

Louis Andriessen

Aesthetic issues in *De Staat*, *De Tijd*, and
De Materie

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Introduction

The music of Louis Andriessen speaks in a voice, often aggressive, which challenges the expectations of the listener. Relentlessly repetitive, it is rarely peaceful; even the more subdued moments are tense. For this paper, I have chosen to concentrate on three works – *De Staat*, *De Tijd*, and *De Materie* – which demonstrate Andriessen's concern with orchestration, theatre, politics, synthesis of musical layers, ritual, and “quotation” in the broadest sense. Through his obsessive handling of each of these elements, Andriessen creates musical rhetoric that is particular to the final decades of this century, and suggests a connection to the postmodern movement identified by contemporary aesthetic criticism. After a biographical introduction, the middle sections of this paper provide an overview of the technical and rhetorical features that unify Andriessen's works. While maintaining doubts about the existence of postmodernism as a viable independent paradigm, the last section of this paper examines the theory of postmodernity as a tool for understanding Andriessen's work.

As this paper finds its genesis in a seminar dealing with Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia*, I have used that work as a recurring reference for aesthetic comparison. The work of Berio questions the role, perhaps the possibility, of avant-garde music in such a way that it is a natural starting point for a discussion of the postmodern in music. It is important to note that the parceling of music history into stylistic packages (e.g. Romanticism, Neo-Classicism) is inherently artificial – an academic convenience. The language of postmodern theory appears here, not to demark a new era of human thought, but as a tool for discussing particular works of art.

Biography of Louis Andriessen¹

Louis Andriessen was born on June 6, 1939, in Utrecht, Holland into a family whose musical dimensions have been compared, by his publisher, to that of the Bach family. His father,

¹Ewen, David *Composers Since 1900, A biographical and critical guide, First Supplement* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1981) p.12-14

Hendrik (1892-1981), is also a well-known composer and organist at the Utrecht Cathedral². His mother, Tine Anschutz, was a professional pianist; his uncle, Willem, was a pianist, composer, and director of the Amsterdam Conservatory; and his older brother, Juriaan (b. 1925), is a composer. From his father, he inherited a preference for music outside of the prevalent German models. Suspicion of German models was, no doubt, reinforced by experiencing the Nazi occupation of Holland during his childhood, and the subsequent destruction of Holland's infrastructure.

During World War II, Louis Andriessen became acquainted with contemporary American composers, including Aaron Copland, Paul Creston, and Norman Dello Joio, through a United States Information Center near his home. He also became interested in boogie-woogie and jazz. He played and listened to the music of Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson, and Meade Lux Lewis, and listened to jazz on American Armed Forces Radio, describing what he heard as “a very progressive radical approach to music.”³ American composers continue to be an important influence on his music; he was a founder of the Charles Ives Society in Holland. 1971 was his first exposure to American Minimalist music, when he heard Terry Riley's *In C* for the first time. He later discovered that he had much in common with Steve Reich and his music. Other notable influences are from composers who worked in France: Messiaen, Milhaud, and Stravinsky⁴.

He began his musical studies quite early, working first with his father (1950-1956) and then with his brother (1956-1958). He entered the Royal Conservatory at the Hague in 1958, where he studied with Kees van Baaren, perhaps the first Dutch composer of twelve-tone music. At that time, Louis' experiments in the serial style were a way for him to distinguish himself

²Liner notes to *De Stijl*, K Robert Schwartz, 1994 (Elektra Nonesuch #79342-2)

³Ewen p. 12

⁴Andriessen has recently published a book, with Elmer Schönberger, about Stravinsky: *The Apollonian Clockwork* (London: Oxford University Press 1990) trans. Jeff Hamburg

from the rest of his family. His father, particularly, did not venture into this area, preferring to focus more on “French” styles. In 1962, Louis Andriessen finished at the Royal Conservatory and began his first period of study with Luciano Berio. He studied with Berio, both in Milan and again in Berlin, between 1962 and 1965.

Currently, Andriessen lives in Holland and teaches at the Royal Conservatory. He is an active pianist, having performed with *De Volharding* and *Hoketus* (groups he founded). He lives with guitarist and musical therapist Jeanette Yanikian, has no children, several cats, and sites his sole hobby as table tennis.⁵

Although this paper will concentrate on some of his later works, it will be helpful to name some of his significant earlier pieces. In 1958 he wrote his first serial piece, aptly titled *Séries*, for two pianos. His comments about the work show his desire to distance himself from the compositional models of his surroundings: “I must say that in 1958 I was one of the very first serial composers in Holland. I liked the strangeness of it...it was also a forbidden land, in a way!”⁶ His first orchestral pieces (he has chosen to write few pieces for that ensemble), the *Introspezione* series (1963-1965) show the influence of Berio, with whom he was studying. *Anachronie I* (1967) is interesting because it incorporates many of the techniques (specific instrumental placement, quotation, tetrachordal pitch structure) that may be found in his later work. The piece is for orchestra (including vibraphone, celesta, and electric organ), and is dedicated to the memory of Charles Ives. The orchestra is grouped centrally around the conductor. The piece contains quotations – Roussel 's Third Symphony and Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* – and is almost entirely generated from a four note phrase. For Andriessen, the score of this piece “indicates more clearly than ever that any individual style is no longer ideal.”⁷

⁵Ewen p. 14

⁶liner notes to *De Stijl*

⁷Ewen p. 13

Andriessen has not written extensively for electronic media. In 1973 he composed *Il Duce* for tape and initially intended for radio. The work is based on a 1935 speech of Mussolini, and was commissioned by Netherlands Broadcasting Company. Andriessen stated:

I had just returned from Italy where I had seen in record shops releases of fascist songs and Mussolini speeches. The MSI [Movimento Sociale Italiano] had become the biggest neo-fascist party in Europe and this, combined with the fact that in the thirties the fascists had been the first to make systematic use of the radio as a political medium, promoted my decision to write *Il Duce*.⁸

Il Duce uses one sentence from Mussolini's speech: "This assembly signifies that the identity of Italy and of fascism is perfect, absolute and immutable." The nature of the work ironically overturns the claim of immutability. The recording of Mussolini is fed back upon itself in a continuous loop. As it loops the words degenerate into a formless roar, out of which emerges a quote from Strauss' *Also sprach Zarathustra*. The work was premiered, in concert, on November 28, 1976 (with *De Staat*).

His relationship (as co-founder and performer) with performing ensembles has yielded fruitful results. *On Jimmy Yancy* (1973) is a polytonal tribute to his boogie-woogie influence, for winds, piano, bass, and was written for the ensemble *De Volharding* (perseverance, another piece by Andriessen). *Hoketus* (1977/8) began with an exploration of American minimal art which Andriessen conducted with his students at the Royal Conservatory. The ensemble *Hoketus* takes its name from this piece. As the name suggests, hocketing techniques are fundamental to this work. This piece portrays two important aspects of Andriessen's music which will have increased significance in the rest of this paper. First, it displays Andriessen's belief that music should develop out of a relationship between composer and performers. (For instance, performers are given freedom to repeat any measure or number of measures as often as they wish.) Second, *Hoketus* highlights the opposing tension between Andriessen's strong American influences (particularly jazz and minimalism) with his strong European ties. He has created a

⁸Ewen p. 14

“European minimalism” in this piece; a style that would not be mistaken for any of his American contemporaries.

The “concept” pieces:

For the remainder of the paper I will focus on three pieces that David Wright terms “concept” pieces: *De Staat* (1972-1976), *De Tijd* (1980-1981) and *De Materie* (1985/8). These works are linked by a focus on particular philosophical issues, taking texts from a wide range of historical sources. *De Staat* focuses on the relationship between music and politics; it takes its text from Plato's *Republic*. It premiered in a recorded performance in Amsterdam on November 28, 1976 (with *Il Duce*), and was subsequently awarded the UNESCO Rostrum of Composers Prize and the Matthijs Vermeulen Prize. *De Tijd* deals with the issue of time as posed by St. Augustine: “*Quid est ergo tempus?*” Its compositional technique addresses our awareness and sense of time, and how it is divided. *De Materie* is an encyclopedia or lexicon of Andriessen's music (as was *Sinfonia* for Berio in its time).

De Materie is a key work in Andriessen's oeuvre because we find combined in it nearly everything that has held his interest; from the rhythmic force of the first movement to the procession of towering chordal monoliths in the fourth movement, and in between the transcendental melody and harmony of *Hadewijch* and the use of 'preformed material' in *De Stijl*.⁹

The texts for this piece are drawn from such disparate sources as *Shipbuilding and Management* (a seventeenth century shipbuilding guide), the 1581 Act of Abjuration (*Plakkaat van Verlatinge*: Holland's withdrawal of loyalty from the Spanish king), writings of thirteenth-century poetess and mystic Hadewijch, texts relating to Piet Mondrian, and words of Willem Kloos and Marie Curie. The final movement also quotes extensively from Hendrik Andriessen's 1927 *Pavane for Piano*.

The compositional processes for each of these pieces are suited the philosophical import

⁹Frits van der Waa (trans. John Lydon) <http://www.netcetera.nl/donemus/louise.html>

of the respective texts. There is a sense of an attempt to “answer” weighty questions by means of musical exploration.

[T]he primacy Andriessen gives to the teleological effect of these pieces – the sense of individual elements being drawn together over the duration of a piece – [is] a common aspect of these three 'conceptual' works, which are in fact constructed around different sorts of musical processes.¹⁰

Technical issues

Instrumentation and text setting

I think of harmony, melody and rhythm as the main parameters of music. Instrumentation is an important aspect, but it remains extra ...All that whining about textural sonorous fields and special instrumental effects bores me.¹¹

What [Andriessen] did draw from Berio was a strong sense of voice, which becomes evident in such works as *De Staat*...¹²

De Staat, *De Tijd*, and *De Materie* all exemplify Andriessen's individual approach to instrumentation. All three pieces include amplified voices. The use of amplification allows the voice to be heard a part of the instrumental texture. The chorus can be balanced with the other parts. The diagram of the seating arrangement (attached) of *De Staat* shows the vocalists virtually hidden at the rear of the stage. Their placement behind two pianos minimizes the dramatic visual prominence that vocal soloists normally have, standing in front of the instrumentalists. Further, there is a discrepancy between where the voice is situated, and where the sound comes from (the loud speakers). Finally, the presence of singers and identifiably human sounds creates a heightened connotation of theatre, of affectation, and of narrative.

Often, the narrative aspect of Andriessen's music requires expert deciphering skills on the

¹⁰Wright, David “Louis Andriessen: Polity, Time, Speed, Substance” *Tempo* 187 (December 1993) p. 7-13

¹¹<http://www.netcetera.nl/donemus/louise.html>

¹²Morton, Brain and Pamela Collins eds. *Contemporary Composers* (Chicago: St. James Press, 1992) p. 20

part of the listener. In this respect, his treatment of texts is similar to Berio's in *Sinfonia*:

[T]here is a deliberate gap created by Berio between the (mytho)logic of his source and the semantic impact of the work either as a score or as a performance – a gap which not even the most expert listener can bridge.¹³

Andriessen, too, plays with the possibilities of incomprehensibility (to a lesser degree – see below: “Failure, contradiction and irony”) and reflexivity. The self-referential dimension of the text setting demonstrates the importance placed on the semantic content of each word. For example, there is a dialogue between the text of *De Staat* (see attached) and the musical setting. When the words:

If it be given a musical mode and rhythm in accord with the diction, it may be performed correctly in the almost same mode throughout; that is, since character is so uniform, in one musical mode, and also in a similarly unchanging rhythm?¹⁴

are being sung (at rehearsal number 5), the chorus is iterating a single pitch set¹⁵ to an unwavering, eighth-note accompaniment, acting out the text (what might be called word painting in a different era.) It is an additional irony that Andriessen uses women's voices to represent Plato, given the Greek's male-only education system.

The medieval text of St. Augustine, upon which *De Tijd* is based, suggests, among other things, mensural notation associated with specific numbers: *tempus imperfectum* (binary or 2) and *tempus perfectum* (ternary or 3). By translating 3 into the ratio of 1:2 (for medieval scholars a “perfect” proportion, along with 2:3 and 3:4)¹⁶ the piece derives its iambic (short-long)

¹³Osmond-Smith, David *Playing on Words: a guide to Luciano Berio's Sinfonia* (London: Royal Music Association, 1985) p. 13

¹⁴Plato's *Republic* as used in *De Staat*, Translation by A. D. Lindsay

¹⁵This pitch set (D-E-G#-A) permeates Andriessen's music. This quasi-tonal, lydian sonority seems to be at home in any of the genres he references. In the liner notes to *De Materie* he terms it the “1-2-3-4” chord because it contains a second, third and a fourth (although it also contains other intervals). *De Materie* is based around this chord.

¹⁶Maciejewicz, Dorota “Czas i trwanie w “De Tijd” Louisa Andriessena” *Muzyka* v.36 n.3/142 (1991) p. 45-62 [“Time and Duration in Louis Andriessen's *De Tijd*”, author's translation]

metrical pattern. This represents time, which is always moving. The other, static layer of the music represents St. Augustine's model of eternity:

...if only [men's] minds could be seized and held steady, they would be still for a while and, for that short moment, they would glimpse the splendor of eternity which is for ever still... [I]n eternity... all is present... They would see how eternity in which there is neither past nor future determines both past and future time.¹⁷

The hearing of the score refers to Dante's similar perspective on eternity, “gazing at the point where all times are present.”¹⁸ *De Materie* also has procedural links between the music and the texts. The third movement (*De Stijl*) gives us a “disco” bass line, while the narrator raps about the dancing habits of Piet Mondrian. Also, the proportions of the whole movement are derived from Mondrian's *Composition in Red, Yellow and Blue* (painted 1927, the same year as the H. Andriessen *Pavane* quoted in the final movement).

Returning to the issue of instrumentation, another similarity between these works and Berio's *Sinfonia* is the use of electric instruments. While *Sinfonia* calls for electric organ and electric harpsichord, Andriessen is more partial to electric guitars and basses, and synthesizers, although he uses Hammond organ in *De Tijd* and *De Snelheid*. These instruments contribute to the perception of “pop music” elements in Andriessen's music. Electric instruments also serve to generate another amplified, potentially “unreal” (or unplaceable) sonority, along with the amplified voices. The sound of a synthesizer is often difficult to associate with the motions of a particular performer, especially when the speaker is away from the player, because the sounding mechanism is not visible. There can be friction between what the audience sees and what they hear, and the music is less governed by human limits of breath or reach.

The distinction between different instrumental groups playing different musical layers is

¹⁷St. Augustine's *Confessions* (Book 11 Chapter 11) from *De Tijd*

¹⁸Heading from the score of *De Tijd* – Dante, *The Divine Comedy*, Beatrice in 'Paradiso' (17th canto, line 17; trans. J.W.Thomas)

critical to the drama of each of these pieces.

In *Sinfonia* grouping by four is all-pervasive (a reflection of the eight voices and of the consequent tendency towards four- and eight-part harmony), except that an alto and a tenor saxophone complement three upper double reeds and three bassoons respectively ...Clearly, the presence of such carefully balanced strata of homogeneous timbre implies a marked interdependence between harmonic process, timbre and texture¹⁹

I would, again, point to the attached seating diagram of *De Staat*, a piece similarly built around the number four. There are four of each wind instrument and four vocalists. The piece is based on tetrachordal sonorities. The same holds true for *De Materie*, which uses the famous four note phrase: B-A-C-H, and is based on the composer's "1-2-3-4" chord: F-Bb-C-E.²⁰ The placement of different musical material in specific parts of the stage creates a visual effect, as well as an aural one.²¹ *Sinfonia* uses percussion groups of equal composition and a group of violins – Violins C – at the rear of the stage. *De Staat* has two large antiphonal groups (two each of oboes (doubling english horns), trumpets, trombones, violas, one harp, one electric guitar, and one piano) centered around the bass guitar and four women's voices. Other pieces by Andriessen, such as *De Snelheid* (which has three groups, two pulse groups (2 saxophones, 2 trumpets, 2 horns, 2 trombone, 1 tuba, and wood blocks) hocketing across center group (flutes, electric harps, bass guitar, Hammond organ, stings, and percussion)) and *Hoketus* (two groups, each having panpipe, alto saxophone, congas, fender rhodes, piano and bass guitar) implement similar strategies.

Friction between musical layers, and synthesis

It is only in this half of our century that we have enjoyed a fruitful dialogue between electronic and acoustic music. Although the idea of synthesis between disparate musical layers

¹⁹Osmond-Smith p. 3

²⁰Liner notes to *De Materie*, Elmer Schönberger, 1996 (Elektra Nonesuch #79367-2)

²¹This drama of such an arrangement is analogous to the drama implicit in the positions of the soloist and the conductor in a concerto.

is not at all new or exclusive to this medium, electronic music has sparked composers to consider the possibility of synthesis as a means of generating musical form. Berio is certainly influenced by his work with electronics:

[After *Nones* (1954)], a more individual approach to the orchestra was quickly to follow, and it was one conditioned by Berio's work with electronic media in the Studio di Fonologia that he and Bruno Maderna had set up in Milan (1955). For there he was able to explore the superposition of layers of sonic material, each with its own complex internal structure.²²

This process of superposition is not limited to purely electronic pieces. The importance of layering is very clear in *Sinfonia*.

[W]hereas *Allez-Hop* and *Epifanie* unite their disparate materials simply by placing them side by side, *Sinfonia* and *Coro* go beyond this, compelling different musical concerns to interact in the moment of composition itself ...In *Sinfonia* Berio synthesized several of his most long-standing concerns, making them literally 'sound together' as the title indicates.²³

Among the works of Andriessen which we are surveying, the clearest manifestation of such layering occurs in *De Tijd*. “*De Tijd*'s concern is with the operation of musical layers that do achieve accord before again separating out.”²⁴ The different, opposing music layers, clearly delineated in by instrumentation and gesture, correspond to St. Augustine's dualistic view of measured time and eternity. The sustained voices and harmonies are a metaphor for eternal time, which cannot normally be perceived. The “bells” – the percussive chords that allow the perception of eternity by segmenting it into iambic units – represent secular time²⁵. The punctuation of this piece by “bells” also connotes ritual time, which will be further discussed below.

²²Osmond-Smith p. 2

²³Osmond-Smith p.1

²⁴Wright p. 9

²⁵Liner notes to *De Tijd*, Elmer Schönberger, 1993 (Elektra Nonesuch #79297-2)

Instrument groups in *De Staat* are spatially divided, as we have seen. However, the musical material ascribed to each group is not opposite, but often exactly the same (or nearly so). Andriessen regards the piece as an exploration of different “types” of unison²⁶. “The music contrasts textures characterized by unison elements, and textures based on imitation or hocket (themselves both forms of displaced unison).”²⁷ An example comes in the concluding passage, (immediately before rehearsal number 46). The two antiphonal groups start with canon three beats apart separated by the interval of a whole step. The canon is inexact, at first; the voices come closer and only a half step separates them at times. Nine measures from the end they finally reach rhythmic unison (with a few small, but critical exceptions) and end on a *tutti* g sharp.

Rhetorical Style

Quotation

The introduction to this paper proposes a broad idea of quotation. Literal quotation of other music, such as the Mahler in the third movement of Berio's *Sinfonia*, is one way for a composer to borrow²⁸ from external sources. As mentioned above, Andriessen borrows from his father in the fourth movement of *De Materie*, and uses the pitch series B-A-C-H, a more oblique type of quote. He also quotes Strauss, Bach, and Roussel in other works.

Another variety of quotation is the quotation of compositional techniques from other genres: popular, non-western, and medieval music. Andriessen often employs hocketing (e.g.

²⁶“Polyphony, harmony, unison, writing in one part, two-part writing, doublings – for centuries, these notions were sufficient to describe musical compositions. They unambiguously classified unambiguous musical structures. Twentieth-century music has forced theoreticians to redefine some of them.” – Schönberger, Elmer and Louis Andriessen “The Utopian Unison” in *Confronting Stravinsky*, Jann Pasler, ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) p. 207.

²⁷Wright p. 9

²⁸or as Stravinsky might prefer: “steal”

Hocketus) along with contrapuntal devices we associate with music of a different era. Sometimes it is impossible to distinguish when hocketing might be a reference to early western music, and when (as in *De Staat*) it functions in a context which owes more to Indonesian gamelan tradition. *De Staat's* gamelan sections (using pitches from the *pelog* scale) blur freely into similar gestures that seem to be drawn from American minimalism. And, sometimes via the kinetic rhythm of minimalism, the piece suggests American popular music: jazz, boogie-woogie or disco. While limning the stylistic borders of *De Staat*, one must mention Messiaen (*Quatuor pour la fin du temps*) and Stravinsky (*Sacre du printemps*); both composers are present in this piece, at least in spirit. It is the quotation of and subsequent dialogue between disparate musical styles that distinguishes the music of Andriessen. Through references to “other” music, he challenges the boundary between new and old, western and non-western, high and low art. Berio challenges the same concepts in pieces such as the *Folk Songs* and *Sinfonia*.

In *De Materie*, Andriessen also borrows external formal models that are both musical and non-musical.

The durational proportions of part 1 are based on those of the Prelude in E-flat major from the first book of Bach's *Well-tempered Clavier*. Andriessen interpreted the melodic material of the second section of this Prelude – the so-called *ricercare* or *motet* – as a variation of the famous tune *L'homme armé* which is incorporated in countless masses and motets from the Dutch school of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from Dufay to Josquin de Pres.²⁹

The musical presence of this “armed man” is a comment on the militant tone of the text (*Plakkaat van Verlatinge*). The next movement of this piece, *Hadewijch*, derives some of its proportions from distance between the pillars of Rheims cathedral in France. The text of this movement describes a vision which takes place in a church; the church is literally present in the music which contains the text. The text of the third movement, *De Stijl*, refers to the life of Mondrian, and the music takes its proportions from his *Composition in Red, Yellow and Blue*

²⁹Liner notes to *De Materie*

(1927). The final movement lacks such a model. Andriessen compares it to a “pavane-like³⁰ final dance”, in which Marie Curie mourns the death of her husband, Pierre.

Politics

Louis Andriessen is a particularly vocal composer; his writings address political issues alongside of aesthetic ones.

Andriessen is a radical who espouses Anarchist Politics but also writes works which feature extensive stylistic reference to Boogie-Woogie. Clearly this combination represents a curiously individual – even bizarre – viewpoint, but does it need to be taken very seriously?³¹

This is a question that exposes an interesting paradox – one that Andriessen seems perfectly willing leave unresolved. He appropriates music with American associations freely, even though America, especially in the early 1970's, was not something an advocate of socialist politics would want to be associated with. In fact, one of the purposes of founding *De Volharding* was to play at protests against the war in Vietnam. One could argue that neither jazz nor minimalism (at the outset) were champions of imperialism, separating American culture from American politics. *De Staat* is intended, on one hand, to be a warning against totalitarianism. Its jazz reference could signify allegiance to the civil rights movement rather than the Nixon administration.

Andriessen is concerned with the politics of the composer-performer relationship, believing that performers should have more input, more say in the music which they perform. About the ensembles *De Volharding* and *Hoketus* he states:

I thought we have to create a new democratic relationship between the musicians and the composer, before we deal with the public. When the players can judge for themselves what to play, how to play, and for whom to play, then we have made a big step ahead.³²

Here, again, is a contradiction: it is very clear that Louis Andriessen is the composer, and is

³⁰Specifically like the *Pavane* of Hendrik Andriessen

³¹Wright p. 7

³²liner notes to *De Stijl*

credited as such, for even his most collaborative works. His relationship with individual performers allows him to create a personal musical language that does not rely on traditional performance practice, or extremely complicated notation. The lack of a specifically twentieth century performance practice is an issue that composers must face when writing music that does not resemble today's symphonic repertoire. Andriessen speaks of a performance of *De Staat* in Warsaw in 1977, where he "had to sing every note for them because they articulated the piece like Bruckner and Mahler. And it should be articulated like Count Basie and Stan Kenton!"³³ Berio, too, pushed the boundaries of performance practice through personal relationships with performers: in the *Sequenze*, with Cathy Berberian, and in *Sinfonia* with the Swingle Singers and Leonard Bernstein. The musical relationship of Berberian and Berio, while redrawing the possibilities to vocal writing, was such that the listener can hardly separate the music from either personality.

Failure, contradiction and irony

Another theme present throughout Andriessen's work is one that places artistic value on failure. *De Staat* presents itself as a political work, but it also acknowledges the powerlessness of the musical art. Andriessen "...deplores the fact that Plato was wrong. If only it *were* true that musical innovation could change the laws of the State!"³⁴ *De Staat* also stages a more tangible failure. He creates music that intentionally taxes the performers, bringing them to the point of exhaustion. It is clear at the end of *De Staat* that the brass players are about to collapse. Perhaps that explains why this piece's public premier was in recorded form. Unfortunately, such a presentation robs the audience of the chance to *see* the performers, and to understand the physical exertion this music demands. Failure in other pieces is more choreographed. For instance, in *De Snelheid* the middle group tries to keep pace with hocketing groups on either side. Only after it falls behind does it start with its own music. In this group, the bass drum is

³³Liner notes to *De Staat* Louis Andriessen, 1991 (Elektra Nonesuch #79251-2)

³⁴Composer's note to *De Staat*

given the role of sounding at the beginning of each cycle. Several times, though, it does not; once it enters too early, and once too late.

A more subtle failure can exist when a piece of music is expected to communicate clearly and literally, rather than heuristically. The issue of intelligibility has been noted with respect to the text of *Sinfonia*. At the musical level, too, much of this piece is unintelligible³⁵. What listener could hear all the quotations in the third movement? And, does Berio ultimately succeed in overwhelming the music of Mahler? But, the expressivity of piece is not diminished because it cannot be completely digested.

Andriessen's choice of language often obscures the meaning of his texts, even though that meaning is crucial to the construction of the music. In *De Stijl* he allows for the “rap” to be done in English (as it is on the Elektra Nonesuch recording), but would prefer the more “exotic”³⁶ Dutch. Dutch is not exotic for the composer; with this choice of words he is acknowledging that his audience will not be able to understand Dutch. He does not provide an English option for other parts of *De Materie*. *De Staat* uses a unique phoneticization (see attached) of the original Greek. Even with the libretto, it is hard to pick out individual words. The same holds true for *De Tijd*, which sets St. Augustine in the original Latin. It is ironic, given the important relationships between the meaning of the texts and the music, that semantic intelligibility is a low priority. Furthermore, would any listener or analyst notice, without prompting, the relationship between certain chords in a piece and the pillars in a French cathedral? There is an intentional contradiction inherent in composing pieces around particular philosophical issues, only to (purposefully?) obscure the most specific references to those issues. Such behavior indicates that the act (or the game) of comprehension is at least as important as the outcome.

³⁵Ironically, the same criticism is leveled at total serialism, music that is overly logical.

³⁶Score of *De Stijl*

In general, there is a tendency for both Berio and Andriessen to create rule systems that apparently govern the unfolding of the musical material, but to “break” their own rules. Systems are never totally controlling. Examples have already been named – “mistakes” in *De Sneilheid*'s bass drum part, the re-lengthening of the iambic unit in *De Tijd*, the imperfect cannon in *De Staat* – that expose Andriessen undermining his own compositional systems. Osmond-Smith's analysis of *Sinfonia* is rife with systems that are only provisionally followed. These deviations shift attention from the unfolding of a particular system to the interaction of the piece with that system. A piece of music can be organized around specific procedures, but also suggest the existence of music (at least temporarily) outside the purview of those procedures. Boundaries are suggested, but not enforced. Andriessen's treatment of procedure is one way in which his “European minimalism” differs from “American minimalism”. Unlike a composer such as Reich³⁷, Andriessen feels free, even obligated, to tamper with processes once they have been set in motion. In his own words:

What is different from my music is that in America there is not enough angst! I'm much more aggressive, I would say...Although I minimalized the material, I developed it much more than the Americans would.³⁸

Symphony or Anti-Symphony

Another interesting aspect of Andriessen's relationship with the tradition and culture of “classical music” is dramatized by his attitude toward the orchestra. “In the course of the sixties, Andriessen's political and musical radicalization grew in step with each other. This led in 1970 to his decision never again to compose for symphony orchestra.”³⁹ The orchestra in this century

³⁷“Though I may have the pleasure of discovering musical processes and composing the musical material to run through them, once the process is set up and loaded it runs *by itself*.” Reich, Steve “Music as a Gradual Process” *Esthetics Contemporary*, Richard Kostelanetz, ed. (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1978) p. 301 [emphasis added]

³⁸liner notes to *De Stijl*

³⁹<http://www.netcetera.nl/donemus/louise.html>

has become the museum for great musical works, and a visible (to some degree) commissioner of new works. Turning away from the orchestra (at age 31) is a serious career choice. The primary cause for this decision is the lack of contact between composer and symphony orchestra. He states, “I don't want to produce a discrepancy between the music and the production of the music – as often happens when twentieth-century music is performed by the standard symphony orchestra.”⁴⁰ Additionally, the ensembles he chooses to work with have characteristic instrumental forces which differ greatly from the traditional orchestra. In the place of orchestral strings⁴¹, Andriessen opts for percussion, brass, and electric guitars and bass. With the ensembles *De Volharding* and *Hoketus*, he is attempting to assemble “the terrifying 21-st century orchestra.”⁴² Notwithstanding, *De Snelheid* was commissioned by Edo de Waart and the San Francisco Symphony in 1984. Andriessen either capitulated (briefly) to convention, or discovered a way to use the orchestra (augmented with four saxophones, extra brass, percussion, electric harps, bass guitar, two pianos and Hammond organ) for his own ends.

The rejection of the orchestra does not come from a rejection of the symphonic form. “Andriessen draws the distinction in attitude between being anti the symphonic orchestra (which he is) and being anti-symphonic, *per se*.”⁴³ Although labeled an opera, *De Materie* most closely resembles a choral symphony, with two slow movements. It begins with an expository movement (part one); part two (*Hadewijch*) has the lyrical qualities of a traditional slow movement. It would be hard to label *De Stijl* (part three) as anything but a scherzo, given its relentless dance rhythm and overall character. This leaves the fourth part: a slow conclusion.

Ritual element (*De Tijd v. O King*)

⁴⁰Liner notes to *De Staat*

⁴¹“Then... we shall not require for our songs and melodies a variety of strings or sudden changes of modulation?” text of *De Staat*

⁴²Liner notes to *De Stijl*

⁴³Wright p. 12

In his statement defining Andriessen's "concept pieces" (see above), David Wright links these pieces by their focus on teleological effect. Certainly there are perceivable musical processes in each of these works, but does that constitute a teleological effect? Often there are processes but not goals – the audible mechanisms could continue forever. The processes are part of a musical ritual. "While performing and listening to gradual musical process one can participate in a particular liberating and impersonal kind of ritual."⁴⁴ In this sense, *De Tijd* is very similar to Berio's *O King*. In addition to sharing an iambic division of time, both pieces are rituals that distinguish between the eternal and the mortal. *O King* can be viewed as a gradual substantiation of the name of Martin Luther King. It starts with vowels, vocal sounds least encumbered by the body, which are gradually shaped by the surrounding consonants. There is precedent for this reading, in addition to the physical fact that consonants have more to do with the lips and tongue. In the Hebrew alphabet, vowels are associated with the soul and consonants with the body. Also, both pieces create their own unique "resonance space", a figurative eternity in opposition to the transitory melodic events. Rather than a linear development, *De Tijd* has a circular process. The piece begins and ends, but it is only a window to a process that could be eternal. For that reason, the gradual shortening of the iambic unit, which has been going on throughout the piece, reverses itself before the end, potentially beginning a new cycle.

The presence of a decreasing an iambic unit in *O King* suggests further comparison, especially with regard to related rhythmic and pitch cycles. "The oscillation between whole-tone groups that is so fundamental a feature of the pitch set is intimately bound up with the deployment of short-long durational patterns because of the implied accent that the longer note carries."⁴⁵ The imposition of one cycle upon another creates a longer durational unit. The piece is too short to explore all the possible phase relationships between the two units, which would

⁴⁴Reich p. 303

⁴⁵Osmond-Smith p. 27

take twenty cycles:

The twenty-one unit pitch set is combined with a twenty unit rhythmic set, so that with each repetition of the cycle the pitch set's internal relationships are inflected differently by the rhythmic set's displaced position.⁴⁶

Finally, this type of procedure suggests an ambiguity similar to that of Andriessen's stylistic quotations: Is it more apt to view this process as a twentieth century reworking of the isorhythmic motet, or as a close cousin to total serialism?

Relationship to Stravinsky

An essential aspect of my way of composing is the realization that each piece of music deals with other music. I learned this, of course, from Stravinsky, who is in many respects my great model. This attitude generates a constant shifting of interests. I don't feel comfortable with composers – like Schönberg – who always push ahead in one direction. I prefer the jacks-of-all-trades: the Purcells and Stravinskys, who are at home anywhere, borrowing here, stealing there, and who – don't forget – have composed much for theatre.⁴⁷

If one personality forms a link between Berio and Andriessen, it is that of Igor Stravinsky. Both composers openly acknowledge their debt to him. Many of the stylistic issues that are critical to the discussion of postmodernity in the following section are raised by the music of Stravinsky, a composer who is, for many, a quintessential modernist. Glenn Watkins explores questions raised by the relationship of Stravinsky to postmodernism in his recent book, *Pyramids at the Louvre*⁴⁸, which deals with issues of collage, quotation and theatre, but a continuation of that dialogue is beyond the scope of this paper. This paper begins to address aesthetic issues of the last three decades; detailed connections to Stravinsky must, unfortunately, remain to be uncovered by other authors.

Conclusion

Clearly, then, the time has come to theorize the term [post-modernism], if not define it,

⁴⁶Osmond-Smith p. 26

⁴⁷Louis Andriessen as quoted at: <http://www.netcetera.nl/donemus/louise.html>

⁴⁸Watkins, Glenn *Pyramids at the Louvre* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1994)

before it fades from awkward neologism to derelict cliché without ever attaining to the dignity of a cultural concept.⁴⁹

[U]nlike postmodernity (where there is a general agreement that *something* happened), postmodernism has provoked precious little agreement on anything from the reasons for its existence to its definition, let alone on the evaluation of its effects. If one of the messages of the postmodern is that cultural values are always local and particular, and not universal and eternal, then we will also have to think about whether – for example – the French figuration of the postmodern should necessarily be the same as the Canadian, or whether the American need resemble the African-American model.⁵⁰

By its nature, the term “postmodern” resists definition. In fact, by its incorporation of paradox, contradiction, and contingency into its epistemological means, the position of postmodernity is antithetical to the kind of definition that would make it a pliable analytical tool. This being the case, I have been reluctant engage postmodern theory in my critique of the work of Louis Andriessen. However, the aspects of irony, quotation, multiplicity of styles, self-reference, high and low art which are ubiquitous in this music make it impossible to ignore such theory. In *The Savage Mind*⁵¹, Lévi-Strauss presents a method termed *bricolage*.

The *bricoleur*, says Lévi-Strauss, is someone who uses “the tools at hand,” that is, the instruments he finds at his disposition around him, those which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous.⁵²

I use the theory of postmodernity in the spirit of *bricolage*, while maintaining doubts about its

⁴⁹Ihab Hassan, at quoted in Hutcheon, Linda “Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism,” *Textual Practice* 1:1 (New York: Methuen, 1987) p. 10-31

⁵⁰Natoli, Joseph and Linda Hutcheon *A Postmodern Reader* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), xi

⁵¹*La pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962) [Eng. trans. *The Savage Mind* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1966)

⁵²Derrida, Jacques “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *The Languages and Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy* eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato (Johns Hopkins Press, 1970) p. 255 (N.B. In the body of this essay, Derrida comments extensively on the work of Lévi-Strauss and its (post)structuralist implications.)

ultimate truth-value. While most of its definitions are negative (e.g. postmodernity is *not* rationalist), the dialogue surrounding postmodernity has as the positive effect of validating conditions of contradiction and contingency, and challenging the prioritization of any one aesthetic. It is a philosophy which allows the possibility of artistic play⁵³, without the relentless demand to be 'avant-garde.' "Because it is contradictory and works within the very system it attempts to subvert, postmodernism can probably not be considered a new paradigm... It may mark, however, the site of the struggling emergence of something new."⁵⁴

It is obvious that Andriessen is producing music that is, in some ways, in opposition to the aesthetic concerns of avant-garde music in the first part of the century, especially in its relationship to music of the past. In *Sinfonia* and other works, Berio suggested a manifestation of musical rhetoric that is similarly in direct opposition to traditional modernism. In that sense, Berio was a participant in the initiation of an *episteme*⁵⁵ that later composers, including Andriessen, have explored. In *Postmodernist Fiction*, Brian McHale states that "postmodern fiction differs from modernist fiction just as a poetics dominated by ontological issues differs from one dominated by epistemological ones."⁵⁶ In other words, the question of what there is to be represented (or known) has supplanted that of how do we represent (or know). Modern music proceeds with the assumption that there is a human rationality that can be represented, and history can be viewed as a series of steps toward eventual perfect representation. I once attended a pre-concert interview where a composer was asked, "What do you think music one hundred years from now will sound like?" The reply was, "If I knew that, I would be writing it."

⁵³Often a rough translation of the French: *jeu*

⁵⁴Hutcheon p. 12

⁵⁵*episteme* is defined as a "general system of thought whose network, in its positivity, renders an interplay of simultaneous and apparently contradictory opinions possible." in: Foucault, Michel *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970 [1966] p.75)

⁵⁶McHale, Brian *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987) ii

Presumably, that composer knew what music from one hundred years in the past sounds like, but he was not interested in writing that. His statement indicates the prioritization of future forms of representation; he would prefer to be one hundred years out of date (so long he is in the future) than to write music of the present. This nostalgia for the future represents one of the core ideas of modernity.

Without the faith in the “perfectibility” of artistic representation, the difference between past and future styles becomes moot. All possible styles are potentially valid and may be applied to the artistic task at hand. This complicates the task of disentangling postmodernity from modernity; modern forms of expression are a subset of the postmodern. The collage structure of *Sinfonia* is perfectly sensible when viewed in this light. It is reasonable that it should sound like Mahler, or Berg, or even Berio. It is both a musical performance, and a comment on musical performance. The piece does not present itself as a “solution” to how contemporary art music should be written, nor is it successful when viewed as such. It is a clamor of many artistic voices – Mahler, the Swingle Singers, Berio, Leonard Bernstein, Lévi-Strauss, etc. – which do not fuse into a unified statement. The interest lies in the carefully preserved play of ambiguity, and in the contradictions, not in finding a solution. Osmond-Smith's comment: “The mythical universe that Lévi-Strauss sets out to explore gravitates towards no central point,”⁵⁷ can be extended to the musical universe of *Sinfonia*. The attempt to represent a structure without a center reveals the paradoxical nature of a centered totality as postulated by Jacques Derrida.⁵⁸ The lack of a central point forces a reevaluation of the relationship between the elements in a musical structure. Berio presents musical play with many possible interpretations, all of which are equally valid or

⁵⁷Osmond-Smith p. 9

⁵⁸“[C]enter is the point at which substitution of contents, elements, or terms is no longer possible...Thus it has always been that the center, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which governs the structure, while escaping structurality... This is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and yet *outside* it...the totality *has its center elsewhere.*” Derrida, p. 248

invalid.

David Osmond-Smith, while recognizing the status of *Sinfonia* as a decentralized game – one with no central point to gravitate towards – is unwilling abandon the effort to find a part of the score that is beyond that game:

The listener, troubled by the rich confusion of what he has heard, may well seek refuge in the score; but there he will discover a maze of allusions to things beyond the score. The more avidly he seeks to pin these down, the more clear will it become that there is no logical end to his activities. But this moment of scholastic exasperation (richly familiar to students of Joyce, or Pound, or Borges) serves to underline the necessity of coming to grips with that initial confusion in another, and complementary way – that of learning to be receptive of the peculiarly vivid aesthetic of the half-understood. Seen thus, the ellipses and allusions of the 'modernist' tradition, and the verbal and musical superpositions of Berio's own work offer not gratuitous mystification, but a survival kit against the facile nihilism that so easily informs attempts to analyze a disjointed, relativistic environment in which 'the unexpected is always upon us'.⁵⁹

The “aesthetic of the half-understood” is a radical substitute for the rational logic that his modernist listener sets out to uncover. The implications of this substitution must be extended to the entire project of analysis. Osmond-Smith's analysis of *Sinfonia* contains the impulse toward recognizing the potential of a musical postmodernity, but does not follow through with it.

Andriessen's music is more often brutally obvious than it is half-understood.

Andriessen's relationship to certain aspects of Berio's work is that of a magnifying glass; issues that might subtly pass unnoticed in the work of Berio grow to surreal size in the work of Andriessen. But both composers share an inclination toward theatricality, which had a musical rebirth in the 1960's

In the fifties the efforts of composers had been concentrated in three principal directions: the extension of serialism, the development of the electronic medium and the introduction of chance. The emphasis had been on exploring the materials of music, on evolving a musical 'language', on compositional system and philosophy. Given such objective interests, it was natural that composers should have been little inclined to involve themselves with the bastard genres of opera and ballet... where purely musical problems

⁵⁹Osmond-Smith p. 91

must be subsumed. ...The next decade, however, saw a reversal of this situation.⁶⁰

Andriessen has taken theatricality in an extreme and personal direction, using his music to “enter directly into public debate on matters of philosophy and politics, ...[which] could be discussed most readily and persuasively in the theatre.”⁶¹ And so, we find free reference to historical techniques, unexpected associations of stylistic references, and relentless compositional procedures at home in the same pieces of music. All chapters of music history (not to mention art, philosophy and literature) are equally accessible to him, and he is perfectly willing to fit any musical tool to the artistic job at hand. His tools are chosen based on their aesthetic utility, their aptness for the job at hand, not on their ability to “push the envelope” of musical language. Andriessen is also a *bricoleur*, taking up whatever musical means are at hand to express philosophical or political, but ultimately musical concerns.

⁶⁰Griffiths, Paul *A concise history of avant-garde music from Debussy to Boulez* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978) p. 182

⁶¹Griffiths p. 182

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