarity of the score of *A Bao A Qu*(M) and the actual sonic result.

In relation to Borges' narration, the final piano solo represents the culmination of the evolution of the *A Bao A Qu*. When everyone finds a common temporal communication, the *A Bao A Qu* is liberated. The piano solo reveals the original material of *A Bao A Qu*(M). For me, this moment of elucidation represents the moment in which the "originating" music starts. I perceive all of the music prior to the solo as a preparation for the "originating" music to appear, and as a sonic development that works as a transition from reality towards a musical experience. This thought reveals my intention that not all sounding events will be thought of as music, but as sound fields (related to Cage's notions on silence). This is not necessarily something that the audience will perceive or acknowledge. The chronological transition from the environment that precedes the concert hall until the solo intends to completely blur the musical fragmentation, and erase the separation between music and its surrounding reality. In *A Bao A Qu*(M) each layer of experience is chronologically added and

⁵⁵ The more complex sound textures presumably result from the sum and different tones produced when different frequencies occur in the same air-column.

experienced in the following order: First, the external sonic environment (sounds outside the hall). Second, the resonating hall (initial instrumental texture blended with the voices and sounds of the audience). Three, the musical texture (the audience is silent). Four, a pitch-based piano solo, containing the original materials of the previous musical layers. Each transition does not exclude the previous environment, but adds new layers to our perceptual reality. The reader might perceive my intention of composing a gradual appearance of musicality as an idealization. The experience of entering the hall may be perceived with an aesthetic and musical charge where all the transformations are already part of a framed musical process. My compositional approach thus differs from an approach where music is presented with a clearly defined beginning. The form of *A Bao A Qu*(M) is the result of the accumulation of sonic layers rather than of a structure of beginnings and endings.

The reason why I consider it relevant to describe the way I composed the piano solo is to reveal the immersive nature of the feedback loop between composing and listening that occurs in my compositional process (in reference to Vaggione's notions presented in the Introduction). The embodied sensation of my own aural experiences through the compositional process influenced the way in which I devised the composition. This might be common to most composers. However, in this case, I intentionally observed and reflected on the problems and interactions that arose between the imaginary space of the compositional process, my physical sensations, and my aural perception of the physical space.

4.5 Francis Bacon and resonance

Isn't the space of the listening body, in turn, just such a hollow column over which a skin is stretched, but also from which the opening of a mouth can resume and revive resonance? (Nancy 2007: 42).



Figure 6 *Head VI* (1949) Francis Bacon

The presentation of multiple experiential layers transforms the perception of the overall environment. In the painting *Head VI* (1949) of Francis Bacon (Figure 6) there is a superposition of spatial and visual elements. There are three main elements: The body ("figure"), the cube and the vertical strokes that can be identified as a sort of background. The body of the human figure is framed in the cube. With this, Bacon seems to intend to focalize the attention of the viewer towards the isolated figure and into the framed space of the painting. In the book *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, Gilles Deleuze discusses the notion of isolation in Bacon's works. The following argument describes isolation in relation to one of Bacon's triptychs:

Not only is the painting an isolated reality, and not only does the triptych have three isolated panels (which above all must not be united in a single frame), but the Figure itself is isolated in the painting by the round area or the parallelepiped. Why? Bacon often explains that it is to avoid *the figurative, illustrative, and narrative* character the Figure would necessarily have if it were not isolated. Painting has neither a model to represent nor a story to narrate. It thus has two possible ways of escaping the figurative: toward pure form, through abstraction; or toward the purely figural, through extraction or isolation (Deleuze 2003: 2).

It is important to consider that the isolation and framed reality that Bacon is aiming at appears in a context of spatial sharing. Bacon designs a multi-spatial context for the viewers to focus on the isolated figure. Deleuze asks, "a Figure is isolated within a ring, upon a chair, bed, or sofa, inside a circle or parallelepiped. It occupies only a part of the painting. What then fills the rest of the painting?" (Deleuze 2003: 4). In the answer to this question,

Deleuze describes the rest of the painting as being composed of spatializing *fields* which coexist with the figure:

In fact, the rest of the painting is systematically occupied by large fields [*aplats*] of bright, uniform, and motionless color. Thin and hard, these fields have a structuring and spatializing function. They are not beneath, behind, or beyond the Figure, but are strictly to the side of it, or rather, all around it, and are thus grasped in a close view, a tactile or "haptic" view, just as the Figure itself is. At this stage, when one moves from the Figure to the fields of color, there is no relation of depth or distance, no incertitude of light and shadow. Even the shadows and the blacks are not dark ("I tried to make the shadows as present as the Figure"). If the fields function as a background, they do so by virtue of their strict correlation with the Figures (Deleuze 2003: 5).

The quote above describes an equal presence of fields. The expressive characteristics of the figure resonate in the resting layers of the painting. Bacon's intentions aim at focusing on the framed reality within the painting. However, in my perceptual experience, the resonance projected from the figure trespasses the frame of the painting due to the multiple spatial layers that coexist within it. The shared plain of the multiple fields ("not beneath, behind or beyond") offer a spatial projection of the sensation created by the figure. The equalization of multiple spatial layers results in an expansion of the process towards the outside of the painting's borders.

The field of vertical strokes creates a virtual space that blends with the surroundings of the painting. The cube where the portrait is contained can be considered as another layer. The body is not clearly defined. As a result, what captures the main attention is the open mouth, which, as an expressive figure, is the most defined part of the body. I experimented with covering the mouth of the painting with my finger, and as a result the disturbing feeling that is projected into the other layers of the painting disappears. By doing this, I realized how the spatial layers of the painting led me to the mouth as an inner point of attention. When I uncovered the mouth, I perceived the disturbing energy of the mouth projected onto the other spatial layers; the harmless plastic texture of the vertical strokes was suddenly charged by a disturbing sensation. The mouth "resonates" together with the other fields, which, in my opinion, abolishes a hierarchic structure. Once all fields are present and available they affect each other reciprocally.

The interactions that occur between an isolated figure and other visual fields, as in Bacon's perspective, can be related to the aural experience of the *A Bao A Qu*(M). In my piece, these interactions have to be thought of as extended through time. The sonic textures that appear throughout the piece can be compared to the spatial fields from the painting. The final piano solo can be compared to the more defined quality of the figure. For me, the piano solo is projected into temporal fields, into the past and into the future, blurring possible boundaries that listeners may perceive or construct. The more familiar sonic outcome of the piano solo can be understood as a form of identification. I associate this with the field made of the mouth's expressive clarity.

The resonance created by the expressive quality of the mouth can be connected to the opening "access" that is experienced in works of art, and to the multiplicity of worlds that is experienced through it, as presented by Nancy:

Is this not what interests us or touches us in "literature" and in "the arts"? What else interests us about the disjunction of the arts *among* themselves, by which they are what they are as arts: plural singulars? What else are they but the exposition of an access concealed in its own opening, an access that is, then, "inimitable," untransportable, untranslatable *because* it forms, each time, an absolute point of translation, transmission, or transition of the origin *into origin*. What counts in art, what makes art art (and what makes humans the artists of the world, that is, those who expose the world for the world), is neither the "beautiful" nor the "sublime"; it is neither "purposiveness without a purpose" nor the "judgment of taste"; it is neither "sensible manifestation" nor the "putting into work of truth." Undoubtedly, it is all that, but in another way: it is access to the scattered origin in its very scattering; it is the plural touching of the singular origin. This is what "the imitation of nature" has always meant. Art always has to do with cosmogony, but it exposes cosmogony for what it is: necessarily plural, diffracted, discreet, a touch of color or tone, an agile turn of phrase or folded mass, a radiance, a scent, a song, or a suspended movement, exactly because it is the birth of a *world* (and not the construction of a system). A world is always as many worlds as it takes to make a world (Nancy 2000: 14-15).

In this quote, Nancy writes about plural worlds, and how art contributes to these. In the case of *A Bao A Qu*(M), this plurality manifests itself in and through listening. The sensorial experience of listening gives us access to this plurality; the significance of the surrounding stimuli does not need to be recognized through thought or through objective meaning. We are "being-with" in the experience of listening. Through listening, being-with can be thought of from three perspectives that occur simultaneously: The sound being with itself; the listener being with sound; the listener being with him- or herself.

As soon as it is present, the sonorous is omnipresent, and its presence is never a simple being-there or how things stand, but is always at once an advance, penetration, insistence, obsession or possession, as well as presence "on the rebound" in a return [*renvoi*] from one element to the other, whether it be between the emitter and the receptor or in one or the other, or finally and specially, between the sound and itself (Nancy 2007: 15).

We can understand that in listening the referral is not perceived as a separate object with an attached meaning, but it exists in an active mobile form that happens through the phenomenon of resonance where "return" can be one of the main terms to describe how it operates. In *A Bao A Qu*(M), the experience of rebounds is presented within multiple layers. As a consequence, the different layers appear equally as references of each other. The presence of the piano solo intensifies this mutual referral. This creates a multiple immersive space where there is no "beneath, behind or beyond", but just coexistence.

4.6 The role of the score in open attitudes

The music of *A Bao A Qu*(M) is written with a double dynamic line. The main line consists of the normal dynamics assigned to notes and phrases within the score. Then there is a second line, which is placed below the main dynamic line. The second line indicates softer dynamics and a different dynamic phrasing for the music. The main goal of using two dynamic lines is to explore the unexpected sound results that occur due to the conflict that arises from trying to overlap a softer dynamic line over a traditionally defined music score. To develop this process, I composed the score with traditional pitch ranges and no extended techniques. These fit well within the habitual performance practices of the performer. However, the performers are required to go through a research process that aims at creating different sonic outcomes from the ones written in the score and to achieve an open listening attitude while performing. I gave the following instructions (which seem quite logical and traditional but aim at achieving a special performative mode and a sonic outcome that will be clarified later):

1. First step. Study the score in a slower tempo than the one indicated in your part.⁵⁶ By no means should you try to play it in the actual tempo.

2. Second step. Try to perform the score in the indicated tempo [Intentionally, I wrote figures that are physically impossible at the required tempo. This excludes the piano, percussion and guitar parts that can achieve a more articulate performance of the score in the actual tempo].

3. Third step. You should play the music at a softer dynamic level, which is indicated by dynamic equivalences:

f ff fff = very soft, a bit more articulate

mf = as soft as possible

mp = almost silence, let sound some articulating noises

p = silence, keep on performing mentally and possibly physically without sound

When the performers play after these instructions, the sonic outcome does not resemble what the score visually represents. Noises, silence and lack of precision dominate the sonic result. After practicing in the order mentioned above, the performers should be able to have a mental representation of the sounds that are written in the score at the same time that they allow themselves to listen to an outcome that does not correspond clearly to this mental representation.

As a result, the score works as an illusion; it results in a different sound world than what is represented visually. This illusion resembles the invisibility that occurs with the score of *La linea*. In *La linea*, the lack of musical information in each individual part, makes it difficult for the performers to imagine a sonic outcome. Most of the dynamic and rhythmic information is communicated through the movements of the conductor who has to be

⁵⁶ "Part" refers here to the individual performing material of each performer.

constantly watched by the performers. The movements of the conductor work as a choreography that complements the incomplete musical information given in the score. The performers discover the piece during the process of rehearsal when the conductor brings the choreographed score into motion. Here, the conductor is not only aiding to put the parts together or to produce a kind of musical expressiveness, but he/she is communicating specific musical information, not present in any of the parts, to the performers in real time. In *La linea* as well as in *A Bao A Qu(M)*, the complete musical information can only be revealed while performing and interacting. This issue can be related to the sense of incompleteness that resides in open works. For Umberto Eco, open works need to have a complementary approach: "(...) the data collected in the course of experimental situations cannot be gathered in one image but should be considered as complementary, since only the sum of all phenomena could exhaust the possibilities of information" (Eco 1989: 16). In the case of both of my pieces, the invisibility (incompleteness) is uncovered in the complementation of its parts through performance (all of the musicians performing together). The main difference between the two compositions is that in *A Bao A Qu(M)* this discovery does not occur because of the absence of information in the parts. Here, the musicians begin working with a part that shows clear musical information (Figure 7). On the other hand, in the conductor's score most of this information is absent (Figure 8). Another difference between both pieces is that the representational characteristics in *A Bao A Qu(M)*'s score are gradually increasing due to its progressive synchronicity and to the gradual process towards a traditional way of performing the score, while in *La linea* the mechanism of the score remains stable. In *A Bao A Qu(M)* there are diverse levels of visual/aural representation. However, in the full score there is always an element that is left invisible. For instance, the last piano solo described earlier is not presented in the general score, while all other instruments are traditionally represented. The piano appears as a black bold line (as seen earlier in Figure 4). The incompleteness of the general score is not presented through formal and mobile mechanisms; neither is it explicitly communicated to the conductor, but experienced because it simply lacks specific information.

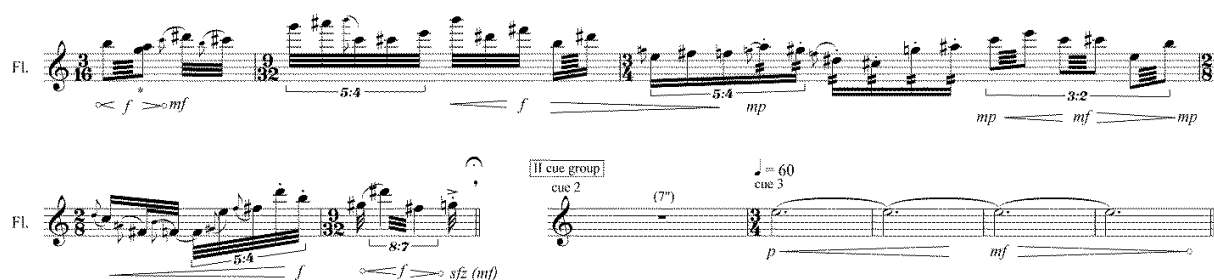


Figure 7 Fragment of flute part. This fragment is performed with the soft dynamics equivalence. The sonic result does not resemble the clarity of the notated figures.

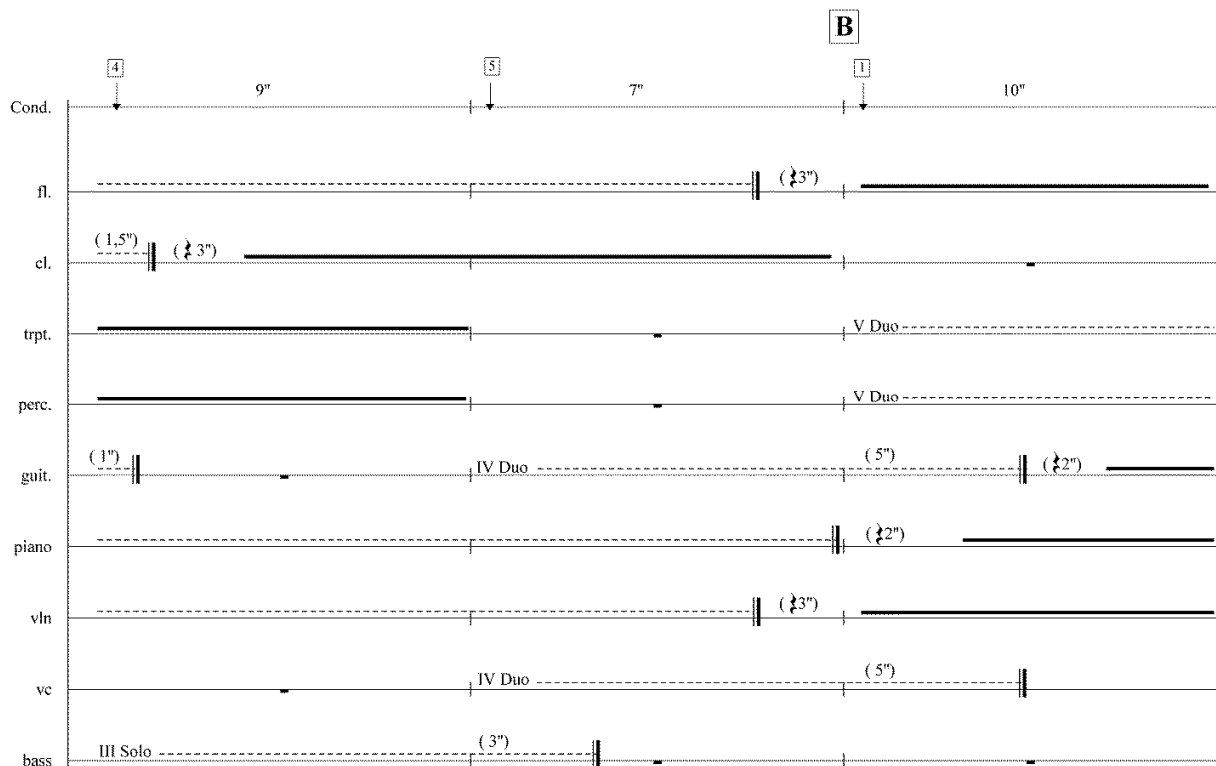


Figure 8 Conductor's score (fragment). The actual music of the parts is not visible in this fragment.

At the beginning of the piece, it is difficult to listen with clarity to specific articulated figures. This counts for the audience and the performers alike. What interests me most with this effect is that the musicians listen to the sonic result with a similar curiosity to that of the audience. The openness created here relates to the unpredictability of the sonic outcome. With this initial listening attitude, my goal is that, even through the process of increasing synchronicity, the performers should keep a more open attitude in their audition of the total result, in order for them to perceive the multiple layers of the musical experience and to musically project this new attitude.

One of the main perceptual characteristics of mobile works is the sense of unexpectedness that appears due to not knowing the exact sonic result. In mobile and open works, this generally occurs due to variations in the structure of the form or in variations within each musical line. This formal unexpectedness could be thought of as a kind of invisibility. Through mobile works the formal results are initially unknown. The elements that could not be deduced from the score could also be understood as "mobile unpredictability" as what is unknown is the order of events. On the other hand, my approach on invisibility refers to a musical gesture that is actually there; it has a defined position within the time structure of the composition. However, it cannot be seen in the score but only revealed during the performance. Invisibility in my practice is a visual incompleteness, whereas it is a structural

incompleteness in mobile works. Both approaches, however, share a sense of unpredictability. My notion of invisibility offers the possibility to relocate open and mobile works within non-mobile musical contexts. In the case of invisibility, the perceived unexpectedness comes about mainly from the aural experience. The structure of the *A Bao A Qu*(M) score is not mobile (with the exception of the very beginning, where all solos are overlapped randomly). However, the complexity of the double dynamic line makes the performers produce sonic variations from performance to performance in spite of the fixed characteristics of the score. Nevertheless, the continuous practice of the score tends to a more stable and fixed sonic result. The important aspect of this is that the non-correspondence between the fixed score and the sonic result creates a space for an open audition. With "open audition", I refer to a listening attitude that does not objectify that which is "the listened". In every performance, that which is listened to by the performers presents itself as new due to its contrast from the representational objectivity of the score.

Openness through invisibility allows the performers to be aurally immersed. Immersion, in this case occurs as a result of combining objectivity (the fixed quality of the score) with an unknown sonic outcome. While focused on the music score, the performers are constantly listening to a musical result which appears to have its own nature. This experience can be associated to the notion that immersion occurs through losing our critical awareness of the objects that produce the sonic stimuli. In this case, the critical awareness is lost in the way that the aural outcome is separated from the musical notation. The aspect that causes the loss of objectivity is the aural experience which is not clearly related to the sounds represented in the score. Through this mechanism, the performers become simultaneously both performer and listener. In other more traditional scores, the music performers are also always listeners, but generally there is a correspondence between the score and the sounds that they intend to produce. In these cases, the performers perceive themselves more as emitters than receivers. In the case of *A Bao A Qu*(M), the non-correspondence between score and sound creates a sense of insecurity on behalf of the performers, because they are not sure that the emission they are producing is the correct one. This allows them to perceive themselves equally as emitters and receivers. As a consequence, they can share the experience of the audience and be immersed in the audience's listening attitude. This also has a spatial connotation. Since the attitude of the performers resembles the listening attitude of the audience, the audience space extends onto the stage. As a result, the attitude of the performers projects a sense of sharing.

When the audience comes into the hall, the sonic texture that is already present begins to take form in each listener. This can be related to the *A Bao A Qu* from Borges' narration. The *A Bao A Qu* does not show itself as something defined. This imaginary being is like a presence that gradually takes form in relation to the spiritual evolution of each visitor. With this, I imagine that each visitor creates a different kind of *A Bao A Qu*. In any case, in Borges' narration, the *A Bao A Qu* at the end of its development can manifest determined forms. These forms do not reveal themselves clearly until the end of the process of ascension and are potentially there as a hidden presence that is felt but not recognized clearly. Based on these characteristics, I perceive the sonic outcome that results from the use of soft dynamics as a hidden manifestation of the identity that exists in the score.

In the end of the piece, there is a return to a soft musical texture. In the case of the last section, the sounds are spatialized through a quadraphonic setup of loudspeakers around the audience. The sonic material is the same as in the beginning. I recorded the solos from the beginning as well as long sounds to use them as musical material for composing this last section. The final spatialized electroacoustic section aims at producing an opening of the aural perception of performers and listeners. The extremely soft sounds that come out from the surrounding speakers make the listeners unaware for some time what is actually sounding. It is not clear if the performers are playing or if it is an echo in their imagination. My goal is to produce a sense of uncertainty from which the listeners will open their perceptual awareness beyond the limits of the hall, leading them into a state of being-with, in resonance with the physical space. Related to Borges' narration, this end symbolizes the decent of the visitor and the gradual return of the imaginary being towards the first step. After experiencing *A Bao A Qu(M)*, the listeners listen to themselves in resonance and still carry their own perceptual abilities which allowed *A Bao A Qu(M)* to fully form.