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Expanded inspiration: metric improvisation and compositional tools in contemporary modal music

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INTRODUCTION

1. Concise historical context

1.1 The *oud* in the Ottoman court and the urban centres of the Ottoman Empire¹⁶

In order to trace the presence and development of metric modal improvisation in the wider area of the Northeast Mediterranean, in the diaspora and nowadays worldwide, it would be an omission not to refer to the networks of musical performance of the area. Given that the *oud* and the *oud* players are the central focus of this research I will here give a far from exhaustive review of the presence of the *oud* in the area, its diasporic connections with America, its contemporary presence in Greece and, through this, the interconnections of the musical networks in which the *oud* and *oud* players have performed and continue to act.¹⁷ The purpose here is to provide the reader with an idea of the conditions and the events that have influenced and created the multicultural mosaic from which artists and practices related to this research emerged and developed.

The *oud* was a common instrument among the ethnic minorities of the Ottoman Empire. We can trace the presence of the *oud* as far back as the 15th and 16th centuries in the hands of the musicians of the court of the Ottoman Palace (mainly of Arab and Persian origins),¹⁸ playing in the small orchestras for the sultan and his court's entertainment. On those occasions, the repertoire consisted of folk tunes and small-scale forms (*türkü*, *şarkı*, *köçekçe* and so on) from Rumeli, East Thrace and Istanbul.¹⁹ The stylistic changes of the 17th century that eventually formed the genre of Ottoman classical music supplanted the *oud* at the court. Its place was taken by the *tanbûr* and the *kanun*, and later the *ney*, and it was not until the mid-19th century that the *oud* reappeared in the Ottoman court music of Istanbul. It is generally assumed that it had uninterrupted lids in the local urban and folk traditions. Likewise, the presence of musicians from the Ottoman court (especially the non-Muslim, non-permanent personnel of the orchestras) can be traced outside of the palace, in places of entertainment such as the *meyhane*, and later the *café aman*, and even in other urban centres of the Ottoman Empire (Thessaloniki, Edirne, Izmir, and others)

¹⁶ As this research is focused on artists that perform(ed) in urban contexts, I choose here to describe the environment and the position of the *oud* in mostly urban contexts. The presence of the *oud* in the Ottoman Palace as well as in the rural contexts of the Ottoman Empire has been examined by Associate Professor of Performance in the University of Macedonia, Efthimios Atzakas. See Ευθύμιος Ατζακάς, “Οι άνθρωποι του ξύλου: το ούτι από τις παρυφές του ανατολικού μουσικού πολιτισμού στη σύγχρονη αστική κουλτούρα του ελλαδικού χώρου (People of the wood: The oud-istic art from the outskirts of eastern music world to the contemporary Greek urban culture).” PhD diss., University of the Aegean, 2012. doi:10.12681/eadd/29900.

¹⁷ Ατζακάς (see previous footnote) provides a beautiful and detailed overview of the presence of the *oud* and *oud* players in the Ottoman, post-Ottoman, modern and contemporary history of the area. His main focus is on the presence of the *oud* in Greece through the biographies of *oud* players that have played a major role in the urban scene of Athens and Thessaloniki (spanning from the last three decades of the 20th century until the first decade of the 21st century).

¹⁸ Feldman, W, *Music of the Ottoman Court: Makam, Composition and the Early Ottoman instrumental repertoire*, (Berlin: VWB-Verlag für Wissenschaft und Bildung, 1996), 114-117.

¹⁹ Ατζακάς (see footnote 16), 21.

Parallel to the *oud*'s presence in the Ottoman Palace, the urban centres of the late Ottoman Empire welcomed the *oud* in the centres of performance such as the *meyhane*'s and later at the *café aman*'s and *gazino*'s. The overlap in personnel inside and outside the palace has contributed significantly to the diffusion and osmosis within the local folk and urban repertoire(s), which would later become the common ground for the various and ethnically diverse musicians sent to permanent exile in the first decades of the 20th century.²⁰

Throughout its historical course, the Ottoman Empire was a place of co-existence of ethnically and religiously diverse communities under Islamic rule.²¹ Muslims, Christians (ethnic Rums and Armenians), Jews and Gypsies (Rom) communities, lived and shared their distinctive cultures in the multi-ethnic environments of the large urban centres of the Empire (Istanbul, Izmir and Thessaloniki, to mention only a few). The presence of all the above communities in the urban centres and the rural areas of the Ottoman Empire led to the creation of a mosaic of musical cultures, an intricate web of musical networks and interrelations. The common understanding of the *makam* musical language and their relative modal systems of Anatolia, despite their communities' various differences in language and style, was their creative common ground. As we will see later in this chapter, it was this common understanding that allowed the diverse ethnic minorities' musical collaboration in places of diaspora and displacement.

When considering the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, that is the late phase of the Ottoman Empire, Thessaloniki and Istanbul are today considered the places with the greatest influence on the musical creation related to the *oud* and its presence in urban environments. In Istanbul, the Rumelian and Armenian communities played a major role in the *oud*'s presence and development. Armenians have had a long and historical relationship with the *oud* and they have been esteemed performers, composers and teachers as they have been musically literate both in the Hampartsum²² and in the Western notation systems.²³ Many Armenians were teachers of later renowned *oud* soloists, for example Udi Kirkor Berberyan (1884-1959) who was a teacher of the Rum Yorgo Bacanos (1900–1977). Udi Kirkor was himself a student of another famous Armenian *oud* player, Udi Afet Mısırlıyan²⁴ (1847-1919), who was born in Istanbul but learned to play the *oud* in his four-year stay in Egypt. In addition, the Rum community has been influential in general in the music scene of Istanbul. One of the many examples is the musical family of Yorgo Bacanos. His father Haralambos Bacanos (unknown date of birth and death), of Rum and Romani

²⁰ Ατζακάς (see footnote 16), 21-23.

²¹ On the history of the Ottoman Empire:

- i. Shaw, S.J. and Shaw, E.K. *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey*, vol. 2, "Reform, revolution, and republic: the rise of modern Turkey, 1808–1975", (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, doi:10.1017/CBO9780511614965.
- ii. Howard, D. A. *A History of the Ottoman Empire*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- iii. Faroqhi, S. (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), doi:10.1017/CHOL9780521620956.

²² Hampartsum Limondjiyan (1768-1839) was an Armenian scholar and musician who invented the *Hampartsum* notation, which was extensively used by musicians of the Ottoman Empire.

²³ Ατζακάς (see footnote 16), 30.

²⁴ Mısırlıyan is actually a nickname which means 'from Egypt' (Mısır is the name of Egypt in Turkish).

origin, was an esteemed performer of *lavta*²⁵ and *oud*. His *lavta* playing is considered influential on the stylistic development of the *oud*. Yorgo Bacanos' brother Alekos Bacanos and his uncle and cousins, Anastasios, Paraschos and Lambros Leontaridis were legendary *kemençe* players. This is one of the many cases that make evident the multiethnic influences on the *oud*'s development and the active relationships of the ethnic minorities in Istanbul, who shared knowledge and participated in the forming of the *oud*, both luthier-wise and stylistically. Additionally, all the above strengthen the argument that, especially as far as the *oud* is concerned, it is difficult and, in my opinion, unnecessary to try to relate the *oud* and the music of the era (in Istanbul and in urban and rural centres) with only one ethnic community. There was 'a time and a place' where Rum, Muslim, Armenian, Jewish and Rom communities co-existed creatively and influenced the musical life of the places they lived and performed in through a constructive co-dependency, despite their ethnic or local mannerisms and particularities. It could barely have been different, with all the mobility and historical changes taking place in the area. Associate Professor of Performance in the University of Macedonia, Efthimios Atzakas, adds to this argument:

Despite their differences in repertoire, style, way of performance and their ethnic and local differences, the "technicians" of sound were converging to a common denominator: they acquired, renewed and reproduced various forms of the eastern Mediterranean folk civilization, being inextricably linked to its modal musical traditions and separating their position from the western European idioms, except if some of them won a place in the urban repertoire, such as the "European" or "ala franca", which were nothing but imported dancing hits.²⁶

1.2 Diaspora, discography and the live music scene of U.S.A.

The political and economic turmoil of the late 19th century, followed by the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent emergence of the Turkish ethnic state, are some of the transformations that mark the start of a long new journey for the *oud*. Greek migration to

²⁵ The *lavta* is a long-necked lute with frets that allow the interpretation of non-well-tempered intervals. It has been used as a rhythmic/melodic accompaniment instrument but also as an instrument of melodic interpretation. Famous *lavta* players were the Rum Antonis Kyriazidis (Lavtaci Andon) (?-1925) who influenced Tanburi Cemil Bey (1873-1916), one of the most important figures of Ottoman Music. The *lavta* flourished thanks to Rum luthiers and performers in the 18th and 19th century Ottoman court orchestras as well as in urban and rural performance environments in the outskirts of Istanbul, Thrace and Macedonia. Its absence in the mid-20th century was followed by the revival of the instrument in the last decades of the 20th century in Greece, in the hands of performers of the *paradosiaka* movement, such as Periklis Papapetropoulos and Sokratis Sinopoulos. This revival can be seen as one of the reasons for the gradual reappearance of the *lavta* in the music scene of Istanbul and Izmir in modern-day Turkey. Kallimopoulou (2006) describes the process of importation and appropriation of Eastern instruments, as well as their subsequent 'indigenisation', and provides a thorough examination of the *paradosiaka* movement in post-dictatorship Greece in her doctoral thesis: Kallimopoulou, E. 2006. "Music, meaning and identity in a contemporary Greek urban movement: The 'paradosiaka' phenomenon." Doctoral diss., University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, (Order No. U210098), <https://login.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/music-meaning-identity-contemporary-greek-urban/docview/301689127/se-2>.

²⁶ Atzakas (see footnote 16), 43. Writer's translation from Greek.

America, Australia and elsewhere had already started at the end of the 19th century, as the political situation in Greece had caused severe economic difficulties that affected mainly the workers and the plainsmen, but also the artists and musicians. This first wave of immigration to America and Australia was followed by the migration caused by the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The main representatives of the urban scene of Istanbul and other places of the Ottoman Empire and Anatolia – where the presence of the minorities was eminent – were forced to leave their natural place of expression in search of new lands. The ethnic minorities of Rum, Armenians and Jews who (as we saw earlier) were active in the field of urban entertainment back home, fled their native lands in search of new lives, bringing their cultural wealth in their luggage. Athens, Thessaloniki, Paris, Beirut and America (New York) were some of the destinations in which the ethnic minorities of the fallen Ottoman Empire moved in and created their new residency.²⁷

Consequently, as early as the beginning of the 20th century, there was a birth of new music scenes in the places where arrivals established themselves. In Athens, leading figures of the emergence of the *alaturka* included Agapios Toboulis²⁸ (*oud*), Dimitris Semsis (violin), Roza Eskenazy (vocal), Antonis Dalgas and many others. They were performing in the *café aman* and music establishments of the urban centres and recorded hundreds of songs, creating what we now call the *café aman* repertoire. In the following decades, the aforementioned artists toured in the U.S.A. and recorded extensively there, influencing the emerging music scene. In the U.S.A., immigrants of the Armenian diaspora, alongside the already established immigrants of Greek origin (as well as immigrants from the Arabic countries), started recording in the many recording companies of the era²⁹ and conquered the live music scene.

In the decades to come (mainly in the 1950s-1970s) the night clubs,³⁰ mostly owned by Greeks, and later the belly dance scene, allowed for a multicultural music environment to emerge. In this environment, the *oud* and other instruments of Middle Eastern origin were often important to the scene. There, the creative co-existence of musicians of different ethnic origins planted the seeds for the development of what would later be distinguished as the Armenian-American style of the *oud*. The presence of touring *oud* players such as Marko

²⁷ The subject of the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Armenian genocide is mentioned in Part A-3.1. Also see, Shaw, S.J. and Shaw, E.K. (1976).

²⁸ Agapios Toboulis was a leading figure in the emergence of the *oud* in particular. Interestingly enough he was also of Armenian origin as his true name Hagop Stabouljian, reveals. More information on Agapios Toboulis' life and work can be found in the writer's Bachelor Thesis: Λιόντου - Μωχάμεντ, Μαρίνα, 2011, "Ο Αγάπιος Τομπούλης στις ηχογραφήσεις των 78 στροφών", Σχολή Καλλιτεχνικών Σπουδών, Τμήμα Λαϊκής & Παραδοσιακής Μουσικής, Τ.Ε.Ι. Ηπείρου (Agapios Toboulis in the 78 rpm discography).

²⁹ However, recordings of Greek artists date back to 1896 (Michalis Arachintzis for Berliner) with a break until 1907-1908. In Ελληνιάδης, Σ. (2022), '1900-1922: Η ελληνική μουσική μεταναστεύει στην Αμερική | Μέρος Ε', <https://edromos.gr/1900-1922-i-elliniki-mousiki-metanastevei-stin-ameriki-meros-e/> we read: "According to Panagiotis Kounadis, the most important researcher of the urban music of Greece, the rebetiko, from 1917 until 1930, 5000 Greek songs were recorded, by Greek and American recording companies in America." The prevalence of the Greeks in the recording industry and, later on in the 1960s, in the night club music is also stated by John Berberian and Ara Dinkjian in their interviews (Appendix I). According to their comments, most of the owners of the night clubs in Astoria and elsewhere in New York were of Greek origin, showing the vital role of the Greek diasporic community in the diffusion of Middle Eastern music in the U.S.A.

³⁰ Rasmussen, A. (1992) texts on the Middle Eastern night clubs of America provide more information on the subject.

Melkon and Udi Hrant in the music scene and discography of the era and place are determining factors in the history of the *oud* in America.³¹ Ara Dinkjian's comment on the determining presence of Udi Hrant in the developing scene of the *oud* in the U.S.A. offers an interesting insight:

So, the style that developed in America is a combination of Udi Hrant's style but also the fact that you are born and living in America and there is even jazz or there is eventually rock and all these different sounds and you are combining all of these things so this unique style developed. your parents were born in Turkey, you are born in New York, you heard Udi Hrant but also, you're listening to the Beatles and so all of that developed the kind of unique style where simple harmony, more than it would develop in the Arab world or in Turkey.³²

The lively and energetic music scene of the U.S.A., as described above, was a factor that from the 1980s onwards allowed artists like John Berberian, and globally renowned *oud* players like Ara Dinkjian, to develop their individuality and to eventually create a different path for the *oud*'s performance. In a domino effect, the presence of the *oud* in Greece in the late 20th century has been affected by figures like Ara Dinkjian, who toured with the famous singer Eleftheria Arvanitaki in Greece in the 1990s, re-introducing the *oud* to the mass audiences of Greece and influencing numerous Greek *oud* players (me included). In this individual style, metric improvisation is a common characteristic and will be highlighted through this research project.

This brief and by no means exhaustive historical account aimed to trace the presence of the *oud* in the different environments that it existed (in the Ottoman Empire era and later in the U.S.A. diaspora), making evident the conditions that formed the different performance and improvisational styles that this project will explore.

³¹ We will see this in chapter 4.3 of Part A.

³² Personal interview, see Appendix I. There seems to exist a lineage of Armenian and Armenian-American *oud* players throughout the 18th century until nowadays that, in my opinion, has affected the course of *oud* playing internationally and is underrepresented in scholarship, a gap that this research is hoping to fill.

2 Delineating the field of research

One of the main problematic issues in trying to define the framework of this trajectory was the use of the terms ‘improvisation’ and ‘composition’ and their relevance to the genre of music being researched. It started with the ontological questions: defining improvisation, defining composition, and the relevance of these terms with the research. At first, the questions may seem naive or easily answerable. However, the use of the terms ‘improvisation’ and ‘composition’ has proved to be problematic when applied in a general manner. For this, I decided to review the existing discourse on the term improvisation, its relationship with the term composition, and their adequacy regarding the topic of research. This overview does not aim to create a new definition for these terms, but to clarify whether or not their use is helpful for the practice. The search for ontological answers is gradually replaced by a search for operative frameworks.

2.1 Theoretical framework

The Professor of auditory culture and music philosophy at Leiden University, Marcel Cobussen, (2017) states:

[1] Improvisation seems to be a hot topic. Although (perhaps) still found primarily in the margins of the discourses around music, the past decades have brought an increase of publications on improvisation. Although Bruno Nettl’s (1998: 1) first sentence in his book *In the Course of Performance* from 1998 – “In the history of musicology, improvisation [...] has played a minor role” – might be true, quite a few monographs, edited volumes, journal articles, Internet essays, and so on. have more or less recently been published on this subject. The list is already far too long and diverse to be used to provide a decent overview or a reliable enumeration of core publications. And one of the promising aspects of these publications is that many of them are written by improvising musicians themselves, thereby offering an insider’s view on the topic, a phenomenon not always self-evident in the academic world.³³

In accordance with Cobussen, I will here mention some of the often-used definitions of the term improvisation, to provide a (non-exhaustive) overview of the discourse.

The origin of the word improvisation comes from the Latin *improvisus*, the unforeseen. In Western musicology writings, discussion on the term ‘improvisation’ has started to come to the centre of attention rather late, with the exception of Ernst Ferand (1887–1972) and his book, *Die Improvisation in der Musik* (1938). It was not until the emergence of jazz and ethnomusicological studies in the 1960s and 1970s that researchers started to take an interest in improvisation. For a number of reasons, this delay comes as no surprise. First of all, improvisation can mean many different things in different cultures. This diversity precludes terms that can be accepted by all, as we will see later in this chapter. Moreover, the

³³ Cobussen, M., *The Field of Musical Improvisation*, (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2017), 14. doi:10.24415/9789400603011.

prevalence and significance of the composed work and the act of composition as perceived in Western music history has led to the underrepresentation of improvisation in early ethnomusicological writings. As a consequence, improvisation was neglected in scholarship, at least for the first half of the 20th century.

In the decades that followed, there was a plethora of different definitions of the term ‘improvisation’. The definition provided by musicologist Willi Apel (1960) in *The Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music* is the start of this discussion:

Improvisation. The art of spontaneously creating music (extempore) while playing, rather than performing a composition already written. Many of the older masters such as Bach, Handel, and Beethoven were as famous for their skill in improvising as for their written compositions. After Beethoven, the art of improvisation declined. Today it is practiced only by a few organists and pianists who improvise on themes given them by members of the audience. More common is the art of introducing improvised details into a written composition. The three outstanding examples of this are the thorough-bass accompaniment, the improvised ornamentations of the Baroque period, and the “cadenzas” of the classical concerto. There has been an interesting revival of improvisation technique in the development of jazz.³⁴

Apel’s definition is still used in writings and traces of it can be found even in the thoughts of musicians and theorists. However, it is rather limited and outdated. It focuses on Western classical music, so that a huge part of the globe is overlooked; there is no reference to other music cultures and established traditions of improvisation, for example, those of the Middle East. Additionally, this definition reinforces the thought that improvisation and composition oppose one another: for instance, extempore (literally meaning without preparation) is in opposition to the previously prepared, ‘already written’ composed work. Nowadays, it is widely accepted that improvisation as a performative act requires thought and preparation, similar to the act of composition. Finally, Apel focuses on the act of improvisation, disregarding the fact that this act produces an outcome, an improvisation, or better said, an improvised performance. This view is better explained by the professor of philosophy, Philip Alperson (1984).³⁵ In his discourse, Alperson favours the definition of improvisation found in the 1980 edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, which he cites as follows:

Improvisation: the creation of a musical work, or the final form of a musical work, as it is being performed. It may involve the work’s immediate composition by its performers, or the elaboration or adjustment of an existing framework, or anything in between.³⁶

He uses this as a basis to mark a distinction between the act of musical improvisation and the result of the act of improvising. He then introduces the intricate relationship between the

³⁴Apel, W., *The Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music*, s.v. “improvisation,” accessed June 26, 2023, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.4159/harvard.9780674729421>.

³⁵ Alperson, P., “On Musical Improvisation”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 43, no. 1 (1984): 17-29.

³⁶ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 1st ed. (1980), s.v. “improvisation.”

practices of improvisation and composition, by accepting spontaneity as the differentiating factor between the two. Finally, he opts to use ‘improvisation’ to refer both to the process and the final outcome of a performance. This comes closer to the latest viewing of improvisation as a part of what we might call a “composition–performance–improvisation triangle”:

The distinction between the compositional and performative stages of conventional music-making also allows for two familiar conceptions of that spontaneous activity of music-making what we call “musical improvisation,” both of which have some currency. First, we can think of the activity of improvisation as a species of composition, a conception which we find implicit in definitions such as this: “Improvise v.t. to compose (verse, music, and so on.) on the spur of the moment.”

Alternatively, we might classify musical improvisation as essentially a kind of performance (...).³⁷ If we search for a definition that has worldwide validity then the definition of scholar, ethnomusicologist and professor, Bruno Nettl, “the creation of music in the course of performance” is a strong one. However, the use of the term *improvisation* to describe non-Western improvised practices is under question in contemporary ethnomusicology and research.³⁸ As the professor of music Nooshin Laudan (2003) explains, improvisation is a concept of Western origin and has been used as a tool of signifying “otherness” when attributed to music cultures of non-Western origin.³⁹

Nettl has gone a step further in his latest writings. As he pointed out in 2013, while referencing his earlier work:

[5] My first thought about possible future directions comes from the topic sentence of a preface of a 2009 book: “We probably should never have started calling it improvisation” (Nettl 2009, ix). Indeed, I wonder whether all the things we include under the rubric of improvisation have enough in common to justify a collective term [...]. I know I am swimming upstream as music researchers have finally managed to get some recognition for this neglected art, and for studying it. But I suggest that we become more nuanced by creating a taxonomy that explores the intersection of improvisation and what one might best call pre-composition, a taxonomy that avoids simply drawing a line between the two but looks at how they overlap and intersect, at what they have in common, at the role of preparation, of following canons, of audience expectation – looking at the many kinds of musical creation holistically.⁴⁰

Following Nettl’s statement, I argue through this research that there is a wide range of creative processes involved in music making (musicking), and that these fall into both the categories of improvisation and composition. Or, that these two terms define categories of

³⁷ Alpers, P., “On Musical Improvisation”, *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 43, no. 1 (1984): 17-29, <https://doi.org/10.2307/430189>.

³⁸ See the works of Nettl (1974), Treitler (1992), Nooshin (2003).

³⁹ Nooshin, L., “Improvisation as ‘Other’: Creativity, Knowledge and Power – The Case of Iranian Classical Music”, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 128, no. 2 (2003): 242–296, doi:10.1093/jrma/128.2.242.

⁴⁰ Nettl, B., “Contemplating the Concept of Improvisation and Its History in Scholarship”, *Music Theory Online*, 19, no. 2 (2013): 2.

artistic practices and artistic outcomes that overlap. In addition, we should also consider the fact that improvisation is better positioned in the performance-composition-improvisation constellation than in a polarised binary construction that does not include performance. Research demonstrates that artists create performances and works of art without feeling the need to define, or otherwise merely by using the terms available at that specific moment in time and in their own culture. For instance, when Marko Melkon recorded a solo *çiftetelli*, the label of the 78-rpm disc was writing *Çifte Telli*, rather than, for instance, “rhythmic nor metric improvisation on a rhythmic cycle that resembles a *çiftetelli*”. The name of the recorded work relates neither to ‘improvisation’ nor to ‘composition’, but to a genre. Nevertheless, it is an improvised performance as research will show, which includes compositional strategies using *makam* as a point of departure. This example is one of many that lie somewhere in the constellation of improvisation and pre-composition, borrowing melodic and rhythmic devices, tools, and techniques from both practices and showing that a dichotomy of improvisation and composition cannot exactly describe what is actually happening in practice and performance. This view is highlighted in the professor of philosophy Bruce Ellis Benson’s (2020) thoughts on Nettl:

Such is also the conclusion of Bruno Nettl in an influential early paper on improvisation east and west. As he puts it, “the conclusion which recurs again and again in our thoughts is that perhaps we must abandon the idea of improvisation as a process separate from composition and adopt the view that all performers improvise to some extent.” He goes on to say that the difference “is only in degree” (Nettl 1974, 19). Of course, despite the fact that improvisation has often been characterized as something like composition done “in the moment”, there are differences between the two.⁴¹

2.2 ‘Improvisation’, ‘Composition’; the discourse with regards to *makam* music

In the case of music cultures that use both ‘unwritten’ and ‘written’ transmission processes, the line between improvisation and composition can easily be blurred. To take a step further, we should consider that the terms themselves have firstly been employed to describe practices related to Western classical music or jazz. What is their relevance to music cultures of the Middle East, for example *makam* music, or to music idioms of the East in general? Every music culture has its own terminology when referring to improvised practice, which by the way does not translate to improvisation. Laudan Nooshin (2013), whose work is focused on Iranian music, comments as follows on the subject:

A local equivalent for the term improvisation, *bedāheh-navāzi*, was adopted from the realm of oral poetry in the early twentieth century, and by mid-century a clear divide was in place – largely following western models – between *bedāheh-navāzi* on the one hand and composition, *āhang-sāzi*, implying notated composition, on the other. As I have argued, this division is not a particularly useful one, not least because – away from musicians’ discourses – analysis shows how structured and “compositional”

⁴¹ Bruce Ellis Benson, “Improvisation” in *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy*, online ed., eds. Tomás McAuley and others, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 443, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199367313.013.24>, accessed June 28, 2023.

these so-called improvised performances are. And, following Bruno Nettl's work in this area (Nettl and Foltin 1972; Nettl 1974, 1987, 2009), I have advocated dispensing with the term improvisation altogether and moving towards a notion of composition that includes all its forms, both performed and notated (Nooshin 1996, 1998, 2003).⁴²

But do those terms define the same practice? Is there any relevance? Are we correct when we apply those terms to every occasion? And do those applications of terms then define the practice? Do they influence the way the artists act on their performances? Does 'improvisation' mean the same thing in every culture? Is the term 'composition' describing the same practice in every culture? Further, do the artistic outcomes of those practices – that is, an improvised performance or a pre-composed work – share common characteristics in all cultures that allow for overall accepted terms? Cobussen's (2017, 37) argument is helpful:

The main problem with coming up with a convincing, durable, and stable definition of this concept [improvisation] is that there are simply too many different models or modes of improvisation, and the more resolute an answer, the greater the inaccuracy and collateral damage will be; each definition of improvisation will simultaneously constitute it and thereby perchance restrict its working.

Indeed, different music cultures seem to have their own terms to describe an improvised performance; *alap* in the Indian classical music context, *taksim* and *taqasim* in Ottoman classical and Arabic music contexts, each term referring to varying degrees of spontaneity and memorisation during performance, constituting 'improvisation' problematic as a term, both in its descriptive use and in its cultural connotations.

According to performer and ethnomusicologist Ali Jihad Racy (2000)

Comparably, in various improvisatory practices, we recognize the intricate relationship between the "referents" (Pressing 1998, 52–53), in other words, various guiding structures, or "points of departure" (Nettl 1998, 12–16), and the newly created, or in a sense the "improvised" components. I have addressed these two realms earlier under the metaphoric titles "the home base" and "the soaring spirit" (Racy 2000, 309–314). Along similar lines, we learn that "musical fixity and flexibility" cannot be rigidly applied to "pre-composition" and "improvisation," respectively, and that referential musical guidelines are assimilated by the learner through extended practice and retained.⁴³

Much discourse on musical improvisation and composition and their interrelationship has been based on binary oppositions. Unsurprisingly, this can be seen as a result of the Western thinking tradition, where things, processes and meanings need to be at one or the other end of a fixed line, making it highly unlikely for things to stand somewhere in between. In this way of thinking, as a creative process improvisation has been standing at the low point of the opposition with composition at the high end. However, research conducted over many

⁴² Nooshin, L. 2013. "Beyond the Radif: New Forms of Improvisational Practice in Iranian Music". *Music Theory Online*, 19 (2), 1.

⁴³ Racy, A.J., "The Many Faces of Improvisation: The Arab Taqāsīm as a Musical Symbol", *Ethnomusicology*, 44, no. 2 (2000), 302-320 at 315.

decades reveals that improvisation and composition coexist creatively in practice and performance in all music cultures around the globe. What differentiates practices is the degree of freedom, the ‘points of departure’, the time of creation (in the course of performance or in the room of the composer), the notation, fixity, stability of the end product and so on.

Several recent shifts in attitude are worth addressing. One is a move away from the binary opposition, which requires a new focus on the similarities between the creative processes of improvisation and composition in the ways that they interact with and influence one another in performance.

As the professor of creative and performing arts Frans de Ruiter (2006) points out:

Is there a difference between composed and improvised music, or rather do we deal with comprovised or improposed music? (...) The word-play with “comprovised” and “improposed” is not referring at set directions in or pieces of music, it tries to touch upon the - as yet preliminary- conclusion that composition and improvisation complement, interfere and mix with each other.⁴⁴

According to Papageorgiou (2017, 54),⁴⁵ the introduction of the term ‘comprovisation’ dates back to the 1970s and to the trombonist and free-improviser Paul Rutherford. He used the term to describe a working technique he used with his band ‘Iskra 1903’ (Derek Bailey, guitar; Barry Guy, bass). Rutherford’s ‘comprovisation’ technique included full composing of the repertoire by Rutherford and, at the same time, an option for the performers to freely substitute newly improvised ideas for written parts.

The detachment from the binary oppositions is in line with the composer Sandeep Bhagwati’s (2013) discussion of the term ‘comprovisation’:

(...) Choosing the word “comprovisation” to encompass the manifold creative practices operating in contemporary “secondary aurality/orality” is an attempt to approach the issue in an inclusive manner, acknowledging both oral, improvisatory traditions and the rich heritage of eurological, sinological and other traditions of written composition. While keeping in mind the distinction introduced at the very beginning of this text, “comprovisation” can here be defined as “musical creation predicated on an aesthetically relevant interlocking of context-independent and contingent performance elements.” A key phrase in this definition is “aesthetically relevant”; it points to the necessity of a conscious engagement, by participants in a given musicking context, with the repeatable/contingent dichotomy that pervades contemporary creative music practice.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ De Ruiter, F., “Composition versus Improvisation”, in *Seminar on Improvisation in Music*, ed. Dr Suvarnalata Rao, NCPA, Nariman Point, Mumbai, January 13-15, 2006, 19.

⁴⁵ Papageorgiou, D. 2017. “Towards a comprovisation practice: a portfolio of compositions and notations for improvisations.” PhD diss., The University of Edinburgh.

⁴⁶ Bhagwati, S., “Notational perspective and improvisation”, in *Sound & Score: Essays on sound, score and notation*, eds. Paulo de Assis, William Brooks and Kathleen Coessens (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2013), 165-177 at 172.

The place of notation is central to his thinking. This, he argues, is a device that establishes a distinction between fixed elements (staying more or less the same between different performances) and context-dependent elements (contingent to a particular performance). ‘Comprovisation’ is an activity that can be examined through this notational perspective, given that it is a creative musical activity “predicated on an aesthetically relevant interlocking of context-independent and contingent performance elements.”⁴⁷

Although I choose not to take on this concept in my own discussion in Part B, it was an important part of my research at a certain point. I created a series of short pieces, or ‘musical moments’, I referred to as ‘Comprovisations 1’. I recorded them informally with an iPhone 4, in domestic spaces in Athens (2017 to 2018) and Istanbul. I chose to keep the sounds of the city landscape in the recordings, as a part of archiving the moment fully.⁴⁸

Another shift in recent discourse is a distancing from the ontological view of improvisation and a turn to the empirical. As a performing artist this is particularly welcome, as it is in line with my own view on creative processes. It is extremely hard to define a practice. Valuable insights can, however, be gleaned by experiencing the way it works in practice and performance and by working through that.

One further interesting point concerns notions of novelty in improvisation. In the definitions above, improvisation is defined as a process of creating something new at a given moment in time. However, ‘new’ and ‘novel’ should be critically examined and related to each working system at a given time. Every music culture has its own vocabulary, phrasing, and models of musical development. And the participating musician has spent a respectable amount of time memorising, practising, and executing prepared material. The argument here is that the search for novelty is an impossible task; instead, decoding how improvisation is developed as a process seems more feasible at the current time. This project aims to contribute to that project.

2.3 What do we call it and why? rhythmic improvisation, metric improvisation, *usulü taksim* (with *usul*), *taqsim 'ala al-wahda* (on the beat)

After delving into the ontology of ‘improvisation’ and ‘composition’ and trying to explain what ‘improvisation’ and ‘composition’ signify in a particular cultural context, I have decided to investigate, in Lydia Goer’s words, ‘how a practice lives and survives’. As an additional step, I investigate how those two phenomenally distinct practices affect one another, overlap and finally create artistic outcomes that are influenced by both practices.

In Lydia Goehr’s landmark work *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works* (1992, 89) we read:

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Sound material available at: <https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/YPbxklQpnfOR7pf>.

How does musical practice operate and how does the work-concept operate within it? The purpose of this chapter is to identify the philosophical content of the claim that the work-concept began to regulate a practice at a particular point in time. One way to do this is to investigate matters with an eye not just to ontological puzzles, but also to how a practice lives and survives – for indeed it does – without explicit understanding of its ontological structure.⁴⁹

Goehr's argument, I argue, is valid not only for the process of composition but also for the process of improvisation – and in general then for the music-making process as a whole, be it in the course of performance or in the composer's workspace. One of the core tenets in Goehr's argument is that of a concept regulating a practice. If we want to extend this not only to the concept of the musical work but also to that of improvisation (as a process and as an end-product), then we first need to define what the concept of improvisation signifies in different music cultures. This task has been undertaken in the scholarly and musical literature at various times, and in numerous cultures and places.

The hardest part of this research was to finalise a term that could describe the type of improvised practices discussed throughout this thesis more accurately. Apart from the difficulties raised by the term improvisation (discussed earlier), an extra level of difficulty arises when trying to define a practice that falls in between other well-established practices. The manner in which I approached this ultimately involved the study of practice: I decided to first see and examine closely (through attentive listening of early and later recordings) what each term means for the artists. I specifically asked what it means for an Arab musician to perform a *taqsim 'ala al-wahda*, for a Turkish musician to improvise an *usulü taksim*, for a Greek musician to perform a *ρυθμικός αυτοσχεδιασμός* (*rythmikós aftoschediasmós*) (rhythmic improvisation),⁵⁰ and so on. Do those terms describe the same practice and, if not, what are the differences in performance?

My preliminary assumption was that '*usulü taksim*' describes a *taksim* practice that can be placed at the one end of the continuum, resembling a *taksim* performance, with a mostly non-metric development of phrasing but an awareness of the concurrent existence of a metric structure. On the other hand, '*taqsim 'ala al-wahda*' and 'rhythmic improvisation' describe *makam* improvised practices that stand at the other end of the continuum, with a phrasing development closely related to the underlying metric structure.⁵¹

After discerning the differences and similarities in practice, the next step was to see the terms employed in literature to describe this improvisation practice. Kallimopoulou (2006, 150), in her book on *paradosiaka*, an urban musical movement in post-dictatorship Greece, is the first writer to introduce the term rhythmic improvisation into the scholarly literature, with

⁴⁹ Goehr, L., *The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works : An Essay in the Philosophy of Music*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 89, eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=273479&site=ehost-live>, accessed June 30, 2022.

⁵⁰ See Glossary.

⁵¹ Sound examples can be found in <https://surfdrive.surf.nl/files/index.php/s/g0litMrhch6k2xQ>

reference to the musical performance of *paradosiaka* in Greece:

It may be noted that rhythmic improvisation – *taksim* – like performance in the middle of a piece, where the musician will either improvise a melody on the rhythm (4/4, 9/8, 10/8, but also fast 5/8, 7/8 or even 11/8, etc) or alternate rhythmic with rubato parts – is highly valued in *paradosiaka*.

In Kallimopoulou's definition, rhythmic improvisation is defined with reference to *taksim*, it is a '*taksim*-like performance'. The extra level that is added and which differentiates it from a *taksim* is the presence of rhythm that the artists follow in order to 'improvise a melody' or 'alternate rhythmic with rubato parts'. Insightful as it may be, this definition includes some vagueness. First, 'rhythm' is parenthetically explained with the use of time signatures (4/4, 9/8), equating rhythm with the time signature. There are ontological differences between rhythm, meter, time signature, and metric systems (in Ottoman music, *usûl*), and these are ignored in Kallimopoulou's definition. The use of the term 'rhythmic improvisation' creates questions such as: is there a non-rhythmic improvisation?, is *taksim* non-rhythmic?, is there something in music that could be called non-rhythmic? or, in other words, is everything in music not of itself rhythmic? All these questions do not totally reject the definition of rhythmic improvisation. On the contrary, they are questions that can take one's understanding of the phenomenon of *makam*/modal improvisation related to rhythm and meter a step further.

The term rhythmic improvisation is generally used in Greece. According to Harris Lambrakis, it was Ross Daly's suggestion to call the seminars he led at Labyrinth, Crete, 'rhythmic modal improvisation'. The paradox here lies in the fact that all people involved (musicians, teachers, students and performers) use the same term to describe a certain practice (*taksim*-like performance on rhythm). However, in my opinion the term 'rhythmic' is not completely adequate to describe the practice, as will be described later on in this chapter.

Another reference to the term can be found in the associate professor and *oud* player Kyriakos Kalaitzidis's (2015) work. Despite Kalaitzidis's search for historic continuity in the 'Hellenic art of improvisation' (Ancient Greece-Byzantium-Modern Greek state) and his rather simplistic approach, which results in a somewhat rigid categorisation of an otherwise open creative process, his article gives us valuable information on the improvisational practices in Greek folk music. As far as metric improvisation is concerned, he comments:

The phenomenon of improvisation appears in Hellenic music with a remarkable diversity and as a consequence it is met in various names among musicians. We classify improvisation to a number of categories: those that appear as independent improvisational forms, and those that are incorporated in accompanying a song or an instrumental piece either rhythmical or non. We also categorize improvisation according to the degree of freedom of the musician. In rhythmical improvisations the musician performs musical phrases that match the song's tempo and often he converses with it by performing phrases either along or not with the rhythm.⁵²

⁵² Kalaitzidis, K., "The Art of Improvisation in the Greek Musical Heritage" in *Penser L'improvisation*, ed. Mondher Ayari, (Paris: Delatour France – IRCAM – CNRS, 2015), 183-201.

If we set aside the problematic use of ‘Hellenic’, it is a fact that within the region of what is recognised as the Greek ethnic state there is a plethora of improvisational practices, both instrumental and vocal. In the above description we see a misuse of the term ‘tempo’; would it be possible to perform together with someone else and not at least be in the same tempo? Here, again, the misuse of the terms ‘rhythm’ and ‘tempo’ call for clarification.

Elsewhere in Kalaitzidis (2015) we read:

In many local idioms of Greek music, improvisational forms are found in *errhythma* [t.n. (rhythmical)] songs or instrumental pieces. It is a widely held practice in musical traditions of the Eastern Mediterranean, with particular characteristics in Greek music. They present an extremely large variety both in morphological characteristics as well as in their names. Their position within each piece, although not specific, is usually placed before the finale (in songs their position traditionally is after the last strophe [t.n. last verse, last lyrics]) and they are typically perceived as being the climax. The instrument improvises and climbs gradually to the highest pitch areas or quite often begins from there thus arousing the enthusiasm of the public. The improvisational part starts without rhythm and remains so until the finale or interpolates some rhythmical phrases following the rhythm pattern of the piece. On other occasions, the whole improvisation evolves on rhythm from the beginning to the end.⁵³

There is an ontological difference between rhythm and meter, and together with it, a discourse on the subject.⁵⁴ It is not the purpose of this research to delve into this extremely interesting discourse, as it touches on the domains of philosophy and human cognition. However, the misuse of the terms in writings and in operative situations is a problem that I cannot completely set aside.

According to the professor of music theory Christopher Hasty (1997):

Central to our understanding of rhythm is the notion of regular repetition. Any phenomenon that exhibits periodicity can be called rhythmic, regardless of whether evidence of this periodicity is accessible to our sense perception.⁵⁵

In this sense, to call a type of improvisation ‘rhythmic’, we should at least be able to discern a kind of periodicity. Then the question arises as to where this periodicity resides? In the phrasing? In the use of motif? And if such periodicity indeed exists, does it not come into conflict with the essence of improvisation, which is the on-the-spot music creation?

There is, to be sure, heterogeneity among the various “levels” of regular repetition (bar, beat, and subdivisions of the beat). And such heterogeneity can be viewed as the result of qualitative distinctions of accent. Nevertheless, this hierarchical order is itself fixed; if the meter does not change, this order is completely homogeneous. Viewed in this way, meter, like

⁵³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴ Hasty, C. F. (1997), London (2012), Clayton (2011) and others.

⁵⁵ Hasty, C. F., *Meter as rhythm*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

a clock, runs unperturbed, continually and uniformly measuring a time in which a variety of events may occur – the genuinely rhythmic events that occupy the time meter measures off. And with this image it is difficult to avoid the implication of a rigid determinism. Once set in motion, meter can seem to run autonomously, driven by its own internal law and fated from the beginning to reproduce its preordained set of time divisions (ibid. 6).

In this sense, to call an improvised practice ‘rhythmic improvisation’ does not explain much about the ontology of the distinct practice.

On the other hand, according to the professor of music, cognitive science, and the humanities Justin London (2012):

Meter is a perceptually emergent property of a musical sound, that is, an aspect of our engagement with the production and perception of tones in time.⁵⁶

As he continues:

Rather, meter is one of the ways in which our senses are guided in order to form representations of musical reality. Meter provides a way of capturing the changing aspects of our musical environment as patterns of temporal invariance.⁵⁷

He then also states:

Meter controls our temporal behavior, and it is that behavior, whether in the form of internal entrainment or externalized tapping or other performance, that gives shape to the ensuing rhythm. This is the crucial distinction between meter and rhythm: meter inheres in our attentional and motor control behaviors, while rhythm inheres in the phenomenal manifestations of sound patterns in time.⁵⁸

In this sense, the use of the term rhythmic improvisation refers to the sound result, whereas metric improvisation can better describe the human agent’s participation in the creative process.

The ethnomusicologist Martin Clayton (2008) summarises the discourse on rhythm and meter in the context of North Indian *raga* music performance. One of his most convincing arguments is the non-universal common understanding of the meter and the use of certain characteristics of meter that could be applied when approaching different music cultures:

Meter as commonly understood in the west is clearly not a universal concept, nor is it a phenomenon observable in all world musics. It should, however, be possible to develop a

⁵⁶ London, J. (2012), *Hearing in Time: Psychological Aspects of Musical Meter*, 2nd edn (2012; online edn, Oxford Academic, 20 Sept. 2012), 4. doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199744374.001.0001, accessed February 18, 2023.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 5

⁵⁸ Ibid., 58

concept of meter which is applicable beyond our own culture, since the organization of rhythm with respect to a periodic pattern of differentiated (e.g., strong and weak or perhaps ‘long’ and ‘short’) beats is certainly not limited to Western music. (...)

1. Much music (but not all) is organized with respect to a periodic and hierarchical temporal framework in such a way that a cognitive representation of this framework may be generated in the mind of the listener; this organization and its representation are termed ‘meter’.
2. The relationship between meter and rhythm has two complementary aspects; meter is inferred (largely subjectively) on the basis of evidence presented by rhythm, while rhythm is interpreted in terms of its relationship to that meter.
3. The inference of meter is a complex phenomenon which is influenced by the musical experience and training of the listener, and more indirectly perhaps by his or her general experience and cultural background. Consequently, both are ultimately founded on the same psycho-physiological universals.
4. The cognition of meter appears to be dependent on one or more of the following factors; the extent of the perpetual present (determining that pulses are unlikely to be separated by more than 2-3 seconds); the function of short-term memory; and the ability to comprehend recurring patterns as single gestalts which combine notions of stress and duration.⁵⁹

Reinforcing Clayton’s ideas on meter, Witek, Clarke, Wallentin, Kringelbach, and Vuust (2014) argue:

Humans’ ability to perceive regularity in rhythm, even when the rhythm itself is not uniformly regular, relies on the mechanism of meter perception.⁶⁰

Thus, instead of rhythmic improvisation, the term ‘metric’ improvisation seems more adequate. In this sense, the metric entity comes forward as a regulative framework for an improvised practice. As this research will show, the presence of a metric entity in the course of an improvised performance affects, influences and ultimately co-defines the form of the improvised outcome in a manner that cannot be negated.

2.4 Contemporary modal music

Contemporary modal music is a term suggested by Ross Daly.⁶¹ In response to a question about what audiences should expect from his performance, he said:

⁵⁹ Clayton, M., *Time in Indian Music: Rhythm, Metre, and Form in North Indian Rag Performance*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195339680.001.0001>, accessed February 16, 2023.

⁶⁰ Witek, Maria A. G., Eric F. Clarke, Mikkel Wallentin, Morten L. Kringelbach, and Peter Vuust, “Syncopation, Body-Movement and Pleasure in Groove Music.” *PloS One* 9, no. 4 (2014): e94446-e94446, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0094446>.

⁶¹ Ross Daly (1952) is a multi-instrumentalist, composer and artistic director of the Labyrinth Musical Workshop. Originally of Irish descent, he has travelled extensively all around the world and has delved into most (if not all) modal music traditions of the area that spans from northwest Africa to western China. For the past 35 years, he has resided in Crete, directing the Labyrinth musical workshop, which offers annual lessons on various music traditions offered by the most distinguished masters. Apart from his huge artistic work (38 personal albums and various participations) and his indisputable contribution as an educator, he has proposed the term contemporary modal music setting this way the basis of work for involved artists.

Our performance will consist of compositions of my own as well as of Kelly Thoma, who will be performing with me. This perhaps needs a bit in the way of clarification, as the ‘genre’ which we serve is as yet little known. This genre we refer to as ‘contemporary modal music’, a term I coined almost three decades ago to describe contemporary compositions which draw their inspiration from the myriad of modal traditions which are still very much alive in today’s world and which continue to develop on their own trajectory. Modal music is found primarily, although not exclusively, in the vast geographical region extending from northwest Africa, through the Balkans, the Middle East, Transcaucasia, central Asia and India right up until western China. After many years of studying the foundations of these traditions (which, on many levels, are intricately intertwined), as well as, as much repertoire as was humanly possible for me (it’s nigh unlimited), Kelly Thoma and I, as well as many other colleagues of ours who followed, each in their own way, a similar course, dedicated ourselves to the development and cultivation of a musical genre which freely incorporates influences from these various traditions into compositions which, although they draw on regional and ‘ethnic’ sources, do not actually belong to or reflect any such given tradition per se. Sometimes we utilize existing forms from one or the other of these traditions, and at other times we create new forms which frequently afford us somewhat greater ‘freedom’, as some people might refer to it.⁶²

Daly’s ‘need for clarification’ is indicative of the confusion that comes up especially but not exclusively – for Western audiences, when faced with contemporary modal music performances. In reality this term has been used for centuries in multiple ways and settings, including medieval musical notation in Europe, and typologies of melody. But Harold Powers’s formulation (2001) allows us to understand how contemporary modal music is situated within this evolving history:

The term ‘mode’ has always been used to designate classes of melodies, and *since the 20th century to designate certain kinds of norm or model for composition or improvisation* as well. Certain phenomena in folksong and in non-Western music are related to this last meaning [my italics].⁶³

As this quotation suggests, there is a long history of Europeans using the term ‘mode’ used to designate modal systems of non-European traditions, ranging from the Perso-Arabic *maqam* to the Indian *raga*. In consequence ‘mode’ is an expanded category, a broad concept that includes and describes the work of creators such as Ross Daly, even while it is still used for historical repertoires in different contexts and in different ways.

With longstanding histories of their own, the modal systems of Asia have led to the creation of immensely rich music cultures. There are enormous repertoires of classical, urban and folk music are in use, offering the interested musician an almost endless supply of music material. It then comes as no surprise that issues of originality (e.g., is this music ‘new’ or is it

⁶² Interview in Fonien (online magazine), <https://fonien.gr/interesting-interview-cretan-irishman-musician-ross-daly/>, accessed January 19, 2023.

⁶³ Harold S. Powers, et al. “Mode.” in the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, Oxford University Press, 2001, <https://doi.org/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.43718>.

‘traditional’?) and origin (where does this music come from?, with which ‘tradition’ can we relate it?, and so on) may arise.

In reality, these questions are not only for audiences. Performers engaged with the study, practice and performance of music cultures that have their centre in the past (for example Ottoman classical music) are frequently puzzled when they first encounter contemporary modal music. This bewilderment is also evident among the creative agents of the genre. For example, Andrikos (2020) discusses the role of contemporary modal composition in the process of dismantling the stereotypical binary opposition of modernity and tradition:

(...) The above condition (the need of the artists to be on one end of the opposition between modernity and tradition creates an evident puzzlement to the contemporary creator, as he/she is in between a mimetic reproduction of a historic material or an innovative statement as a be-all end-all. Is there perhaps a possibility of disentanglement from this opposition? How can a music culture, with a longstanding historic course, ensure/ secure its vitality without acquiring a museum profile?⁶⁴

As we will see in Chapter 4, Andrikos’s suggestion is that *synthesis* (composition) is the way to avoid this ‘puzzlement’. In fact, this is also what the lifelong work of Ross Daly suggests and it is one of the main interests that triggered this doctoral project. As a result, Daly’s definition will be the working definition for the second part of this thesis. I argue that ‘contemporary modal music’ can be used as an umbrella term that describes evolving practices. It is a genre under formation that draws influences from well-formed modal cultures (traditions) around the Middle East and the northeastern Mediterranean. The creation of original precomposed work, the influences from different modal systems, the use of new forms but also pre-existing forms seen through a contemporary point of view, are some of its distinct characteristics.

2.5 Recording: a frozen object

In Marcel Cobussen (2017) we read:

“We choose a performance or recording for study, we decide how to listen to a given passage, and ultimately we determine how to translate our analytical involvement with the music into a compelling narrative to be shared with fellow scholars and musicians,” music theorist Paul Steinbeck writes in a short essay in which he exposes the fictional character of music theory and other discourses around music (Steinbeck 2013: n.p.).⁶⁵

Since the beginning of the 20th century, recordings have been gaining ground as helpful tools

⁶⁴ Andrikos, N. (2020) Ανδρίκος, Ν. (2020) «Σύγχρονη τροπική σύνθεση –Διασπώντας το στερεοτυπικό δίπολο νεωτερισμός–παράδοση», 11ο Διατμηματικό Μουσικολογικό Συνέδριο: «Νεωτερισμός και Παράδοση» (με αφορμή τα 70 χρόνια από το θάνατο του Νίκου Σκαλκώτα) (Πρακτικά διατμηματικού συνεδρίου υπό την αιγίδα της Ελληνικής Μουσικολογικής Εταιρείας, Αθήνα, 21-23 Νοεμβρίου 2019), Ελληνική Μουσικολογική Εταιρεία, Θεσσαλονίκη 2020, 7.

⁶⁵ Cobussen, M. 2017. *The Field of Musical Improvisation*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 7. doi:10.24415/9789400603011.

to approach music cultures that do not use written means of transmission. From the recordings of the early ethnomusicologists to YouTube videos, sound materials (and now also audiovisual materials) are playing the role of oral transmission. They are also changing the significance of the ‘work’ in its romantic sense, as theorised by Lydia Goehr, as I discuss below.

For this thesis, recorded improvised performances are the material for analysis. This does risk critique: am I transforming improvised performances into works, in the romantic sense? In fact, both precomposed works and improvised performances are carried out by human agents, composers or improvisers who are acting musically or, in other words, ‘musicking’. I argue that, if we look at improvisation and composition as musical processes and not as two different musical categories, we are able to turn the focus away from the end product (work) to the action of the agent. In the past, the view that musical meaning can only be found in a finished and notated work has drawn attention away from the creative processes involved in the making of that work, glorifying the end and devaluing the creative process leading up to it. It is now possible to recover the practice of creation.

We can all agree that a recorded improvised performance (in studio recording or from a live performance posted as a YouTube video) is an instant, a photograph, a moment in the performer’s musical life. The following question then arises: how can an instantiation be explicative of the entirety of an artist’s style of performance? The fact of the matter is that it actually cannot, and this is also not the purpose of the project. Especially in the cases of early recordings, where the amount of sound examples is restricted, such a goal would be an impossible task. The goal here is not to trace or prove any kind of continuity (even if there seems to be a kind of master and teacher relationship that affects the final outcomes of some of the performers included in the project). Rather, recordings (and their respective transcriptions) are used as tools for investigating materials, models, and aesthetic and stylistic traits, as employed by certain landmark artists of the genre. In the case of improvised performances, the work object could be the performance itself, a view that definitely draws our focus away from the musical product (recording) and shifts our attention to the process of music making.

2.6 Politics, hierarchy and connotations

Writings concerning metric improvisation barely existed in literature, whereas as research shows it has been alive in performance practice. The role of the *taksim*, the *gazel* and other (vocal or instrumental) non-metric practices has been examined with focus on the development of the melodic material (*makam*), leaving out the connection and relations to the precomposed part and rhythm on the whole. The absence of written material on the subject can have a series of possible explanations:

1. Metric improvisation, as we will see through this research, has been diachronically connected with informal and non-academic occasions. It is safe to assume that

metric improvisation was connected with festive occasions and its operating role was to prolong a dance or to bring people to the state of *kef*.⁶⁶ *Taksim* on the other hand has been regarded as the point of excellence of musicians active in environments where dance and festivity were not the main goal; first it was the Ottoman Palace, then the national orchestras of the National Turkish Radio (TRT), then the closed theatres and the cultural centres and so on. Inevitably, this resulted in the prevalence of the *taksim* as the most important instrumental improvised genre both in recordings and in the research around this genre.

2. Another interesting point emerging from research is that the main representatives of the subgenre of metric improvisation were artists that belonged to the minorities of the Ottoman Empire. In the discography from the beginning of the 20th century, Armenians, Greeks and Rom artists improvise metrically, whereas, to my knowledge, ethnic Turks do not appear in such recordings. Apart from the occasion of Udi Hrant (who was an Armenian but continued to live in Turkey after the Armenian genocide) all the other artists of the early recordings that improvised metrically were either of completely Greek or Armenian origin. This changed with time, as research has shown through the decades, since at the end of the 20th century ethnic Turks appear to improvise metrically in recordings. Through research, we can also listen to a great many Rom clarinet players improvise metrically (wind instrument improvisations are out of the scope of this research and remain open for further investigation). There are practical explanations for this: Armenians, Greeks and Rom communities are known for their festive occasions, so they must arguably have developed this practice for their festivities. This would then explain the plethora of examples in the relevant discography. However, it does not explain why such improvisation has been underrepresented in musical bibliography and research. Marginal communities, diasporic or exiled communities, Armenians, Greeks, and Roms created and performed this *taksim*-like improvisation. I argue here that the general underrepresentation of the above communities has a bearing upon with the absence of academic writings on the subject. In this sense, the Otherness of these communities (Armenian, Greek, Rom) has led to the underrepresentation of their distinct performance practice.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter dealt with the problematic use of the term rhythmic improvisation and suggested that the term metric improvisation is an alternative that can better describe improvisation or improvised melodic developments that maintain a close relation to the underlying metric entity. This descriptive definition is an open, inclusive term that includes improvised performances that, in their development, adhere strictly to a metric entity; and it also includes improvised performances that follow the underlying metric entity loosely, or that alternate between strictly rhythmic and more flexible parts.

⁶⁶ See Glossary.

3 Motivation: Research and Performance issues

During my entanglement with the *oud* and *makam* music in performance and in research, I realised that there is a demand on stage and in research for a way to approach metric improvisation. It emerges especially in settings of what we generally call world music or fusion, involving a performer of a Middle Eastern instrument (*kanun*, *oud*, *ney* and so on) who is required to improvise metrically and to interact with the underlying rhythmic environment. To my surprise, I was faced with the almost complete lack of written material that could inform performers, students and researchers on the subject. Especially in literature, written sources are extremely scarce. Both in Arabic and Turkish ethnomusicology, the scholarly emphasis is on the *taksim* genre and especially on its modal aspects and not its temporal/rhythmical/metrical aspects. And even for *taksim*, musicians and students that would like to deepen their knowledge on this improvisatory performance practice need to base their efforts mostly on private research.

Metric improvisation in *makam* music is generally considered a ‘type of *taksim*’. With reference to Arabic music, in Nizar Rohana (2021) we read:

A second and less prominent type of *taqsim* is performed with a fixed rhythmic cycle played by another instrument (often a percussion instrument). This type is often called *taqsim muqayyadah* (lit. restricted) or *taqsim muwaqqa’ah* (lit. measured).⁶⁷

Also, in Nettl & Riddle, (1973)

Moreover, there exists a metric genre of *taqsim*, *taqsim ’ala al-wahda*, but it is not considered at all in this study.⁶⁸

If we stick to the definition of metric improvisation as a ‘type of *taksim*’, unfortunately we fail to explain the difficulties raised for the performer of *taksim* when asked to improvise metrically; if metric improvisation was a type of *taksim* then musicians that could play a *taksim* inevitably could play a metric improvisation. Reality, however, challenges this notion. From personal experience, both in performance and in education, I realised that performers (myself included) often find it extremely difficult to improvise metrically. This should come as no surprise. Both in education and in performance, the emphasis in *makam* music is mostly on how the performer could best interpret the modal essence of the *makam* through the *taksim*. Meanwhile, rhythm is completely out of the scope of music education on *taksim*. The phrase, the melodic progression (*seyir*), and the ornamentation are tools that form an integral part of any performer’s education and on which they are directed to focus their attention.

Research shows that ultimately *taksim* and metric improvisation have the same point of

⁶⁷ Rohana, N., 2021, “ud Taqsim as a Model of Pre-Composition.”, Doctoral diss., University of Leiden, 19.

⁶⁸ Nettl, B., & Riddle, R., “Taqsim Nahawand: A Study of Sixteen Performances by Jihad Racy”, *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council*, 5 (1973): 11–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/767493>.

reference, namely the modal system of *makam*. However, the interconnection with the ‘fixed rhythmic cycle’ is a parameter that cannot be avoided and requires a different approach on the whole process of improvisation in practice, performance and education. In addition, through personal experience as a performer in different settings around the world, I was often required to employ melodic material other than *makam* in its strict sense. For example, when performing with musicians coming from a jazz- educated environment, the mode was the prominent system from which I would deduce melodic material. *Makam* is rarely used in all its development, meaning in its classical form (i.e., required when fully developed in a *taksim*). The definition of metric improvisation as a ‘type of *taksim*’ is therefore descriptive on a basic level, but not complete. It requires a broader conceptual frame, for which I suggest ‘metric modal improvisation’ as an umbrella term that could describe the practice addressed in this research.

In this sense, the first part of this research is dedicated to the acknowledgement of metric modal improvisation as a distinct improvisation practice. Despite its similarities with the *taksim* genre, metric improvisation in *makam* music is a performance practice that requires a different approach in performance and practice.

4 Research questions and methodological approach

This research project aims to investigate the following subjects:

1. What is metric improvisation in *makam* music, as understood through concrete examples of recordings of artists?
2. How can metric improvisation be developed and practised?
3. How can metric improvisation analysis and practice of rhythm provide a source of inspiration for the creation of precomposed works of contemporary modal music?

A variety of methodological tools (theoretical and practical) were employed to facilitate answering these questions: intensive listening to recordings spanning from the early gramophone 78 rpms to the end of the 20th century, detailed transcribing of music and thorough music analysis, bibliographical researches and the study of literature, practice on concrete rhythmic and melodic material and composing. As this project’s main goal is to explore the relationship and the interconnections of metric improvisation practice and composition practice, and how those can be delivered in a performance, I mainly followed a non-linear and practice-based route that included the following intertwined phases:

1. Choice of selected artists and material for transcription and analysis;
2. Transcription and analysis;
3. Determining the various rhythmic tools (or rhythmic devices), models and stylistic decisions employed by the artists and practice;
4. Experimentation with all the above in my improvisation and composition practice, and creation of precomposed pieces.

5 Why transcribe?

This section addresses the need for manual transcription. According to Nettl (2005: 74),

The point is that a transcription or notation system may be developed to solve a particular problem in the music of a specific culture.⁶⁹

Indeed, in this research project the ‘particular problem of a specific culture’ leads to the need for a deep understanding of how metric modal improvisation operates. Historically, *makam* music dissemination is based on the notion of *meşk* – a close master-student relationship based on the oral dissemination of music and all of its nuances. As performer and researcher (PhD), Michalis Cholevas (2022)⁷⁰ explains how the political changes that followed the fall of the Ottoman empire and the subsequent emergence of the nation states had an enormous impact on music and music education. The introduction of staff notation was only one of the many steps made at the time – alongside the creation of national conservatories and orchestras – that contributed greatly to the homogenisation of an otherwise heterogeneous music tradition. In this process, staff notation has become a significant tool for the dissemination of *makam* music and, together with it, the relatively recent concept of transcription.⁷¹

Despite its conclusive usefulness, manual transcription is a relatively new tool in the analysis of Middle Eastern music. Its use can create controversy, in the sense that the outcome of a transcription process is mainly based on the capabilities of the person transcribing and, consequently, on his/her abilities, background, cognitive choices and other factors and variables. Especially in Middle Eastern cultures where an abstraction is already in place (by definition) due to the use of staff notation, transcriptions should operate as descriptive tools. As Nettl (2005, 78) points out,

The concept of transcription has expanded in its combination with various analytical methods. Thus, we will be faced on the one hand with transcriptions that give us only part of the musical picture, such as ornamentation, singing style, or melodic contour, but give it in enormous detail; we may, on the other extreme, having admitted that the Western concept of the note is equally an abstraction, now come to view abstractions such as formal schemes as particular kinds of transcription as well.⁷²

To conclude: despite all of its abstractions and deficiencies, manual transcription can be a mind-opening tool for performers. Transcription that derives from attentive listening and practising, combined with analysis, can contribute to better performance awareness and, as this research project aims to show, enhance the performer’s inspiration in music making in general (improvised or precomposed), by utilising the tools discovered through transcription

⁶⁹ Nettl, B., “I Can’t Say a Thing until I’ve Seen the Score: Transcription”, in *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 74-91.

⁷⁰ Cholevas, M. (2022, 3-4).

⁷¹ As we will see later in this chapter, there are but a few published transcriptions of *taksims* in Turkish music.

⁷² *ibid.*

and analysis.

5.1 Terminology

In *makam*-related music, transcription of improvisations has mainly been focused on *taksim*.⁷³ According to Walter Feldman:⁷⁴

The *taksim* as it is known in modern Turco-Arabian music is defined by four major characteristics, which are not present as an ensemble in any other non-metrical genre within the core Muslim world (including the Maghreb and Transoxiana):

- 1) Performance-generation which precludes learned tune-like models
- 2) Specific rhythmic idioms within an overall flowing-rhythm context
- 3) Codified melodic progression (*seyir*)
- 4) Modulation.

Taksim performance (not even to mention *taksim* transcription) is generally regarded by teachers and students alike as a vigorous and difficult task;⁷⁵ with the difficulty seeming to lie in the non-metric nature of *taksim*, its improvisational nature, and its detailed ornamentation. This may well explain the scarcity of transcriptions of *taksims* in the literature compared to the significance of *taksim* in performance practice. Besides, the process of learning how to perform a *taksim* is not one that supported (at least until the late 20th century) the use of notation; one must attentively listen to recordings of the great masters of *taksim*, try to decipher phrases and sentences, imitate them and then, reproduce them. This oral/auditory process of learning how to perform an improvisatory performance practice can prove extremely beneficial to developing one's auditory and imitation skills. However, it has not triggered, at least until the beginning of the 21st century, a large production of transcribed material on *taksim*, consequently leaving a pronounced gap in the relevant educational material. As a result, musicians and educators are constantly searching for ways to explain and teach *taksim*, so as to facilitate their educational goals and inform their performance practice.

The situation seems to be even more blurred in the case of metric improvisation in *makam* music. Because it is still an underrepresented practice, there are only a few transcriptions of

⁷³ Such transcriptions can be seen in the works of:

- i. Yahya, G., *Ünlü virtüöz Yorgo Bacanos'un oud taksimleri: taksim notaları, analiz ve yorumları*, (Ankara: T.C. Kültür Bakanlığı, 2002). On Yorgo Bacanos *taksims* on ud.
- ii. Torun, M., *Mutlu Torun.ud METODU. Gelenekle geleceğe*, (Istanbul: Porte Müzik Eğitim Malzemeleri, 2019).
- iii. Igar, K., "Mesud Cemil'in Rast Makamındaki viyolonsel taksiminin analizi", *İdil: Sanat Ve Dil Dergisi*, 6, no. 30 (2017): 757-807, On Mesud Cemil Bey's *taksims* on cello and elsewhere (see literature).

⁷⁴ The development of the *taksim* genre as it is discussed in Ottoman sources is thoroughly described in Feldman, W., "Ottoman Sources on the Development of the *taksim*", *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 25 (1993): 1-28.

⁷⁵ Çalhan, N. & Yokuş, H., "Kanun Öğrencilerinin taksim Yapmaya Yönelik Görüşlerinin Değerlendirilmesi", *Eurasian Journal of Music and Dance*, 15 (2019): 91-104.

metric improvisations.⁷⁶ Even the term rhythmic improvisation was only introduced in international literature by Kallimopoulou as late as 2006.⁷⁷ The term *tempolu taksim*⁷⁸ (literally meaning *taksim* with tempo) which is often used in Turkish literature to describe a *taksim* played on top of an *usül*, (Turk. sing. *usül/ usûl* pl. *usuller, usûller*), an underlying rhythmic cycle (metric entity), seems to be the only close equivalent in Turkish literature and describes a subcategory of *taksim* performance, without however giving any hints on how exactly it is performed or if it has any structural or stylistic differences with the ‘traditional’ form of the *taksim*. Thus, the absence of nearly any transcribed material on the subject comes as no surprise. This gap is one that this section of the present research hopes to fill, even if only partially.

5.2 Conventions

5.2.1 The notation system

The notation system chosen for almost all of the transcriptions in this research is the one currently used in modern Turkey, based on the theoretical system for *makam* by Arel-Ezgi-Uzdilek (AEU notation system).⁷⁹ Despite the disputes and controversy over the use of this system, it has been chosen as it still is the system most commonly used in modern Turkey for the notation of *makam* music.⁸⁰ This has resulted in transcriptions in which the transcribed pitch is different from the actual recording pitch. For example, the recording’s tonality may have been G (4) *Uşşak* and the transcriptions tonality is depicted as A(4) *Uşşak*, following the convention that *Dügâh*, which is the basis for the *makam Uşşak* in the AEU notation system, is depicted with the note A of the second interval. This is a common situation that musicians playing *makam* often face, and, mainly outside Turkey, one of the predominant arguments within music circles against using the AEU notation system. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted by most musicians performing *makam* music, and this is the reason why it was selected for the transcriptions in this study. In some cases, however, where the original pitch of the recording is connected with certain fingerings and positions for the instruments, or in cases where harmony is involved, the transcriptions have been made following the original pitch.

Another relevant convention is the depiction of the *makam* as a scale in the related examples inside the main body of the text. This convention was adopted only for illustrative reasons and for audiences that are not familiar with the *makam* system. *Makam* is a combination of components (intervallic structure, melodic progressions (*seyir*)) that provides a framework for

⁷⁶ Apart from the author’s transcriptions of metric improvisations for her Master’s thesis, Liontou–Mochament, M., 2013, “Rhythmic improvisation in the works of Ara Dinkjian, Sokratis Sinopoulos and Kyriakos Tapakis”, Master thesis, Codarts, University for the Arts.

⁷⁷ In Kallimopoulou (2006): ‘It may be noted that rhythmic improvisation – *taksim* –like performance in the middle of a piece, where the musician will either improvise a melody on the rhythm (4/4, 9/8, 10/8, but also fast 5/8, 7/8 or even 11/8 and so on) or alternate rhythmic with rubato parts – is highly valued in *paradosiaka*.’

⁷⁸ Kaçar, Y. (2009, 22-23).

⁷⁹ The introduction and adaptation of the Western music notation system for *makam* music, as well as the ongoing controversy around it, is described thoroughly in Ayangil, Ruhi (2008).

⁸⁰ See Appendix for more information on symbols, alterations and so on.

melodic development and should not be regarded as a simple scale. In this text, its depiction as a scale is an abstraction and serves only informative purposes for unfamiliar audiences.

5.2.2 *Technical issues*

During the transcription process, several issues arose. The constantly-flowing nature of improvisation as performance practice has raised major technical challenges during the processes of transcription and analysis, thereby rendering decision-making an improvisatory practice in itself. This has especially been the case when dealing with older recordings, with live performances (live performances recorded for commercial use), or with both. Some of them are listed below:

1. Changing tempo/metronome during the recording.
2. Changes in the accompanying rhythmic pattern (within the solo or from the solo to the composition).
3. Different and, at times, contradicting rhythmic decisions/layering among the performers during improvisation.
4. Sound quality.
5. Tuning.

Facing up to issues like those listed above has posed questions, such as ‘how much’ or ‘what’ to transcribe and ‘why’. Transcribing is a process limited by the listening/hearing capacity of the transcriber that leads, inevitably, to a great degree of subjectivity included in any effort to transcribe any sound source. This subjectivity lies in the aural capacity and perception of the transcriber. Being aware of the human limitations imposed, in this research project, transcription came as the last step of a long process of a combination of actions; attentive listening, imitating (not only the sound and style but even the bodily posture of each artist) and finally, performing along with the sound recordings of the artists and trying to reach the highest possible similarity to the reference recording. All those steps were undertaken before even starting to transcribe. In this sense, the main focus was on the embodiment of each artists’ distinct traits. As a performer, and with the aid of the process described above, I was able to discern technical particularities related to performance technique, and structural development on a macro level. Following the ‘de codification’ of each of the artists’ style in a ‘bodily’ level, there was still the need to decipher what was happening in terms of melodic and rhythmic cells, larger units and components, i.e. a need for analysis. Manual transcription was the only solution for this, in my view, because it included my active participation in the deciphering process. As a former computer scientist, the easiest path for me would have been to use technology to do the ‘hard’ job’. Instead, and being aware of the perceptual limitations of the transcriber, the deficiencies of the staff notation concerning the modal systems of the East and the ‘abstract vagueness’ that surrounds, by definition, the use of notation in the Middle East, the transcription process has proven beneficial for my musicality, and has provided access to details that reinforced the process of analysis. All decisions made during the process of transcription resulted from attempts to avoid the ‘correct/wrong’ opposition. Instead, relevance to the subject under research was the factor that motivated me to prioritise

certain choices above others. This has resulted in decision-making that produced transcriptions with a focus on the improvisational aspect of the recording. However, this does not mean that ‘problematic’ issues are not addressed or even ignored. On the contrary, the need to understand these issues and why they exist lies in the field of knowledge about music-making conditions of each period, which affects artistic choices that are made during performance; aesthetics, recording/commercial needs, and certain conditions of the performance.

So, instead of regarding these issues as ‘problematic’, another approach would be to use them as a tool for a deeper understanding of this performance practice through time, and even to use the ‘flaws’ or ‘problems’ to inform our performance practice. In line with this view, the recorded material was selected to try and include examples that demonstrate how this distinct improvisation practice was (and still is) performed – embracing the technical issues that they may include.

5.3 What to transcribe?

Given that there are but a few transcriptions of metric improvisations in existing literature, the decision of what to transcribe was a difficult one. As the aim of this research is to show how the practice of metric improvisation can help to empower creativity in contemporary modal music, the choice was firstly made according to how the specific recordings could reveal more musical tools (rhythmic complexity, phrasing, structure, and the use of *makam* being some of them) to facilitate this goal. Secondly, as the practice is common for different instruments, the inclusion of a variety of instruments seemed like an interesting and worthwhile criterion to be met. The ways in which metric improvisation is performed on different types of instruments (*oud*, *kanun*, *lyra* of Istanbul) could shed light on the variety of ways that this practice can be performed, and provide ideas and tools for a wider audience.⁸¹

The lack of bibliography on the subject made it necessary to choose recordings that would give at least a partial review of the practice through time, as well as culture-specific information. For example, the early recordings of Udi Hrant and Marko Melkon contribute to the argument that the practice was extant during the early 20th century, although scarcely represented within the recording industry. In the same sense, recordings of John Berberian’s improvisation can give information about style and innovations in the U.S. during 1960s, and recordings of Ara Dinkjian and Tamer Pınarbaşı can show the development of the style during the early 21st century.

⁸¹ Wind instruments are consciously not included in this research for two distinct reasons: a) There seems to be a bigger focus on *tempolu taksim* in the performances of clarinets as far as this music is concerned, something that did not add a lot of information for the rhythmic focus this research is intending. There are, of course, players that could be included and that perform in that style, with their musical influences leading back to Balkan music (which is outside of the scope of this research). b) As the goal was not only to transcribe but to also try and incorporate techniques of other performers and types of instruments into my musical practice, the playing of wind instruments proved to be an extremely difficult task to imitate on the *oud* and away from my artistic choices. This may well be of interest to players and researchers of wind instruments and it remains open for further research and experimentation.

The main steps were as follows:

First, recorded material was taken both from live and studio recordings. In the case of album recordings, the process was quite straightforward as far as the sound quality was concerned: studio engineering, especially in recent recordings, provides clarity of sound and minimal or zero background noise, easing and facilitating the transcriber's work. Also, nowadays the nature of studio recording is structured; a steady pulse and a more or less fixed number of bars make transcription much easier. In those cases, all instruments are included in the transcription, even during the improvisation part. However, this is not the case in live recordings (even those that became a live concert album afterward). In those cases, the density of the sound, the background noise, the absence of a steady pulse and, at times, the low quality of the sound or video hindered the process of transcription. In those cases, the emphasis was mainly given to the improvisation part, at the same time transcribing prescriptively and not in any detail as pertains to the accompanying instruments.

Second, as metric improvisation is usually performed after the exposition of the precomposed part, the question arose as to how detailed the transcription of the composed part should be. Again, decisions were made according to whether or not the level of detail of the transcription would help in making a relevant point for this research. The composed parts of the selected material fall into the following very general categories: 1) folk tunes of Anatolia (anonymous composers), 2) compositions of Turkish classical music (*Türk Klasik Müzikisi*), and 3) contemporary modal music repertoire.

These three genres were chosen for the following reasons: First, as research will show, in all three genres we encounter performances of metric improvisation. Early recordings of *halk müziği* and *Türk Klasik Müzikisi* provide the starting point of this research, whereas arrangements of the above and samples of contemporary modal music serve as examples of the development of the genre. Second, my main focus as a performer and a researcher is on those three genres and their development and change historically. Accordingly, these genres are the ones that I am most familiar with. In all of my professional education and in my performance career I have practiced and performed a large repertoire of the genres referred to above and even composed music that falls into the contemporary modal music category. In this sense, I have the advantage of researching this music not as an observer, but as a participant who has embodied the repertoire and even composed original music for the contemporary modal music genre.

As a result, I have not examined examples of metric improvisation that are exemplified in other traditions, such as Arabic, Persian, Indian and others. However, I argue that this research provides models, methods, and tools for researchers of the above music traditions, and it can also provide inspiration for creativity.

For the first two categories above, an existing version of the tune/composition was found and consulted as a comparison wherever possible. Where it was the same as the recording, it served to aid the transcription. However, I decided to transcribe most of the

tunes/compositions from scratch again, because I felt that there were significant differences with the existing versions in the literature and that these differences were conveying different rhythmic and stylistic meanings. For compositions that fall into the third category, the transcriptions of the compositions are rendered as close as possible to the recordings. Given that one of the main goals of this research is to facilitate the creation of music in the genre of contemporary modal music, these transcriptions can, on the one hand, serve as examples of the genre for the unfamiliar reader and, on the other, serve as a framework for the part of the analysis that concerns how the improvised part is influenced by coexistence with the precomposed part.

Finally, in each case, decisions had to be made as to whether or not all instruments participating in the performance would be transcribed in detail. Again, my focus was on bringing the rhythmic aspects of improvisations into the foreground; therefore, the rest of the arrangement has simply been transcribed in such a way as to contextualise it. In transcriptions of categories 1 and 2, an extra level of the basic rhythmic cycle (*usül*) – played or implied – is added to facilitate the rhythmic analysis. The accompaniment is also prescriptively transcribed when regarded as necessary, such as in cases where it can shed light on the communication of performers during their improvisation.

5.4 Tools

All transcriptions were made with MuseScore 3, an open-source notation software that facilitates the notation of *makam*-related music, as it allows the use of accidentals specific to *makam* music. Transcribe.exe is the software that was used to slow down the speed. Being aware that slowing down a sound sample can affect the perception of the transcriber, as described earlier, I had already imitated the sound material by playing it before transcribing it and then I was able to compare everything to the original speed.

5.5 Towards a transcription/analysis protocol

Given the volume of the transcribed work, decisions had to be made regarding the standardisation of elements. For this purpose, I chose to create a template for the transcribed material that could give the reader an in-depth overview of the performance on three levels:

1. The rhythmic aspect of the performance
2. The melodic and phrasing aspect of the performance
3. The structural aspect

In this way, the reader can have a micro and macro-overview of the performance simultaneously.

To facilitate this, a standard, all-over name giving has been employed. For every transcription I use the following labels:

1. InstM/FNo:

This refers to the instrument name, and the number of the melodic figure/motif.⁸² It is used to identify small melodic figures, motifs and cells. A figure is described as a ‘a short melodic idea having a particular identity of rhythm and contour, often used [...] in conjunction with other such ideas to build a larger melodic idea.’⁸³ The term motif is described as a ‘recurring melodic figure or melodic idea.’⁸⁴

Under this label, the following aspects are explained:

- 1.1. Rhythmic description: This includes subdivisions, changes in rhythmic flow, groupings, accents, and so on.
- 1.2. Effect: A description of the effect that is created (if any) and includes syncopation, laid back, swing, feeling, and so on.
- 1.3. Use of intervals: Ascending-descending, jumps, and so on.

2. InstPNo:

This label refers to the instrument and the phrase number and it is used to identify a phrase. According to Arnold Schoenberg, a phrase is:

[A] kind of a musical molecule consisting of a number of integrated musical events, possessing certain completeness, and well adapted to combination with other similar units.

The term phrase means, structurally, a unit approximating to what one could sing in a single breath. Its ending suggests a form of punctuation such as a comma. [...]

[...]

Rhythm [...] is often the determining factor in establishing the unity of a phrase. [...]

Phrase endings may be marked by a combination of distinguishing features [...].

The length of a phrase may vary within wide limits.⁸⁵

Under this label, the following aspects are explained:

- 2.1.1 Length of phrase in bars. A particularly significant aspect of metric improvisation has proven to be, through this research, the length of a phrase (two-bar, three-bar phrase, and so on).
- 2.1.2 Melodic Figures/Motifs included (InstM/FNo).
- 2.1.3 Explanation of melodic development (*seyir*): A short description of what is happening in terms of melodic development is included here; modulations,

⁸² The labels in the transcriptions are written without a space in between words and numbers, for reasons of spacing. In the main body of the text, the labelling format includes spaces between words and numbers, as follows: InstrumentName MelodicFigure/MotifNumber for reasons of clarity. The same applies to the labels *Phrase* and *Sentence*.

⁸³ Drabkin, W., *Grove Music Online*, s.v. “figure,” accessed May 6, 2022, doi:10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.53712.

⁸⁴ Ibid, Rohana, N. (2021, 48).

⁸⁵ Schoenberg, A. *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*, (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1967), 3.

dominant tones, movement to certain notes, cadences to closure, and so on.

3. EndOfSentenceNo:

The third level of analysis on the transcription is the structural one, on a macro, zoomed-out level. A sentence is syntactically a period. It can consist of one or more phrases, and it constitutes a section where a large musical meaning is concluded. The label indicates the end of the sentence, so that the reader has an indicator of the closure of a musical statement alongside the timeline.

An example of the above is shown in the following figure:

60

K.

The musical score is written on three staves. The top staff contains a continuous melodic line. The middle staff contains a series of rests, indicating a rhythmic pattern. The bottom staff contains a melodic line with some rests. Annotations in red boxes describe specific motifs and phrases. Blue arrows connect these annotations to the corresponding musical elements in the score.

Instrument
Name: Oud
MotifNo: 2, 3, 4, 5

Rhythmic description

Effect

Use of intervals

OudMotif2
Combination of 8th & (2) dotted quarters creating syncopation feel

OudMotif3
Group of (4) 8ths & (1) dotted 4er introducing 5th degree & jump from 5th to 7th

OudMotif4
Group of (4) 8ths & dotted 4er (placed on beat (5) creating a new 7/8 bar)

OudPhrase4
(2) bar phrase
OudM2 & OudM3
Stops on Çargah *Neva
Movement around Neva showing Gerdaniye fall on Hüseini

OudPhrase5
Extending over (4) bars
Ascending movement from Neva to Tiz Buselik
Descending movement showing Tiz Çargah
Fall on Muhayyer

Motif Rhythm

Phrase Melodic Development

InstrumentPhraseNo

Length of phrase in bars

Includes Motifs: InsNMno

Explanation of movement (*seyir*)

Figure 1: Excerpt from Ara Dinkjian's *oud* metric improvisation in Crosswinds (03:34-03:36)