

Artistic Project Report

Perspectives on musical creation: thoughts on the relationship between
improvisation and written composition

A reflection on the creative process of five original compositions

Samuel Gapp

Master's Degree in Music

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Supervisors: Ph. Dr. Luís Tinoco, Nicholas McNair

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Abstract in Portuguese

Este projeto centra-se na área intermédia entre a improvisação e a composição escrita e explora a sua relação em abordagens específicas na criação musical.

O propósito do estudo é compreender como os processos criativos de cinco composições originais se relacionam tanto com a improvisação como com a composição escrita, e como a construção das obras foi abordada neste contexto. As composições incluem quatro peças exclusivamente musicais e uma performance interativa, e foram divididas em três categorias: obras improvisadas, obras parcialmente improvisadas/parcialmente escritas e obras escritas.

Para a investigação exploratória, foi realizada uma ampla pesquisa sobre o processo criativo na música a fim de depois refletir analiticamente sobre a elaboração das respetivas peças. Através das conclusões finais do estudo, o objetivo final do projeto foi alargar e aprofundar a minha perspetiva sobre a criação musical e assim crescer como compositor e músico improvisador.

Os resultados do estudo mostraram que as obras improvisadas perseguiram um objetivo estético diferente das composições escritas, embora as abordagens específicas à criação musical das cinco peças estivessem interligadas e entrelaçadas. Além disso, tornou-se claro que o meu trabalho define-se mais pela minha prática em si do que pela forma que assume durante o processo. Neste sentido, as respetivas peças podem ser consideradas como um só corpo de trabalho, uma vez que todas elas se baseiam nas características e valores da improvisação.

Palavras-chave: Processo criativo; Improvisação; Composição escrita; Abordagens à criação musical

Abstract in English

This project focuses on the intermediate area between improvisation and written composition and explores their relationship in specific approaches to musical creation.

The aim of the study is to understand how the creative process of five original compositions relate to both improvisation and written composition, and how the construction of the works was approached in this context. The compositions include four purely musical pieces and an interactive performance and were divided into three categories: improvised works, partly improvised/partly through-composed works and through-composed works.

For the exploratory research, a broad investigation into the creative process in music was carried out in order later to reflect analytically on the elaboration of the respective pieces. The ultimate objective of the project, through the final conclusions of the study, was to broaden and deepen my perspective on musical creation and thereby grow as a composer and improvising musician.

The results of the study showed that the improvised works pursued a different aesthetic goal than the written compositions, although the specific approaches to musical creation of all five works were interconnected and interwoven. Furthermore, it became clear that my work is rather defined by my way of doing than by the form it takes. In this sense, the respective pieces can be regarded as a single body of work, as they are all based on the characteristics and values of improvisation.

Keywords: Creative process; Improvisation; Written composition; Approaches to musical creation

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ESML: Escola Superior de Música de Lisboa

RM: Rehearsal mark

FBAUL: Faculdade de Belas-Artes da Universidade de Lisboa

1. Introduction

This final project of my Master's Degree in Composition at ESML emerged as a consequence of my activity as a composer and improvising musician, influenced by jazz and improvisation and therefore constantly confronted with the relationship between improvisation and written composition. The project arose as a continuation of the study I realised in the first year of the course, entitled "Thoughts on orchestral composition with improvising soloists in Western Classical Music". Here, the intermediate area between improvisation and written composition in the Western music tradition was investigated in order to define approaches to through-composed orchestral music with improvising soloists. As an expansion of the respective topic, the final project is based on an analytical reflection on the creative process of five original compositions that were written and performed during the course of the Master's Degree in Composition. All of the works are connected to the intermediate area between improvisation and through-composed music. In order to contextualise and deepen the topic, a broad research study on the perspectives of musical creation was carried out.

All performances of the five works were recorded and some of them published. The documentation of the respective works will be shown in a public presentation in video format at ESML.

1.1. General description and main objectives of the project

The main aim of the project is to reflect analytically on the relationship between improvisation and written composition and to understand how my personal creative process is influenced and shaped by both. Thus, the central part of the report focuses on the structured, formal and conceptual analysis of five original compositions. Here, each of the works will be examined for its creative process, the specific aspects it addresses in relation to musical creation and its structure. The compositions were divided into three categories:

- 1) improvised works
- 2) partly improvised, partly through-composed works

3) through-composed works

The formations of the five works consist of a piano duo, a large ensemble with a soloist, an orchestra, a chamber ensemble, and finally the format of an interactive performance.

The first work, a fully improvised piano duo, deals with my personal approach to general principles and values of improvisation as well as their comparison to written composition. This examination will be crucial for the analysis of the remaining pieces, as the respective topics will reappear in different contexts.

The second work focuses on the construction of through-composed music for large ensemble with an improvising soloist. Here, the relationship between the large ensemble, the soloist and the conductor will be explored. In addition, the improvising soloist and the ensemble will be compared in regard to their approaches to musical creation and execution, including my personal experience as a soloist performing the piece.

Thirdly, my creative process during the construction of the through-composed orchestral composition will be examined. Subjects to be explored are the conceptual origin of the musical material and its progressive development throughout the piece.

The fourth piece is a through-composed work for chamber ensemble with two spoken voices and is based on a short story by Portuguese writer José Saramago. Here, the deconstruction of the written text and its relationship to my creative process will be analysed.

Finally, the interactive performance is linked to all three of the above categories and further addresses issues such as the incorporation of visual material into a composition as well as the relationship and interaction between composer, performer and audience. Moreover, my creative process regarding the theoretical and conceptual framework of the composition will be examined.

Through the close examination of the works and the broad research on musical creation that accompanied their elaboration, conclusions will be drawn with regard to the main topic of the project and the three categories mentioned above. In this sense, the aim is to gain a greater awareness of my personal process of musical creation in order to deepen and broaden my competence as a composer and improviser.

2. Literature review

The bibliographic sources that were consulted during the research process were divided into four categories, according to their thematic context:

- 1) General perspectives on musical creation
- 2) The comparison of improvisation and composition
- 3) The open work as a conceptual basis for musical composition
- 4) The relationship between composer, performer and audience

2.1. General perspectives on musical creation

American composer William Duckworth (1995) published a collection of interviews with relevant 20th century modernist composers, in which he addresses their creative process during the compositional practice. John Zorn, for example, states that musical creation depends on a constant process of reflection on musical material, and does not emerge as sudden, isolated ideas (Duckworth, 1995). This standpoint is anticipated by the German musicologist Arnold Hauser (1973), who further explains that in the moment of musical creation, the author's initial idea automatically turns into a blurred version of its original form and loses some of its originality and spontaneity. On the other hand, according to the German composer and modernist Mauricio Kagel (1991), the consolidation process of a musical idea is not an obstacle, but holds the potential for unfolding in several different forms.

In their documented correspondence, Arnold Schönberg and Wassily Kandinsky repeatedly reflect on the enigmatic aspect of the moment of creation (Hahl-Koch, 1984). They allegorise the process of musical creation as the laborious decoding of puzzles, which "serves to create new puzzles" (Hahl-Koch, 1984, p. 54). Theodor Adorno also shares this view when he states that a "picture puzzle recapitulates playfully what artworks carry out in earnest" (Adorno, 1997, p. 121). In this way, musical creation is necessarily based on a complex process in the interior of the artist (Hahl-Koch, 1984). In addition, Kandinsky (1963) describes the creative process as a state in which an external voice leads the artist, while the actual goal of the process lies

concealed in his subconscious. American composer Gerard Pape (2002) explains that the creative process is not something an artist can control and that he must “wait for the next aperiodic opening of the unconscious if [he wishes] to remain inventive and not merely productive” (p. 1).

According to Italian writer Umberto Eco, the final work “reveals the entire personality of the artist, not just in its subject or its theme, but first and foremost in the unique and very personal way in which it has been formed” (Eco, 1989, p. 160). Consequently, all the authors mentioned so far approach the phenomenon of musical creation as a deeply personal matter.

By contrast, another opinion is that creative invention is a moment where all individual intentions are abolished, and that this moment is the only and unique occasion where the creator can “temporarily leave behind the petty qualities of the ego, the narcissistic desire to be hailed as a 'great composer' “ (Pape, 2002, p. 1). This belief is also confirmed by the Czech writer Milan Kundera (1993), who describes the music of composers like Iannis Xenakis and Edgar Varèse as devoid of human subjectivity and praises their work as a timeless, nonhuman invention. David Borgo outlines the direct opposition of two standpoints in his work on contemporary improvised music: the “total mental involvement” on the one side and the “complete annihilation of all critical and rational faculties”, the “transcendental feeling of ego loss” on the other (Borgo, 2002, p. 175).

2.2. Improvisation and composition

An article of Martin Clayton (2016), professor of ethnomusicology, reflects on the confrontation of improvisation and composition. Clayton states that “composition and improvisation are aspects of the same phenomenon rather than opposed concepts” (Chapter 1.2), whereas American improviser Derek Bailey questions this similarity in his book on improvisation: “It's common to find improvisation described as a type of instant composition, but are they not completely different types of activity producing completely different results?” (Bailey, 1992, p. 37).

German-Czech musicologist Bruno Nettl (1974) describes improvisation as inevitably based on existing references which he calls “models”. This statement is confirmed by Martin Clayton (2016), who points out the impossibility of isolated creation without any

connection to foregoing material. Likewise, Mauricio Kagel (1991) explains that the creation of something completely new would automatically be the negation of the existent, referring not only to improvisation but to any kind of artistic creation.

According to Italian composer Luciano Berio, improvisation is focussed too closely on instrumental praxis rather than on the “discovery of a coherent discourse that unfolds and develops simultaneously on different levels” (Berio, 1985, as cited in Borgo, 2002). On the other hand, the Czech writer Milan Kundera (1993) outlines the prodigious architectural potential of improvisation, through which a perfectly calculated and structured form can be created.

Many improvising musicians describe a specific state of mind during their improvisational practice and explain their spiritual approach to musical creation. Among them are the Japanese pianist Masabumi Kikuchi (SeaMuSHaLey, 2010) and Cecil Taylor, who states that “the purpose of the music is to achieve a levitation or a trance which is the existence beyond the normal existence” (GBH Archives, 2019, 0:28). French composers Jean-Yves Bosseur and Dominique Bosseur (1990), although less connected to improvisational practice, agree when they explain that improvisation means a condition of greatest openness and availability, a waiting state for the happenings to come.

Composition on the other hand can be described as a constant process of investigation which is “characterized by laborious processes and the careful, thoughtful solution of complex problems” (Nettl, 1983, p. 29). At the same time, this investigative approach carries the risk of becoming too theoretical, as the British musicologist Nicholas Cook explains (Marvin & Hermann, 1995). In this context, the German musicologist Carl Dahlhaus (1978) states that composition as a purely rational process often takes place in isolation from the performer.

John Zorn (Bailey, 1992), David Borgo (2002) and British writer Tim Rutherford-Johnson (2017) describe specific characteristics of both improvisation and composition. The comparison of both methods being pointless (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017), one should rather focus on their specificities in order to combine them successfully (Bailey, 1992).

Much earlier, Hauser (1975) describes the conception of a music that is created through two opposing but equally valid poles: routine with secure methods of creation

on the one side and improvisation with the use of unconditioned material on the other side. In fact, any artistic creation depends on these poles in order to maintain a general balance (Hauser, 1975).

For the research process, many musical works by composers and improvisers have been consulted that constantly move in an intermediate area, that are neither fully associated with improvisation nor with composition. American composer Alvin Curran, for example, speaks of his work as a “music which is made with the sense of improvisation [...]” (Bergen Kunsthall, 2022, 21:40).

2.3. The Open Work

This category was mainly influenced by Umberto Eco's “The Open Work” (1989). Here, Eco explains the fundamental theoretical and philosophical basis for the construction of an artistic work that is characterised by a constant transformation, continuously reforming itself (Eco, 1989). The emphasis lies on a creation that, while possessing a specific identity and being organically completed, does not superimpose a closed conception or a suggested reading to the addressee (Eco, 1989). Describing his concept of the “forming form”, the author distinguishes between natural intentionality and human intentionality, claiming that both cohabit in a continuous synergy and that there is no need to oppose one against the other (Eco, 1989). The fundamental condition of the artist to succeed in this approach to creation is the “belief in the profound congeniality between human work and the natural laws of forms” (Eco, 1989, p. 162).

According to Bosseur & Bosseur (1990), any (musical) idea inevitably implies an organic continuation that has to be grasped by the author with the greatest openness and availability. In the introduction to Umberto Eco's book, university professor David Robey explains that the creation of strict rules and closed forms would therefore be superimposed on natural laws, which is a method that is no longer applied and inappropriate to our times (Robey, 1989).

At the same time, Hauser (1975) outlines the artificial character of every work of art, explaining that there is nothing natural, necessary or organically grown about an artistic idea. American composer John Cage agrees with this standpoint and describes the intrusive character of an artwork on its natural environment (Redfern, 2015).

In a musical context, the open form refers to a composition that is characterised by constant transformation and diversification. Japanese composer Toru Takemitsu (1995) exemplifies this in his work “Garden Rain”. While moving through an imaginary garden where musical material is associated with specific objects in the garden, the piece undergoes “variations in shape according to the position of the stroller” (Takemitsu, 1995, p. 133). At the same time, Takemitsu draws attention to the overall setting of the garden which is originating and forming the musical ideas (Takemitsu, 1995). However, the through-composed piece does not effectively change its form with each execution, by contrast with a composition by American composer Earle Brown. Based on a sculptural work by artist Alexander Calder, Brown developed a composition called “Calder Piece” in 1967, for four percussionists playing around and on the sculpture (Brown, 2023). During his creative process, he “was stimulated by ‘the integral but unpredictable “floating” variations of [the] Calder mobile“ (Griffiths, 2010, p. 32).

2.4. The relationship between composer, performer and audience

Rutherford-Johnson (2017) explains the general process of a musical idea in written music, beginning with its encoding (notation) by the composer, its decoding by the performer and the reception of this process by the listener. In this conventional triadic relationship, we encounter three main problems regarding the authenticity of the original musical idea (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017).

The first obstacle appears in the process of documenting the musical impulse (Hauser, 1975). The original idea inevitably loses part of its originality, immediacy and vitality through its documentation, which is basically a form of codified information (Hauser, 1975). As Derek Bailey explains, from the moment of documentation “a musical work [is] no longer strictly musical; it [exists] outside itself, so to speak, in the form of an object to which a name was given: the score” (Bailey, 1992, p. 59). Or, in the words of Dahlhaus, musical notation seems to be an alienating of music from its true nature, which is merely execution (Dahlhaus, 1978). British improviser Evan Parker rejects the use of scores for his own music and explains musical notation as the idealisation of a perfect execution that is impossible to achieve (Bailey, 1992). Furthermore, Bosseur & Bosseur (1990) state that there is no type of musical notation that could in any way provide the complete determination and control of an acoustic phenomenon. Kundera

(1993) also describes the dependence of an idea on its documentation and asks whether the original idea continues to exist by itself.

The second difficulty we encounter is in the act of performance, as the execution of the musical score (the encoded information) depends absolutely on the musician's interpretation, experience, capacity and approach in decoding, which are likely to diverge from the original musical idea of the composer (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017). According to Kagel (1991), composer and performer eventually exchange roles in the process of execution: the composer becomes interpreter of his source material, while the interpreter becomes the composer of a material proposed to him (Kagel, 1991). In the context of Western music culture, most classical musicians are unable to express themselves freely in musical language without relying on a written score (McNair, 2022). Thus, the performer may only provide a reproduction of the codified information, which is no longer connected to the initial musical idea.

Thirdly, the reception of the executed material by the audience is a completely subjective process, as it is influenced by many unpredictable factors such as space, environment, acoustics or emotional state (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017).

Because of the above stated obstacles in the triadic relationship between composer, performer and audience, it is necessary to “[challenge] the conventional image of the performer as an interpreting/reproducing machine for the composer's will”, and to “[interrogate] the relationship between performer and notated score, increasingly emphasizing the action of performers” (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017, p. 103). In order to find a way to involve all three parties equally in the process of musical creation, Allan Kaprow (1956) included the audience in the unfolding of the narrative of his work. In this way, the audience automatically has to be considered in the conception and creation of a work (Kaprow, 1956).

Mauricio Kagel (1991) employs a musical and compositional thinking in order to apply it on a broader scale where the equal involvement of all three parties might be possible. Alvin Curran speaks about creating “sounds in certain environments, in certain spaces, that naturally enhance an object, or speak about an object” (Bergen Kunsthall, 2022, 01:04:53), thus focusing on a compositional approach to extra-musical subjects. Parameters such as speech, light or movement can be compared with notes, tone colours or musical articulation (Kagel, 1991). The only, but fundamental, condition is the clarity of the action created, so that the audience clearly understands what is

happening and how, thereby ensuring their active participation in the process (Kagel, 1991).

Following the idea of comprehensibility and contributing to the clear structure of a composition, Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1922) speaks about the importance of a coherent relationship between every moment of a musical work and the composition as a whole. According to Samuel Adler (2016), the foreground material of a composition in particular contributes to the effectiveness and transparency of the work. The organisation of different (musical) layers should remain clear, even if they reach a certain complexity and degree of abstraction (Marvin & Hermann, 1995).

3. Research framework

The research process was mainly guided by the following question: How does the creative process of my compositions relate to both improvisation and written composition? In consequence, several different, interwoven and overlapping questions arose:

- What are the specific characteristics of my creative process in the five original compositions?
- How does my creative process differ in improvisation and written composition?
- Can the improvisational approach to musical creation be transferred to a through-composed context?
- What is my approach to the construction of both improvised and through-composed music?
- How does the written documentation of musical ideas and the recording of their performances relate to the creative process?

Regarding the last of the compositions, the interactive performance, more specific questions were elaborated:

- How can a musical work be constructed in an open form that is different with each realisation?

- How did I conceptually approach the construction of this interdisciplinary work?
- What are the conventional roles of the triadic structure of composer, performer and audience and how can they be dissolved?
- How can composer, performer and audience equally participate in the musical creation process?

The research questions were addressed by the structured, formal and conceptual analysis of the five original musical compositions and their respective creative process. In addition, this analysis was based on the collection of qualitative data from bibliographic, discographic and electronic sources, as well as direct contact with relevant professionals working actively in the three categories mentioned. The respective data was analysed in an objective and systematic way in order to elaborate possible answers and conclusions during the implementation of the project. In this way, my awareness of the relationship between improvisation and composition in relation to my personal creative process was deepened, thus expanding my competence as a composer and improvising musician.

4. Methodology

The methodology of the project was based on the formal and systematic analysis of three main aspects concerning the creative process of the compositions:

- 1) the specific approaches to musical creation in the five works
- 2) the personal documentation created during the elaboration of the works
- 3) the structure and musical material of the works

At the same time, the collection of qualitative data and its formal, systematic and objective analysis was crucial for the project. It mainly comprised existing bibliographical references by relevant improvisers, composers, musicologists and artists from other fields. All the references addressed musical creation and included reflections, transcribed interviews, theme-specific explanations, documented studies and scientific papers. In addition, electronic sources were consulted such as online articles, theme-specific websites and public videos of lectures and interviews. Another

influence on the research process was the structured analysis of certain discographical references with regard to the relationship between improvisation and composition.

The qualitative data collected was carefully examined and constantly related to the research questions described, in order to define common patterns, such as repeated ideas and perspectives on the topic of musical creation. For example, the opinion that musical creation is a personalised issue that depends strongly on the character and experience of the author stands against the belief that musical creation is an impersonal process that takes place in a specific spiritual state. Another repeating pattern is the perspective on improvisation and composition as aspects of the same phenomenon against the viewpoint that they are different activities with different goals.

Furthermore, data was collected through personal communication with several active improvisers and composers on an international level: João Paulo Esteves da Silva, Carlos Azevedo, Nicholas McNair, Diogo Alvim, Ingrid Laubrock, Niels Klein, Mark-Anthony Turnage and Peter Evans. Specific questions that arose in natural conversations led to informal discussions about broader issues concerning musical creation. This data influenced the elaboration of the respective composition I was working on at the time and was therefore included in the report. However, as the conversations were not approached as research participant interviews, they were not a crucial part of the research process.

It has to be considered that the analysis of personal experiences and approaches concerning musical creation is unavoidably complex. Consequently, the methodology of the research process was limited by its non-scientific nature and the lack of concrete, unambiguous data.

5. The five original musical works and their creative process

This chapter provides an analytical reflection on the five original compositions with regard to the research questions. Through the close examination of the specificities of each work and their creative process, the information revealed will finally lead to concrete results.

5.1. “Mirages” – Improvised Piano Duo

In the free improvised music of this piano duo with Nicholas McNair, there were “no conscious decisions made prior to the moment the performance begins, no musical material nor structure – nothing” (McNair, 2022).

I met Nicholas during my jazz piano studies at ESML, where he has been teaching for many years. We eventually noticed our mutual interest in improvisation which led to an informal improvised session on two pianos. Several musical encounters followed until we decided to document our process in four recording sessions at ESML in 2021. A selection of the four hours of music we recorded was released as an album in January 2022 on *Habitable Records*, entitled “Mirages”.

Two of the four recording sessions lasted about one hour and took place without interruptions, without any prior or intermediate agreements about what was going to happen musically. The other two sessions were very similar in character, with the exception of occasional suggestions for the next improvisation to possibly allow for greater musical variety. Through specifications such as “tonal vs. atonal”, “repetitive vs. irregular” or “with prepared piano”, the improvisations were steered in a more specific direction. We agreed to change the pianos occasionally during the sessions in order to be equally exposed to the specificities of the instruments and the acoustics in different positions in the room.

Subsequent to the release of “Mirages”, we played a concert for the Portuguese radio station *RTP Antena 2*, on 5 May 2022 at the *Instituto Superior de Economia e Gestão* in Lisbon, which originated the excerpt shown at the public presentation of this final project. The following paragraph was written by Nicholas McNair about the recording session in July 2021 and applies equally to the public concert in May 2022:

The most striking thing about a recital of this nature, in which no-one knows what will happen, is the openness throughout to *possibility*. We never knew who would be the first of us to begin a piece [...]. [This] could potentially affect the entire piece, if the material of the opening was of such a nature as to impose itself on the whole, which might happen as the result of our different backgrounds – in the sense that an opening suggestive of one or other extreme of the classical/jazz spectrum could have the effect of leaving the other pianist less intuitively ready to contribute

immediately. On the other hand the overall climate of possibility allowed for a fundamental relationship of freedom and ease that is not often the case in classical music, and music has everything to do with relationship. It is, in the last analysis, a question of letting go one's individuality, and allowing the music to speak through us as a collective capable of involving everyone present. (McNair, 2022)

5.1.1. The creative process: characteristics and values of improvisation

The "overall climate of possibility" McNair describes here is one of the fundamental necessities for a musician to approach free improvised music. As Bosseur & Bosseur (1990) explain, the performer needs to open up as much as possible to a state of complete availability and expectation of the unknown. These qualities are mainly connected to the focus on the present moment and require a continuous practice and sharpening of the mind, an exercise that can have musical but also extra-musical forms.¹ Improvisation thus means to distance oneself, for a moment, from the personalised reference and to tend to grasp sound in its immediacy (Bosseur & Bosseur, 1990).

Many improvisers mention a specific state of mind during their practice, where the manipulation of former internalised material happens in a natural flow.² One could say that there is no conscious decision-making in the actual process of musical creation through improvisation. An essential prerequisite, however, is the existence of a database of musical material, a library, so to speak, which forms the basis for the manipulation of musical objects.³ The more extensive this library and the control over it, the easier it is to get into a state of mind where manipulating musical objects happens intuitively.⁴

By contrast, Milan Kundera (1993) describes an autobiographical experience at a young age, in which the development of references was at a very initial stage. He refers to the ecstatic state of the improviser:

What I was experiencing during those improvisations was an *ecstasy*. What is *ecstasy*? The boy banging on the keyboard feels an enthusiasm (or a sorrow, or a

1 Many improvisers talk about extra-musical exercises that help to focus on the present.

2 N. McNair, personal communication, March 23, 2022.

3 The term "musical object" describes any kind of musical gesture that may be considered as an essential and individual element of the musical work.

4 P. Evans, personal communication, March 21, 2022.

delight), and the emotion rises to such a pitch of intensity that it becomes unbearable: the boy flees into a state of blindness and deafness where everything is forgotten, even oneself. Through ecstasy, emotion reaches its climax, and thereby at the same time its negation (its oblivion). (Kundera, 1993, p. 82 f.)

What Kundera describes here is an act that is based on the absence of intentionality, on the complete devotedness to the moment, in a certain way connected to the abolition of the ego. The less recognisable the improviser's intention and the less he solicits approval, the greater and more successful his improvisation and its impact (Hauser, 1973). Consequently, the purity of a musical act is not primarily connected to the technical accuracy, nor to the personal library of musical references, but more on the fact if the improviser manages to enter the "state of ecstasy" described above.

This ability can be equally (and sometimes more easily) achieved by non-musicians of any age. Of course, the improviser's continuous practice and work with music can lead to extraordinary results and in the case of the piano duo with Nicholas McNair, the actual musical material is surely characterised by our different musical backgrounds and the fact that both of us studied music for many years. When thinking about an excellent and perfectly skilled musician, one can say that "a prodigious architectural potential exists within [...] improvisation, the potential for a complex, rich structure that would also be as perfectly calculated, calibrated, and premeditated as even the most exuberant architectural fantasy of a cathedral was necessarily premeditated" (Kundera, 1993, p. 19). This description by Kundera is an excellent musical quality to reach, however it has been shown that it is fundamentally not the point of improvisational practice.

It seems that people that are strongly devoted to improvisation pursue a very different aesthetic, spiritual goal than people focusing on through-composed music, even though both methods of musical creation can be described as composition.⁵ Italian composer Luciano Berio "dismissed [improvisation] as 'a haven of dilettantes' who 'normally act on the level of instrumental praxis rather than musical thought... [B]y musical thought [he means] above all the discovery of a coherent discourse that unfolds and develops simultaneously on different levels'" (Berio, 1985, as cited in Borgo, 2002, p. 169). But in this statement, Berio approaches the topic too one-sidedly and suppresses the essential aim of the improviser, that is "the ability to incorporate and negotiate disparate perspectives and worldviews" (Borgo, 2002, p. 167) as well as to achieve a

5 P. Evans, personal communication, March 21, 2022.

state and unique occasion where he can “temporarily leave behind the petty qualities of the ego, the narcissistic desire to be hailed as a 'great [musician]“ (Pape, 2002, p. 1). Thus, Berio's strictly analytical perspective on improvisation in this statement potentially misses its most remarkable characteristics (Borgo, 2002).

Regarding the unintentional approach to musical creation, the question of ownership arises.⁶ “Music is something that an individual cannot possess, yet it begins strictly through an individual and later shows its form in relation to other individuals” (Takemitsu, 1992, p. 66). If the improviser performs selflessly and builds the music on pre-existing material, can he claim to own the music?

Usually improvisers do not have a desire to be classified as the sole authors of the music they play (Bailey, 1992). This, once more, is related to the focus on the spiritual state during their practice. When looking at works of experienced and significant improvisers, one observes a strong characteristic that unifies them all, independently of their musical and cultural background: the spiritual and human values that their music irradiates. When improvisers speak of “my music”, it is “not a claim of ownership but a complete personal identification with the music they play. They, 'the musicians', are the embodiment of the music” (Bailey, 1992, p. 11).

Thus, a clear distinction has to be made between the personal and impersonal aspect of improvisation. Seemingly opposites, both sides coexist in every improvising musician, as in the piano duo with Nicholas McNair:

- The unintentional, selfless state of mind during the improvisational practice, without claiming ownership of the music
- The unconditioned devotion and embodiment of the music as an extremely personal matter

Another important point to consider with respect to the state of mind of the improviser is the question of live performance. The audience of a live performance, besides altering the acoustic conditions of the space, influences directly the emotional and spiritual state of the improviser. The stage performance of the improviser involves “self-augmentation and self-multiplication; [its] meaning extends to questions of embodiment and identity” (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017, p. 193). As a consequence, the vitality, immediacy and emotional energy that arises in a live performance is a crucial

6 N. McNair, personal communication, March 23, 2022.

characteristic of improvised music. The improviser's live performance “involves an individual freedom and the desire to express what one feels at any given moment during the performance” (Takemitsu, 1992, p. 66).

In this sense, the recorded documentation of free improvisation decontextualises the original circumstances in which the music was created. English pianist Lionel Salter explains:

I'm not at all sure that recording [of free improvisation] is useful for anything more than reference. You have to react to the conditions of performance – the actual circumstances. You play differently in a different hall. The acoustics make a difference. The instrument makes a tremendous difference. You may be feeling more – I don't know – you may be feeling more worked up on this occasion – you feel something brighter is needed. You go into the music in a kind of – unbuttoned way, and if you play something which doesn't fit absolutely perfectly, well, it doesn't matter too much. You've really got to be on your toes, to be alert to do something which occurs to you which may seem a good idea, and be prepared also to find that it doesn't absolutely work. But it wouldn't matter because then the thing is alive, it's got some vitality in it (Salter, n.d., as cited in Bailey, 1992, p. 26).

For this reason, I preferred to include an excerpt of the live performance in May 2022 in Appendix A, which best conveys the above-mentioned subjects.

When looking closer at the actual musical material of the piano duo, it is important to consider the two contrasting musical backgrounds and generations. The fact that we come from two contrasting musical worlds and have an age difference of almost fifty years proves the human and social value inherent in improvisation. This difference shapes our music, because the improvised material that emerges depends entirely on our musical references. As Martin Clayton explains:

No one, composer or improviser, has ever created music out of nothing, without reference to what has gone before. Both improviser and composer build up a store of musical experience before creating something new, and that ‘something new’ is both related to and in some way different from what has gone before. Beethoven drew on the tradition handed down to him, arguably neither more nor less than did jazz saxophonist John Coltrane or Indian sitarist Pandit Ravi Shankar (Clayton, 2016, chapter 1.2).

It is an important and natural working method to use references and pre-existing material to develop an individual artistic voice, independent of the musical style or context. In my case, some of the references consulted in the context of the piano duo include Kris Davis and Craig Taborn (2018), Vijay Iyer and Craig Taborn (2019), Sylvie Courvoisier and Jacques Demierre (2019) and Paulo Álvares and Simon Nabatov (2020).

The rootedness in the artistic achievements of former times is not only a method for an improviser to approach musical creation, but a necessity (Bartók, 1949). “It is the form into which we mould [the references] that makes the essence of our work. This form reveals the knowledge, the creative power, the individuality of the artist.” (Bartók, 1949, p. 23). Unfortunately, due to the rapid technological and social transformation we live in, the mainstream music consumed today does not deal with such thoughts, but is rather geared towards adapting to the consumer’s lifestyle (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017). In this way, music merely serves to adapt to extra-musical factors and loses its essential value.

For this reason, the piano duo with Nicholas McNair seeks “a kind of music making that resists these constraints in the face of technological and social transformation, if only in the interest of preserving a diversity in possible human experience” (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017, p. 37).

The work shows that my creative process as an improviser is mainly influenced by the “impersonal” state of mind during the musical creation on the one side and the full personal devotion achieve this state on the other side. In this sense, the most important condition for successful improvisation is a certain attitude towards musical creation that relates to the characteristics and values of improvisation discussed here. I believe that this attitude is essential to my work in improvised music and written composition.

5.2. Piece for Large Ensemble and Piano

“Piece for Large Ensemble and Piano” is a through-composed piece for large ensemble in combination with a partly improvised solo piano part. The composition was written between December 2021 and March 2022 and was the focus of a short investigation conducted during this period into the question of placing an improvising soloist in an orchestral, through-composed context. The instrumentation of the large ensemble was

defined after Arnold Schönberg's "Kammersymphonie Nr. 1" from 1907 and includes a flute/piccolo, an oboe, an english horn, three clarinets (Eb, Bb and bass clarinet), bassoon, contrabassoon, two horns in F and a string quintet. The composition has a duration of approximately 15 minutes, depending on the extent of the open improvisations of the soloist.

Here, the soloist takes on a very specific role, being placed in between improvised and written music. He is supposed to improvise freely within the fixed framework of the large ensemble, that consists of classically trained musicians. In order to fulfil the demands of the piece, the soloist must be very familiar with its musical material and have a great deal of experience and musical understanding.

After four days of rehearsals, the piece was recorded on 29 September 2023 by ESML students in collaboration with conductor Leonardo Costa. The role of the soloist was taken on by myself, as I had the clearest idea of how the piece should sound. Still, I encountered difficulties, which are explained in more detail below.

5.2.1. The creative process: in between improvisation and written composition

The work draws on influences from compositions I studied before and during the time it was written. These include, among others, Ingrid Laubrock (2018), Mark-Anthony Turnage (1997), Schönberg (1907), Ligeti (1970/1998) and several works by Toru Takemitsu.

Closely echoing Alvin Curran's description of his own creative process, the music was devised "with a sense of improvisation" (Bergen Kunsthall, 2022, 21:40). The intuitive, improvisational approach to written composition means that the emergence and consolidation of the musical material in no way followed a specifically controlled method and thus allowed for an immediate and spontaneous flow of compositional ideas. Parameters such as intensity, density and the orchestration as well as the structural narrative of the piece were defined in real time during the actual composition process.

However, two problematic points of this method have to be considered. Firstly, all intuitive ideas are only pure in the first moment.⁷ An idea appears always as an

⁷ I. Laubrock, personal communication, April 7, 2022.

abstract information that needs to find a way to consolidate itself in an objective and tangible form (Hauser, 1975). This process depends on the creator's experiences, his way of thinking and his conventions. In this way, an idea automatically turns into a blurred version of its original form and loses some of its originality and spontaneity due to the obstacles it encounters in its implementation.

Secondly, musical material that is created through improvisation has to be worked out very well to serve as a starting point for further compositional development.⁸ Every musical idea coming from improvisation has to be reviewed and eventually adjusted in order to provide a logical and coherent basis. Improvised music thrives on little imperfections and nuances that may work very well in a live performance because the aesthetic goal is a different one. But if these imperfections are part of the initial idea for large-group composition, they will surely create problems in the logical and successful organisation of the musical material.⁹

We see that my creative process in written composition is different from that of improvisation. Although the creation of the through-composed material is mainly due to the improvisational approach described above, the emphasis is on slow and carefully designed music. Consequently, it can be said that the moment of musical creation in my improvised and through-composed music is very similar, but that the main goals and the working methods are quite different. In this sense, the notation of the music helps to keep track of the material that has been created. However, there have been cases where the actual musical idea was clear to me as an improviser, but encountered obstacles in the notation process. In these cases, the music certainly lost its immediacy and original character.

Regarding the construction and development of the piece, it was based on three specific sections that were written much earlier, in October 2020, and then reused for this composition. These sections, shown in their original manuscript in Figures 1 – 3, appear in the score in Appendix B at RM 10, 15 and 22 and were the only predefined material for the composition. Serving as the architectural pillars in the structure of the piece, the sections were placed more or less equally in proportion to the beginning, the end and each other.

⁸ N. Klein, personal communication, April 5, 2022.

⁹ Idem.

Figure 1: Original manuscript of the first pillar

Handwritten musical manuscript for the first pillar. The notation includes three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Mel' and contains a sequence of chords: D, Bb-Db, C7#9, B7, Bb7b9, A-b9, Ab9#5, E7/9, and D7/9. The middle staff contains chords: F7b9, F7b9, Db/E, E Pedal / unisono, and A Pedal. The bottom staff contains a melodic line with various accidentals and dynamics.

Figure 2: Original manuscript of the second pillar

Handwritten musical manuscript for the second pillar. The notation includes three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Mel' and contains chords: Eb-9, D add9 (Rare), Db9, C-9, B-9b9, Bb9, and A/B. The middle staff contains chords: Ab9, E/6, Gb9, F7b9, E9#5, Gb9, C7#9, and Gb9. The bottom staff contains a melodic line with a 'VAMP.' section and a 'Bb Pedal' marking. The word 'energisch' is written below the first staff.

Figure 3: Original manuscript of the third pillar

Handwritten musical manuscript for the third pillar. The notation includes three staves. The top staff is labeled 'Mel' and contains chords: F-9, G#7/E, Db9#9, B7(b9), Bb-9(b9), A-7(b9), and Bb-9(b9). The middle staff contains chords: Bb-9(b9), A-7(b9), Ab9, G9, and Gb9. The bottom staff contains a melodic line with a 'VAMP.' section and a 'F Pedal' marking.

Consequently, the construction of the composition was based on two opposing poles:

- The improvisational approach to through-composed music
- The prior definition of structural anchor points

An important factor for both methods, described by various composers in their creative process, was the general feeling for the overall form of the piece and the consequent construction of musical objects. The awareness of these musical objects and their effect in relation to the global form of the piece is fundamental for a profound and meaningful creation of music.¹⁰

5.2.2. Improvising soloist within a through-composed orchestral context

In order to incorporate the improvised parts into the narrative, the composition was constructed with a prevailing sense of proportion on the one hand, and the notion of my own improvisations within the piece on the other. Nevertheless, it is impossible to foresee the exact execution of the solo parts by the improviser. Therefore, every performance is a certain risk, as the role of the soloist is based on a great deal of trust and responsibility.

The successful interpretation of such a piece depends completely on the musical understanding of the improvising soloist, being a fundamental factor for the functioning of the music. The composer Ingrid Laubrock, for example, describes the improvisers she worked with in her "Contemporary Chaos Practices" as musicians with a "compositional brain", referring to their comprehensive perspective and understanding of the music and its structural conception.¹¹ If this is not given, the music might not emerge or would lead to unsatisfying results.¹² A possibility to ensure the functioning of such a piece, even if the soloist is unknown to the composer, is to provide specific material or building blocks in order to have more control over the improvised sections.¹³

At this point, another difference compared to my improvisational practice has to be stated. The improvised parts of the piece surely depend on the above discussed characteristics and values of improvisation. But the improvising soloist in any case needs to be an experienced, technically versatile and competent musician in order to execute the piece. This contrasts with the idea that a successful improvisation is not related to the technical accuracy of the improviser. However, the context of this composition is very specific and the improvised parts can be considered as an actual part of the through-composed conception of the music. In this way, the characteristics

10 C. Azevedo, personal communication, March 19, 2022.

11 I. Laubrock, personal communication, April 7, 2022.

12 M. Turnage, personal communication, May 10, 2022

13 Idem.

and values of improvisation remain, but are applied within a specific framework.

To what extent is the improviser influenced or even restricted by the written material and the sonic mass of the large ensemble? In order not to get submerged by the ensemble, the soloist has to create a space of his own and possibly go against the ensemble.¹⁴ However, improvising with a large ensemble means neither more nor less freedom than improvising in any other setting with specific rules, such as a fixed harmonic progression.¹⁵ The specific setting might change the improviser's starting point, but not his ability to express himself freely in it, or even to take advantage of the specific situation to reach into areas that would be hardly accessible without it.¹⁶

Another important point in the relationship between the improvising soloist and the large ensemble is the conductor. Improvisation in a group setting is based on the interaction of multiple individuals (Menezes, 2010). But, when looking at this piece, the large ensemble does not act as a group of individuals, but is much more comparable to one instrument¹⁷, which is controlled by the conductor. A mutual and respectful understanding between improviser and conductor is therefore a fundamental condition for a successful interaction with the large ensemble¹⁸.

Finally, it seems that there is a general difference in the approach to musical creation between improvisers and classically trained musicians, based on divergent educational traditions and respective musical goals and values. The improviser, due to his state of constant availability (Bosseur & Bosseur, 1990), usually feeds his natural inquisitiveness by studying a wide variety of musical genres, resulting in a broad musical perspective and understanding. In contrast, the main goal of classical music education is the perfect execution of notated music that automatically transmits different values to the student with regard to music creation. It may be questionable whether the relationship of classically trained musician to the music they play equals the dedication of the improviser.¹⁹

Still, it is important to consider the structural specificities of a professional ensemble. In order to work regularly and effectively on a great variety of music, a fixed working structure is essential, which results in the establishment of specific, service-like

14 N. McNair, personal communication, March 23, 2022.

15 J. Silva, personal communication, March 24, 2022.

16 I. Laubrock, personal communication, April 7, 2022.

17 J. Silva, personal communication, March 24, 2022.

18 Idem.

19 J. Silva, personal communication, March 24, 2022.

routines. However, this does not necessarily detract from the joy and dedication to the music itself.²⁰

5.2.3. Experiences during the recording process

Since I am very familiar with the piece and its musical material, the incorporation of the improvisation into the through-composed setting did not pose any problems in terms of the musical result and its balance. However, I encountered two unforeseen difficulties with the setting in general.

Firstly, it was a very unusual, almost unnatural feeling to improvise over a completely through-composed music. Although the piece worked well as a whole, I had the feeling of playing *besides* the ensemble instead of *with* it. As the musicians were performing the written material and consequently there was no improvised, “real time” response to the material I was playing, it was difficult to experience the group as a unit.

In addition, my background in jazz music and the collaboration with a classically trained conductor proved to be a problem. Although the relationship with the conductor was very productive and worked well as a link between me and the ensemble, I found it difficult to execute the written piano part appropriately. Not because of its technical difficulty, but because I had to constantly oscillate between listening to the ensemble (as I am used to playing) and following the conductor. Of course, this is a matter of experience, but it took a lot of energy and focus, which possibly affected the improvisation.

Finally, I noticed a clear difference in how the classically trained musicians approached the piece. While most of them participated in the process with great dedication, it seemed to me that they had little understanding of the general functioning of the music due to their musical education background. This certainly contributed to my unnatural feeling within this setting, and possibly compromised the musical outcome as I had envisioned it.

Since the piece contains these very specific characteristics, I think it needs an equally specific conductor and musicians to unfold its full potential.

20 N. Klein, personal communication, April 5, 2022.

5.2.4. The structure and musical material of the piece

In the following, the structure of the composition will be examined with regard to the three architectural pillars and the above discussed topics. The full score and the recording can be consulted in Appendix B.

The original texture was created drawing on influences from Laubrock (2018) and Ligeti (1970/1998). Until reaching the first pillar at RM 10, this texture is in dialogue with harmonic and melodic ideas coming from the pillar itself. The discourse comes to a halt in the first solo piano moment at RM 10. It is important to consider that the solo piano part in the initial section was conceived as an organic part of the whole and should not necessarily stand out from the general texture. In RM 10, the written material is defined by the main melody and chord symbols, as is common in jazz notation. The intention of this section is for the piano to first freely execute the given material and then take it as a basis for further development through improvisation.

Continuing the piece, the large ensemble returns providing a background for the last section of the piano solo. The section from RM 13 to 15 was written by imagining the orchestrated continuation of the piano solo in the ensemble. In this way, little gestures and phrases that emerged in free improvisations by myself were directly transcribed to the score. In some cases, this material was adjusted, when necessary, to correct the natural irregularities that would disturb the coherent structure of the through-composed music.

The second pillar, at RM 15, is presented by the large ensemble without the participation of the soloist, as a contrast to the first one. Once again, the section serves as a resting point for the agitated musical activity. In RM 16, the piano re-enters with through-composed material, this time clearly as a soloist above the large ensemble. The material emerged as a reference to several recordings of improvisations by myself. Without analysing them in detail, the idea was to transport the general character of the improvisations into the written score. With the same method as before, improvised gestures were directly transcribed to the score and adjusted. In this way, they served as the basis for the continuation of the large ensemble in RM 19, which can be seen as the energetic climax of the piece. RM 20 acts as a great exhalation of accumulated intensity, culminating in a second, freely improvised solo piano moment that serves as a transition to the third pillar.

In RM 22, the large ensemble presents the third pillar as an answer to the preceding piano solo. The final section of the piece, which begins just before RM 23 and lasts until RM 26, is a great slowdown with occasional accentuations of certain instruments within the ensemble. As at the beginning of the composition, the piano complements the general texture without taking on a soloistic role. At RM 25, the initial texture reappears as a reminiscence of the opening section. When the slowdown reaches an almost static point, the abrupt ending appears and acts as a conclusion and extreme consolidation of the entire piece.

Finally, it can be said that my creative process in the “Piece for Large Ensemble and Piano” is similar to that in my improvisational practice, but differs in its intentions. Although the musical material was created in an improvisational approach, its architectural basis was defined previously. While the process of music notation was helpful in the structural overview, it also caused problems that disconnected the music from its original idea. Due to the special role of the improvising soloist and the complex dynamics between improviser, ensemble and conductor, the successful execution of the composition is a very demanding task that should ideally be carried out by specially chosen professionals.

5.3. “Still, Unfolding!” for orchestra

The orchestral composition “Still, Unfolding!” was written between March and June 2022, in the context of the application for the *Prémio de Composição Francisco de Lacerda 2022*. As required by the competition rules, the through-composed work has the instrumentation of a classical orchestra and a duration of approximately 12 minutes. All pieces submitted to the competition were expected to relate in some way to the life and work of the Azorean composer Francisco de Lacerda (1869 – 1934). Eventually, the composition was performed by the *Orquestra Metropolitana de Lisboa* on the 17 September 2022, at the *Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa*.

5.3.1. The creative process: construction

The initial step for the conception of the composition was an investigation into the life and work of Francisco de Lacerda. Born on the Azores, Lacerda lived an agitated life,

moving constantly between the islands, continental Portugal and France and achieving very early the status of an excellent composer and conductor. His musical work as such is largely influenced by the post-Romantic tradition, but was not directly considered in the conception of "Still, Unfolding!". Rather, the geographical and natural features of the volcanic islands as the composer's place of origin were given special consideration in the initial phase of the creative process.

In this context, satellite images of the Azores and their surroundings in the Atlantic Ocean were observed in order to eventually draw conclusions about the conception of the musical layers and the visual aspect of the orchestral score to be designed.²¹ In this way, a more concrete image arose for the creation of an organic object that lies in constant transformation, marked by unforeseeable and irregular movement, however shaping slowly and progressively. This image is closely connected to my improvisational practice as an unintentional, organic process. Thus, the improvisational approach to musical creation should be transferred into a through-composed work.

In continuation, several different orchestral works were analysed, many of them in connection with natural elements, such as Hosokawa (2014), Adams (2014), Norman (2014) and several orchestral works from Anna Thorvaldsdottir and Toru Takemitsu.

In contrast to "Piece for Large Ensemble and Piano", no predefined architectural structure was employed here. After establishing the first musical idea, the composition was constructed consecutively in organic progression, leading from one gesture to the next without losing the sense for the global form. In this way, the term "construction" describes best the character of the creative process. The following statement by Umberto Eco captures the mental state during the development of the composition:

A brush stroke, a musical phrase, a line of verse (particularly the first line, which [...] determines the development of the entire poem) are all germs of forms which, by the mere fact that they are and exist as the premises of future configurations, presuppose the coherence of organic growth. The artist must, therefore, turn the coherence implicit in the cue into his own coherence and must choose, from among the various directions he can take, the most congenial one, the only one that will be fully realized (Eco, 1989, p. 162).

The "first line" is responsible for the development of the work in its entirety. As

21 This method will be exemplified in 5.3.2.

described in the *Canadian Composers Portrait* (2002) by composer Murray Schafer, every phenomenon in our natural environment finds itself in a continuous process of development, because complete immobility, like complete silence, is an unrealistic state. For this reason, the consolidation of an idea automatically implies several possibilities for its continuation and transformation. In this concept, described by Eco (1989) as “forming form”, he distinguished between the natural intentionality and the human intentionality. On the one side, every creation is based on and inevitably developed through the natural intentionality. This means that even without any human activity, this natural law is an active working process. The human, on the other side, creates formal, artificial laws that are based on the natural intentionality. These human laws were considered by John Cage as opposed or superimposed to the natural laws: “[...] the work of an artist, for instance, is it not an incisive intrusion [into natural intentionality]? Because, for heaven's sake, it didn't exist until the artist does it” (Redfern, 2015, 4:22). But, as Eco (1989) explains, every formal, human law arises organically as an interpretation and extension of natural formativity. Rather than being opposites, they cohabit in a continuous synergy. For this reason, the form of a creation is undoubtedly guaranteed in the very first step of construction. The fundamental condition of the author to succeed in this process is the “belief in the profound congeniality between human work and the natural laws of forms” (Eco, 1989, p. 162). Realising this condition was an essential factor for the creative process of “Still, Unfolding!”.

Another point Eco (1989) mentions is the commitment to choice. Here, the improvisational mindset of the composer must be considered. As we have seen, in the creative process of both improvisation and written composition, the composer has an internal feeling for form which guides the decision-making.²² Important in this process is the objective perspective on the musical material and on the own choice. Here, the composer must remain honest with himself/herself and not try to find validation for his/her ego, but concentrate entirely on the objective devotion to the musical problem and its solution²³.

Thus, the two poles of improvisation (the selfless posture on the one side and the pure commitment on the other) were, once more, prevalent in the creative process of the composition, however with the aim of achieving a slowly designed, coherent musical work. In addition, the elaboration of the piece was characterised by the following two

22 N. Klein, personal communication, April 5, 2022.

23 Idem.

aspects:

- Determination of the very first musical gesture, which is then guided by the concept of “forming form”.
- Focus on objective decision-making among several possibilities.

The actual musical material emerged mainly through improvisations on the piano that were approximately transcribed and then meticulously adjusted in the orchestral setting. Figure 4 shows an example of the handwritten documentation of these improvisations. The manuscript generally contains the essential information about a musical gesture. Further development of ideas takes place directly in the notation process, so that the final version constructs itself through careful experimentation and reshaping.

French composer Bernard Parmegiani describes his creative process in a very similar approach:

How I did it, there's no mystery: at every moment I was composing on the spot. That is to say, really 'by ear': improvisation that is continually repeated. [...] First a lot of tests; second time corrections; third time adjustment. It's always like that... [...] It's always a continual back and forth: do-reflect-do-reflect. (Mion et al., 1983)

When thinking about the more technical aspect of the composition process, the successful organisation of musical layers (Marvin & Hermann, 1995), i.e. the structuring of the musical material in foreground, middleground and background, (Adler, 2016) was prevalent in the creative process.

The foreground material in particular must be perfectly clear, as it serves as a guide for the musical narrative.²⁴ Furthermore, the awareness of the musical objects and their impact on the organisation of the material is essential to be able to work comfortably with the three layers.²⁵ In this sense, the roles of specific instruments and instrumental groups were constantly shifted in order to achieve the acoustic effect of transformation and movement.

²⁴ C. Azevedo, personal communication, March 19, 2022.

²⁵ Idem.

Figure 4: Handwritten sketches of *Still, Unfolding!*

The image shows several pages of handwritten musical sketches. At the top, it is titled "Piece Azores". The sketches include:

- A section labeled ".95-release" with musical notation on a staff, including notes and accidentals.
- A section labeled "T. 90" with musical notation and a circled asterisk.
- A section labeled "T. 110" with musical notation and a circled asterisk.
- A section labeled "T. 117 - Transition" with musical notation.
- A section dated "15.05.22 - T. 130" with the text "Arrival Chord in E1:" and musical notation.
- A section dated "16.05.22 - T. 142" with musical notation.
- A section dated "18.05.22" with musical notation and a circled asterisk.
- A section dated "T. 205" with the text "Inversion;" and musical notation.
- A section dated "T. 209" with the text "strings" and musical notation.
- A section with the text "bzw." and musical notation.

5.3.2. The structure and musical material of the piece

Appendix C shows the full score of the composition that will be examined closely in this chapter.

The first concrete musical gesture emerged as a conceptual image that corresponded to the location of the Azores islands in the middle of the ocean. Here, two contrasting schemes were defined:

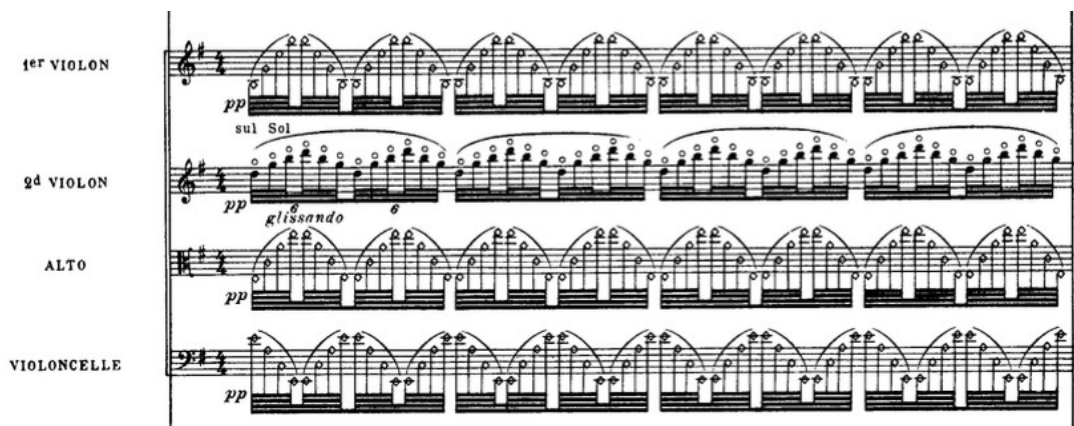
- 1) A comprehensive and largely constant element, which however contains many small irregularities and structural variations (water, ocean).

- 2) The punctual, specific placement of objects that occupy a physical space within the first scheme (islands).

The first, rather static texture was musically realised by the strings of the orchestra, referring to a model to be found in Maurice Ravel's "Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé" (1914), shown in Figure 5. The second scheme was mainly implemented by the other instrumental sections as protruding musical objects. Figure 6 shows an excerpt of the original score of "Still, Unfolding!", where the combination of the two schemes is exemplified. The material highlighted by the continuous line corresponds to the first scheme whereas the broken line shows the second scheme. The texture described here became the central element of the entire first section of the piece up to RM 8.

After a constant increase in intensity, the piece reaches a release of the accumulated tension at RM 8, characterised by a large descending movement that gradually passes through the orchestra from the high to the low register. This release can be considered as the first structural anchor point of the composition. At RM 9, punctual soloistic musical objects act as reminiscences of what has gone before.

Figure 5: Maurice Ravel's "Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé"



The image displays a musical score for the string section of Maurice Ravel's "Trois poèmes de Stéphane Mallarmé". It consists of four staves: 1^{er} VIOLON, 2^d VIOLON, ALTO, and VIOLONCELLE. The music is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The first violin part is marked *pp* and includes the instruction "sul Sol". The second violin part is also marked *pp* and includes the instruction "glissando" with a circled number 6 below it. The alto and cello parts are marked *pp*. The score shows a series of arpeggiated chords with long, sweeping melodic lines across the staves.

Source: Paris: Durand, 1914. Plate D. & F. 8979.

The arpeggio that enters at RM 10 acts as a recurrent musical gesture in the piece. Each time it appears, the pitches, the order of the notes and their orchestration vary. In fact, this whole section is still a part of the tension release at RM 8, an allegory for the decaying consequences of an explosive eruption.

Figure 6: Excerpt of “Still, Unfolding!” (1)

The image displays a musical score for an orchestral excerpt. The score is organized into two main sections. The upper section, starting at measure 65, features staves for Flute 1 (Fl. 1), Flute 2 (Fl. 2), Oboe 1 (Ob. 1), Oboe 2 (Ob. 2), Clarinet 1 (Cl. 1), Clarinet 2 (Cl. 2), Bassoon 1 (Bsn. 1), Bassoon 2 (Bsn. 2), Trumpet 1 (Trp. 1), Trumpet 2 (Trp. 2), Trombone (Tbn.), and Cymbal (Cym.). This section is marked with 'Scheme 2' in three locations, indicated by dashed boxes. The lower section, starting at measure 112, features staves for Violin 1 (Vln. I), Violin 2 (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vcllo.), and Double Bass (Db. Bass.). This section is marked with 'Scheme 1' at the bottom. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (pp, mf, f), articulation (accents, slurs), and performance instructions like '3 solo' and '3 solo and subito marcato'.

Immediately afterwards, the first bassoon sets a counterpoint to the general textural character of the piece with a solo. The idea for this solo part relates to the conceptual basis of the piece, described above as the image of an organic object in constant transformation. While up to this point the object has been addressed in its entirety, the bassoon solo symbolises the focus on a concrete detail. In this way, not only the musical material itself is transformed, but also the perspective on it and its perception.

At RM 11, the music transitions into a new part, the beginning of another build-up. Here, the focus was placed on the string section of the orchestra to establish a variation in colour. In order to keep the piece alive and not too predictable²⁶, the string section is doubled here and there by other instruments and complemented by short solo sections.

The organic, interwoven soundscape is briefly slowed to a static point at RM 13, only to

²⁶ The unpredictability of the music as a general characteristic was a recurring topic discussed in my composition classes.

begin again with more intensity shortly afterwards. Here, the textural idea remained the same, steadily increasing in intensity and density until bar 181, where a ritardando, a decrescendo and a descending melodic movement suggest the slow outpouring of energy. What follows, however, is an abrupt and explosive burst of the tension that has been building since RM 11. This release acts as the second structural anchor point of the piece, including another appearance of the recurring arpeggiated motif. The idea for this section was influenced by the visual analysis of Hosokawa (2005), where certain graphic elements fed directly into my own creative process. For instance, the descending movement shown in Figure 7 was directly adapted in my work, as shown in Figure 8.

Figure 7: Excerpt of Hosokawa's "Circulating Ocean"



Source: Hosokawa (2005)

In contrast to the first release at RM 8, where the tension drops to a low point only to rise again, RM 15 is followed by the immediate sustenance of a medium level of tension. This process is marked and reinforced by the cumulative note repetitions in different rhythms throughout the orchestra. Although harmonically static, the constant shaping of rhythmic layers and textures gives the section a continuous restlessness. This idea is developed further at RM 17, where the orchestral texture becomes increasingly dense through the superimposition of short rhythmic figures and phrases. This structure reaches its highest intensity at RM 18, finally culminating in the climax of the piece in bars 212 and 213, that can be defined as the third structural anchor point.

Figure 8: Excerpt of “Still, Unfolding!” (2)

The image displays a musical score excerpt for the piece "Still, Unfolding!" (2). The score is written for a large ensemble, including woodwinds, strings, and a soloist. The tempo is marked "a tempo con brío!" and the dynamics range from *pp* (pianissimo) to *f* (forte). The score is divided into two main sections, each starting with a boxed-in measure 15. The first section features a complex texture with multiple layers of woodwinds and strings, while the second section is more focused, featuring a soloist (labeled "To Viol.") and a more prominent oboe solo. The score is marked with measure numbers 185 and 193, and a page number 13 is visible in the top right corner.

The very long decay of the climax is initially characterised by a textural style, before becoming focussed on a calm and lyrical oboe solo from bar 240 onwards. The solo acts partly as a distant reminiscence of the bassoon solo described earlier, partly as a guide through the continuous calming of the piece that influences the musical material applied on other instruments. Again, by introducing a different organisation of layers, a different perspective, so to speak, the main focus was on the transformation of the prevalent object.

The final section at RM 24 and 25 is a mere acoustic exploration of punctual orchestral sounds, maintained by a cyclical motif in the strings that was influenced by an excerpt in the second movement of Norman (2014).

As in "Piece for Large Ensemble and Piano", we can see that "Still, Unfolding!" was based on three structural anchor points, in this case the resolutions of three processes of tension accumulation. The important difference is that the structure was not planned

in advance but emerged during the actual composition process. Since the pieces were written directly after each other, it can be assumed that the structural thinking of the first composition influenced the second. Another important feature is the recurring motif that connects the different parts of the composition.

Lastly, the notation process was approached by taking advantage of its purely visual features, therefore being less limitative than in the "Piece for large ensemble and piano".

5.4. "Almejar, em sonho" for chamber ensemble

The composition "Almejar, em sonho" is based on the short story *O conto da ilha desconhecida* by Portuguese writer José Saramago. The music was written between July and August 2022 for a composition competition organised by the *Ensemble MPMP*. The central theme of the competition was to relate the music to be written to one of Saramago's short stories. As a competition rule, the respective text had to be narrated in the composition, although it remained completely open in what form and to what extent. The instrumentation could be chosen among various possibilities and in this case includes a female and a male narrator, flute, clarinet in Bb, piano, violin and cello. The piece was performed by the *Ensemble MPMP* on 26 November 2022, at the *Convento dos Capuchos* in Almada. Furthermore, a studio recording, included in Appendix D, was realised on 27 November 2022.

5.4.1. The creative process: deconstruction

The creative process began with the reading of the short stories given in the competition rules, one of which was to form the basis for the composition. Here, none of the stories was approached analytically, nor were concrete musical ideas thought of. Rather, the focus was on the overall impression and subjective perception of the texts. In this context, I chose the short story "O conto da ilha desconhecida" (1997) because it appealed to me the most. Already here, an improvisational approach crystallised: absorbing the given information ("models"), embodying them subjectively in order to then reinterpret them objectively.

In this sense, the musical creation was approached in a similar way to “Still, Unfolding!”, which had been completed shortly before. It is very likely that the constant reflection and work with the musical material in the orchestral piece had a direct influence on "Almejar, em sonho". On the other hand, the reading of Saramago's short stories took place in parallel with the composition of "Still, Unfolding!", which in turn might have been influenced by the impressions of the texts.

After the repeated reading of the short story, my personal impression of the text was documented, which was then to be transferred to the music. Simultaneously, specific key passages of the text were highlighted and collected. Very early on, it became clear that the musical narrative should not be consecutive to the text. Rather, the general ideas that emerged during the reading, the characteristics of the story as well as the collection of the specific text passages should provide the basis for the elaboration of the musical material. It was therefore a logical conclusion to use very little text in the composition in order not to be dependent on the actual narrative of the short story. In the handwritten documentation of ideas and key words dated 27 June 2022, the essential characteristics of the text and the main conceptual features for the music were described as follows:

- Keywords: metaphoric, romanticism, introspective, search for oneself, dream-like, otherworldly.
- The narration should not be fundamental to the musical discourse, but should be treated on an equal footing with the instrumental parts.
- The composition should not become too dense.

The next step was to define more concrete ideas about the narration of the text and the specific features of the instrumentation. Firstly, a male and a female narrator were chosen to match the two main characters featured in the short story and to facilitate a playful dialogue between them.

Secondly, the text itself should be manipulated and transformed into something distinct through a deconstructive process, not just replicating the original written material. Here, the highlighted passages were compared and analysed in order to rearrange them in a more abstract way and finally to change the context in which they appear in the musical composition (see Figure 9).

Figure 9: Highlighted text passages

02.07.22

A ilha desconhecida (2)

"já não há ilhas desconhecidas" (p. 11)

"ilhas por conhecer é coisa que se acabou desde há muito tempo" (p. 34)

"estão todas nos mapas" (p. 11)

↕

"nos mapas" estão as ilhas conhecidas" (p. 11)

"é impossível" que não exista uma ilha desconhecida" (p. 12)

"todas as ilhas, mesmo as conhecidas, são desconhecidas enquanto não desembarcamos nelas" (p. 18)

"às vezes naufraga-se pelo caminho" (p. 18) ! [...] mas [...] sempre se chega

"também é deste modo que o destino..." (p. 14) } mais longo

"o sonho é um prestidigitador hábil,..." (p. 31)

"o mar" | "o barco" | "o céu" | "as ventos" | "as nuvens" | "o céu, sim, o céu" (p. 26)

"quero saber quem sou quando estiver [na ilha desconhecida]" (p. 25)

"se não saís de ti, não chegas a saber quem és" (p. 25)

"é necessário sair da ilha para ver a ilha" (p. 25)

- que não nos vemos se não nos saímos de nós
- se não saímos de nós próprios
- "não é a mesma coisa"

} p. 25

com a maré, A Ilha Desconhecida fez-se enfim ao mar, à procura de si mesma" (p. 37)

Thirdly, the technical possibilities of the spoken voice were considered. In order to guarantee an organic flow in the narration, the definition of fixed pitches would have been limitative, which is why a natural way of speaking was demanded throughout the piece. Further aspects of the narrative that were considered were specificities of articulation, expression, dynamics, voice quality and rhythm.

It is important to note that all the conceptual elements and reflections on the short story described so far do not yet result in concrete musical ideas, because the concept of

“forming form”, should be pervasive during the composition process. Thus, again, no prior structural thinking was applied in the development of the music. Furthermore, the creative process of subjective deconstruction described here can be compared to the building of a personal library, which then serves as the basis for objective reinterpretation.

However, an important prerequisite for the elaboration of the musical material and the form were the specific textual elements I decided on. Without losing the essential characteristics of the short story, the musical "building blocks" were clearly influenced by the text passages, giving the musical material more presence than the narrative and yet reflecting the spirit of the short story. For example, when short phrases or incomplete fragments were used between the two narrators, this resulted in a similar fragmentation of musical phrases between the instruments, while a longer, continuous passage of text reflected a denser musical arc. In addition, the text elements served as triggers for the musical material, which was then developed instrumentally until a new impulse was given by the narrators. With this approach, I avoided a direct, consecutive use of the text, in which the music would tend to take on an ornamental role.

Likewise, the title of the piece was determined by the deconstruction of the general features of the short story. As the composition should not be a mere musical reproduction of the text, it was appropriate that its title should differ from the original one. In this way, without disregarding the content of the story and the qualities of Saramago's writing style, various possibilities and word combinations were considered in order to then adapt the title of the musical piece to its general expression. However, this process only happened after the compositional work was concluded.

Mauricio Kagel (1991) cites the Dutch painter Theo van Doesburg who stated a set of short but assertive analogies concerning his creative process. These statements have been another important influence for the creative process of the piece and my musical practice in general:

- Definiteness instead of indefiniteness
- Clarity instead of haziness
- Proportion instead of form
- Synthesis instead of analysis

- Logical construction instead of lyrical constellation

The definiteness Doesburg states here refers again to the commitment to choice in an open composition process without structural predefinitions.²⁷ In this sense, the creative process of “Almejar, em sonho” was constantly guided by a certain decisiveness, related to assertive choices and the awareness of their impact on the narrative of the piece. Here, once again, the boundaries between written music and improvisation merge, as this is also a basic precondition for a successful improvisation practice.²⁸

Regarding the question of form, Doesburg concentrates on the importance of proportion, rather than the definition of a form (Kagel, 1991). This describes very well the creative process of the piece in which the main focus was on the proportion of the musical objects developed, but without disregarding a sense for the global form of the piece. Being constantly aware of this aspect, inappropriate sets of musical gestures were automatically avoided.

Finally, Doesburg rejects the analytical thinking in his creative process (Kagel, 1991), which was also not employed in “Almejar, em sonho”. In this way, the emphasis was placed on the pure synthesis of the musical objects, consequently resulting in an organic and logical structure without the need for prior definitions.

At the same time, Figure 10 shows the documentation of a brief structural analysis of the piece from 1 August 2022, in the middle of its construction process. Here, the piece was divided into seven parts and analysed after parameters like harmonic and melodic material, the use of the text, the proportion between instrumental and narrated parts and the general character of the parts. Specific points to be worked on were defined, such as “create more tension” (5), “create greater impact through static blockchords on piano” (5) and “less melodic lines” (7). Even though some specific harmonic material was analysed here (see chord symbols in 1, 2, 3 and 7), the main focus of the analysis was on the aspects mentioned by Doesburg, namely proportion, synthesis and logical construction of musical objects.

Concerning the notation of the music, I have noticed a development after the completion of the two previous compositions. In “Almejar, em sonho”, many musical gestures that emerged during the creative process translated into graphic information much more quickly. While this is a positive development, however, it must be

²⁷ See 5.3.1.

²⁸ N. Klein, personal communication, April 5, 2022.

considered that the notation process still limited the immediacy of the musical ideas. To a certain extent, it restricted the overall climate of possibility (McNair, 2022), as only "translatable" musical gestures would emerge, automatically leading the music in a certain direction.

Figure 10: Brief analysis of "Almejar, em sonho"

Quick analysis (structure) 01.08.22

1 | b. 1 - 25
 - introducing harmonic field
 - melodic motifs
 - general setting and timbres
 - muito pouco texto

nach etwas feiner ausarbeiten?
 mehr Spannung mit/ohne?
 piano harmonics? use again later?
 C-G

2 | b. 26 - 59
 - 3 momentos w/ narrativos (8-8-16 bars) com narrativos diferentes mas coerentes harmonica/funcionalmente
 - bastante texto usado

↳ ① G-d7 ② D_b7#5 ③ D_b7#5/ish - end on G (dominant)
 E_b7#5

3 | b. 59 - P3
 (- mais tonal, ainda mais narrativo)
 (- lines - contrapuntistic)

4 | b. 74 - 84 (Überschneidung)
 - block chords + melody (different textures)

INSTRUMENTAL

5 | b. 81 - 101 - ambiguous harmony
 - static, one chord, different textures
 - piano more block chords? rest distribution of chord?
 - texture more strengthened?
 - without losing connection... ↳ ① ② ③ mehr Wirkung geben!

lots of text

instrumental very contrapuntistic climax

static part of piano
 in 1st part of 2nd part
 D_b7#5
 receive less lines/contrapoint again!

Finally, the creative process was strongly influenced by several musical works that have similar instrumentations and common conceptual features in their general setting. These include Takmitsu (1977), Messiaen (1941/1980), Schönberg (1907/1999) as well as solo piano improvisations by Japanese pianist Masabumi Kikuchi (2016). As a matter of fact, only one of these works features a voice, which underlines the conceptual approach that the narration should not be fundamental in the musical discourse.

5.4.2. The structure and musical material of the piece

As can be seen in the full score of the piece in Appendix D, already the beginning is marked by the organic synthesis of different musical objects that runs through the entire piece. The initial soloistic moments of the flute and clarinet provide the basis for the material that follows.

The narration starts at RM 2 with an excerpt of the first text passage, read by the female voice. However, the passage does not appear in its entirety and thus hints at a continuation. This comes a few moments later, but still leaves the general thematic context of the spoken text open. After a little respiration, the passage is followed by a more active instrumental part at RM 4, that culminates in the second text passage, this time read by the male narrator. This suggests a possible answer to the first phrase, but since they are not clearly connected either temporally or thematically, the listener is left puzzled. The intended result is a state of introspective contemplation on the given material.

This first section of the piece up to RM 5 can be seen as an introduction to the piece, presenting its general spirit and the deconstruction of the text that influences the organic and successive development of the musical material.

At RM 5, the previous text passage is taken up, suggesting a sense of continuity for the first time. However, the deconstruction of the text remains prevalent, playing with and reshaping its thematic context. The two narrators enter in a conflict, one opposing to the other, ending with a conclusive statement of the female voice. Here for the first time a text passage appears as a continuous phrase without any instrumental intervention. Referring to Doesburg, we can see that the deconstruction of the text was led by a strong sense of proportion and synthesis (Kagel, 1991).

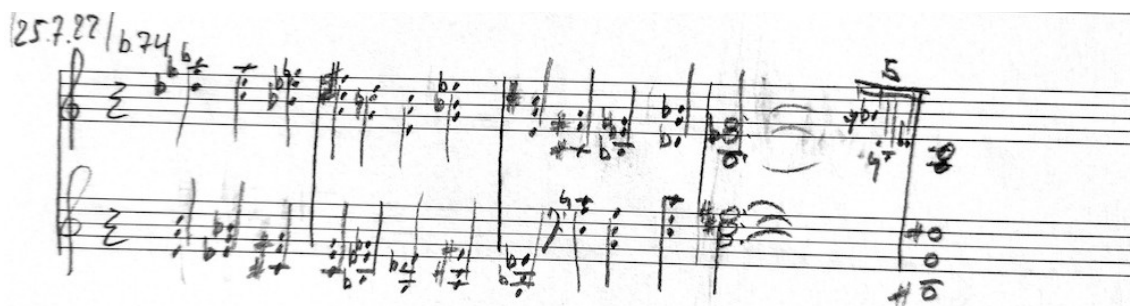
RM 6 is characterised by the continuation of the conflict between the two voices introduced earlier. Both positions of the discussion are clearly presented at the beginning of the section to then slowly but steadily calm down and converge. Starting from an opposition, the phrases are shortened and rearranged to finally result in a single phrase with a completely different meaning. To enhance the calming effect, the voices are whispered in their final interaction, creating a dream-like, contemplative state. Musically, the section starts with an impulsive gesture, aligned with the agitated atmosphere of the thematic conflict. Gradually, the musical material loses density and intensity and ends in a very delicate and fragile texture.

As a direct influence of the whispered voices, the instrumental part at RM 7 is marked by corresponding acoustic characteristics. These are deployed through the airy playing of the winds, the pizzicato in the piano and the mute in the strings. In this way, the spoken voices seem to continue their dialogue instrumentally and the separation between the two sections becomes blurred.

The musical material at RM 7 and 8, as a result of what has gone before, is gradually developed. The section is characterised by specific solo parts and the constant interaction between the instruments. Here the principles of proportion and synthesis described above are prevalent through the logical placement of melodic objects. In this way, the piece seems to open up from different perspectives, and be stretched, but without losing its logical musical discourse.

Then, at RM 9, the exact opposite effect is achieved. Through the sequence of full chords in the piano, which are set in a constant and similar structure, the piece seems to gather the preceding spread parts into a solid form and thus to condense strongly.²⁹ Figure 1 shows the manuscript of this section, which was once again created by documenting and adjusting an improvisational process.

Figure 11: Handwritten manuscript of RM 9



We see that not only the text was deconstructed and rearranged, but also the shaping and the structural conception of the instrumental parts. Consequently, the way the text was approached also influenced and guided the treatment of the musical material.

In continuation, a soloistic moment of the piano serves as a respiration after the preceding active musical discourse and can also be seen as a redirection of focus before the narrators reappear.

RM 11 acts as a preparation for the following section. Here, the narration is characterised by the use of specific words, mainly natural elements that were retrieved from a passage of the short story. Among the words used, the word *sonho* (Portuguese for "dream") is found as a recurring and ultimately central component of the passage, which also refers to the title of the composition. It is placed repeatedly throughout the section, with the female voice insisting on it.

29 C. Azevedo, personal communication, August 16, 2022.

At RM 12, the previously prepared text passage finally finds its resolution and is expressed in its entirety by the female narrator. It is the longest continuous text passage used in the composition. To reinforce the sense of continuity, the piano persists in a repetitive ostinato, which is partially taken up by the other instruments. Again, the musical material arose after the thematic context of the narrative and relates here in particular to the continuous, repetitive and introspective atmosphere of the passage.

In an organic transition, a short but dense instrumental part is presented at RM 13, which functions as a compact conclusion to the preceding parts and prepares the extensive final section. In this sense, it is a key moment in the musical discourse of the piece. Once again, proportion and the logical construction of the musical material were at the centre of the construction.

From RM 14 to the end, the piece is characterised by a calm atmosphere. In continuation of another long text passage of the male voice, a sparse dialogue between the two narrators re-enters, partly taking up some of the passages already presented throughout the composition. The reappearance of previously used material connects the piece as a whole. Accordingly, the focus in this final dialogue is on the conservation of some of the central aspects of the text. Around this conception, the instrumental part can be described as a subtle picturesque movement, characterised by a continuous process of diminuendo. At the very end of the piece, the two voices narrate the same phrase, referring to the title of the short story. At the same time they are rhythmically displaced, which intentionally blurs the comprehensibility of the text, as the conclusive act of a deconstructive process that shapes the composition as a whole.

We have seen that the creative process of “Almejar, em sonho” was marked by the constant deconstruction of the short story as source material, resulting in a logical and coherent musical structure. This process guided and shaped not only the textual material employed but also the creation and proportioning of the musical objects. Nevertheless, the text appears only sparsely in the musical discourse of the composition. In this sense, it may be questionable whether the coherence of the short story was maintained throughout the piece. However, it has been shown that the emphasis was on elaborating a work *on* the story rather than *around* it. As in “Still, Unfolding!”, the improvisational approach was prevalent in the creation of the music, with the difference that the notation process was tended to limit the immediacy of the musical ideas.

5.5. “Sentido Improvável” – Interactive Performance

Canadian composer Murray Schafer states:

It seems to me it's only natural that as you develop more competence and more confidence, that you want to try to do something larger to see if you can handle a larger medium; after all that's what art is really all about – can you handle a larger and more daring kind of scale of things? (Canadian Composers Portraits, 2002)

After the elaboration of various compositions, I realised a more confident approach to the creative process and the handling of musical material. For this reason, the interest in exploring a broader setting grew. Thus, the themes examined above were to be incorporated into the creation of a larger musical framework that was not limited to the conventional concert setting.

As a consequence, many composers were investigated who have worked with both improvisation and written music and have realised their ideas in a wider setting. In their work, the focus is not only on the musical aspect, but above all on the general conception and context. This research formed the basis for the creative process of "Sentido Improvável" and continuously influenced it. In this way, the aim of the work became clear in an early stage: to explore a different compositional format that focuses more on the conceptual basis, but without disregarding the prevailing theme of improvisation and written music.

The investigated artists can be divided into three categories:

- Past composers: John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, George Crumb, Allan Kaprow, Murray Schafer, Iannis Xenakis, Mauricio Kagel, Dieter Schnebel, Constança Capdeville.
- Recent, active composers: Tan Dun, Bent Sørensen, Barry Guy, Peter Ablinger, Yannis Kyriakides, Michel van der Aa, Pierre Judowski, Ricardo Jacinto, Diogo Alvim.
- Artists from other disciplines than music: Josef Beuys, William Kentridge, Robert Wilson, Alexander Calder, Ana Hatherly, António Jorge Gonçalves.

“Sentido Improvável” addresses all the themes discussed in the previous works and

furthermore focuses on broader issues such as the construction of an open work, the questioning of the roles of composer, performers and audience, the interaction between performers and audience and their movement, as well as a general reflection on an interdisciplinary performance setting.

The composition was conceived between October 2022 and August 2023. After an initial research on the respective topics, the process gradually moved into the practical experimentation of specific ideas in collaboration with the visual artist João Ghira. Ghira, with whom I have worked in the past on experimental audiovisual improvisation projects, was an essential part in the construction of the piece with regard to its conceptual aspects.

The piece was presented in three interactive performances at FBAUL on 25 and 26 August 2023. Each performance had a duration of one hour and was characterised by various interactive dynamics between the audience, seven musicians and a performer (dancer). By moving freely through a more or less defined route, the audience became part of the visual and musical phenomenology of the piece. Through their mere presence and movement, the viewers had a direct influence on the shaping of the music by triggering specific reactions from the musicians. The instrumentation of the performance included two cellos, a flute, a clarinet in Bb, a female voice, a tenor saxophone and a tuba. Lastly it will be shown that the piece approaches the essence of the creative process itself that has been examined from different perspectives throughout this report.

5.5.1. The roles of composer, performer and audience

Western art music has always entailed moving from one set of codes (notation) to another (its realization as sound). When we listen to a piece of notated music, we are listening to both the composer's written encoding of an idea and the performer's interpretation of it. Our appreciation of the success of a particular performance depends in part on our being aware of this act of transcoding and on how well the performer has achieved it. This is a distinct difference from the visual arts, where there is not normally a notational or interpretational step between artworks and their audiences. (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017, p. 96)

This statement by Rutherford-Johnson sums up the usual triadic relationship between

composer, performer and audience. In the conventional path that a written musical work takes from its creation to its reception by the listener, we encounter three main problems regarding the authenticity of the original musical idea (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017).

The first obstacle appears in the documentation process of the musical impulse (Hauser, 1975). Since the creation and expression of an idea depends always on the experience and the musical language, the formal possibilities of the composer so to speak, it inevitably loses part of its originality, immediacy and vitality through its documentation, which is basically a form of codified information (Hauser, 1975). As Bailey (1992) explains, the act of documentation of a musical idea objectifies the idea itself, leading to isolated material that is no longer connected to its essence. Further, Bosseur & Bosseur (1990) state that there is no type of musical notation that could in any way provide the holistic determination and control of an acoustic phenomenon. Even if our notation system is extremely precise regarding the manipulation of musical parameters, it still is incapable of addressing extra-musical issues such as space and environment (Bosseur & Bosseur, 1990). As long as the musical idea is so strongly connected to its notation, its actual existence outside the documentation is questionable (Kundera, 1993).

For these reasons, experienced British saxophonist and improviser Evan Parker rejects the use of scores for his own music, even while showing interest in the analysis and reflection of musical notation (Bailey, 1992):

[I]f the score represents some kind of ideal performance why does it ever have to be performed? Surely, it would be better for the music-lover to read the score, alone or with others, conducted or unconduted as his preference dictates? If it is objected that this attitude is too unemotional, then I would reply that the score is itself too unemotional; and since it concerns itself with the description rather than the emotions themselves it would be more appropriate to consider score-making as an esoteric branch of the literary arts with its own criteria rather than as anything to do with music. (Bailey, 1992, p. 80 f.)

Or, according to Dahlhaus (1978), musical notation seems to be an alienating of music from its true nature, which is merely execution. Furthermore, composition, as a process of rationalisation and integration, tends towards the abolition of the performer.

On the other hand, it must be said that there are specific acoustic results that are impossible to achieve without the tool of notation. In this case, the encoding of a musical idea plays a crucial role in the process of music creation, being the closest possible approximation to its essence and the original intention of the composer. Furthermore, the actual process of documentation in through-composed music may follow the characteristics of improvisation and in this way becomes a fundamental step in the creative process.³⁰

The second difficulty we encounter is the act of performance, as the execution of the musical score (the encoded information) depends absolutely on the musician's interpretation, his experience, capacity and approach of decoding, which are likely to diverge with the original musical idea of the composer (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017). In this way, the original intention of the composer might get blurred or even lost through the interpretation of the performer. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, many classically trained musicians are unable to express themselves freely in musical language without relying on a written score (McNair, 2022). This may not be a problem for the actual execution of notated music, but it does raise the question of authenticity regarding the relationship between performer and music. According to Kagel (1991), composer and performer eventually exchange roles in the musical execution: the composer becomes an interpreter of his source material, while the interpreter becomes the composer of a material proposed to him (Kagel, 1991).

Thirdly, the reception of the executed material by the audience is influenced by many unpredictable factors such as space, environment, acoustics or emotional state. As Rutherford-Johnson states, "the private experience of music can be overlapped with one's daily activities, each bleeding into the other" (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017).

It becomes clear that the process of a musical idea from its creation to its reception is a complex issue in written composition. In improvisation, on the other hand, the first two obstacles described are irrelevant because no musical notation is used and the roles of composer and performer are taken by the same person. As a consequence, the use of improvisation came into focus for "Sentido Improvável" right from the beginning of the creative process, but without excluding the possibility of written composition.

Simultaneously, the above presented obstacles stimulated the rethinking of the roles of composer, performer and audience for this composition in order to employ all three

³⁰ As shown in 5.3.1.

parties in the process of musical creation.

Allan Kaprow (1965) explained that in every artwork the audience participates in the unfolding of the narrative. Therefore, this has automatically to be considered in the conception and creation of a work (Kaprow, 1965). Further, as stated by Rutherford-Johnson, it is necessary to “[challenge] the conventional image of the performer as an interpreting/reproducing machine for the composer’s will”, as well as to “[interrogate] the relationship between performer and notated score, increasingly emphasizing the action of performers” (Rutherford-Johnson, 2017, p. 103).

Through the reflection on a format in which the roles of composer, performer and audience merge, in which all three parties share equal importance regarding the musical formativity, the need for a space and general context outside the conventional concert setting arose. In this way, the performance setting emerged naturally, in which elements such as the disposition of the performers in a space and the conception of this space become essential. In this sense, the movements of the performers and the audience as well as their interaction were taken into account in the creation and handling of the musical material. With the inclusion of visual and plastic parameters in the composition process, I was automatically confronted with interdisciplinarity as a central theme.

Moreover, the interactive dynamics between performers and audience are clearly related to Eco’s (1989) idea of the open work. The involvement of the audience in the actual musical creation was only possible if the form of the music remained malleable. In this way, the creation and execution of the music in an improvisational approach became essential to the functioning of the work. However, this would not mean that the music is limited to pure improvisation, but that it is conceived in such a way that the audience can participate in shaping the form of the music in real time.

Consequently, both improvised and through-composed music was employed, but always according to certain rules activated by the audience. In this way, the immediacy and directness between performer and written musical material was maintained and the audience involvement in the creative process ensured.

Regarding the interdisciplinary performance setting, extra-musical subjects were approached by following a musical and compositional thinking. Kagel (1991) states that parameters such as speech, light or movement can be compared with notes, tone

colours or musical articulation. In addition, Curran speaks about creating “sounds in certain environments, in certain spaces, that naturally enhance an object, or speak about an object” (Bergen Kunsthall, 2022, 01:04:53). In this sense, some of the characteristics that influenced the creative process of the previous compositions (e.g. the sense of proportion and synthesis) were applied directly on the interactive dynamics between space and sound, between visual and auditory perception.

According to Kagel (1991), no concrete narrative is needed here to create a convincing act, as the act itself conveys a musical integrity. The only but fundamental condition is the clarity of the action created so that the audience can relate to it directly, ensuring its active participation in the process.

5.5.2. The creative process: transformation, potentiality and the labyrinth

After a broad research on the respective themes and the work of related composers, the initial step of the creative process was the practical experimentation of specific audiovisual ideas. The exercises were defined by free improvisation on the piano by myself and visual actions through live projected drawing and the manipulation of objects by João Ghira.

Some of the ideas explored in the experimentation sessions are explained in the following. Even though they were not directly incorporated into the final work, they clearly influenced the creative process and the reflection on the general framework of the piece.

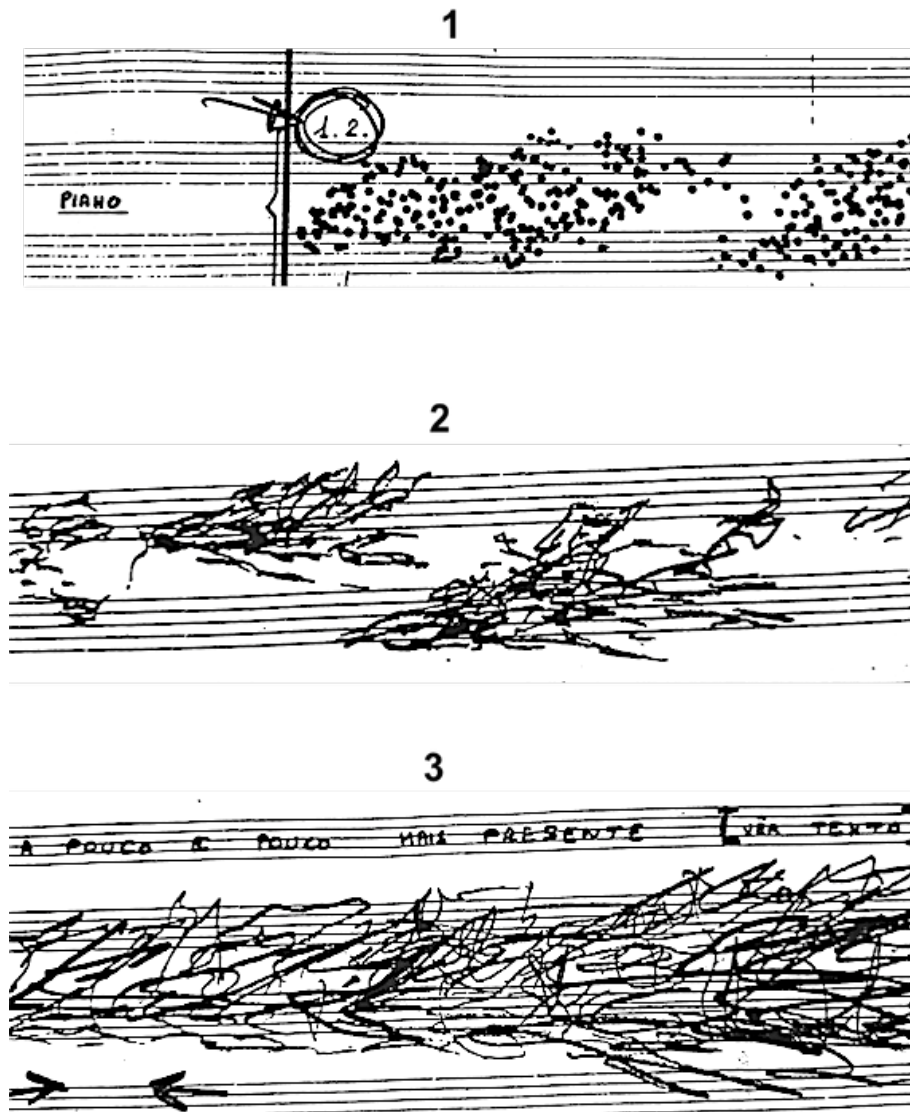
In one of his lectures, stage producer Robert Wilson stated about his work that the sense of time is controlled consciously through the speed of gestures (BRAFA Art Fair, 2020), an idea that was explored in the experimentation sessions. Here, an important conclusion was that the visual and the musical actions could follow completely different parameters at the same time without losing their connection. As soon as visual and musical information was present simultaneously, a relationship between the two was established.³¹

During the examination of different graphic scores such as Crumb (1972) or the work of Sylvano Bussotti, special attention was drawn to the visual aspect of musical notation.

31 D. Alvim, personal communication, November 21, 2022.

Figure 12 shows three extracts from the score of Constança Capdeville's "Libera Me" that was written in 1979 (Capdeville, 2008). Here the composer uses various graphic notations which, on closer examination of the visual aspects, suggest a certain development throughout the narrative of the piece. This idea directly influenced an exercise that was carried out with João Ghira.

Figure 12: Excerpts from Constança Capdeville's "Libera Me"



The exercise was based on a stone as a concrete object, which was represented visually, as a drawing, in different forms, triggering certain musical reactions. Then, Ghira consistently transformed the drawing through a performative action, activating a different musical gesture. Finally, certain points of the transformed drawing were spotlighted with a magnifying glass to activate musical cells that were connected to the

original forms. The visual parts of the exercise are shown in Figures 13 to 15. The prevalent topic in this exercise was the development and structural transformation of a concrete object, both visually and musically.

Figure 13: Initial drawn form

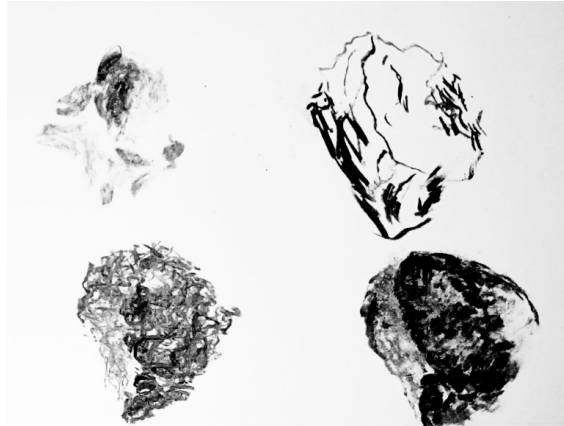


Figure 14: Transformation of the initial form



Figure 15: Spotlights on the transformed form



Two other works that have strongly influenced the creative process were Alexander Calder's "Mobiles", as well as Earle Brown's musical composition "Calder Piece" from 1966 (Calder Foundation, 2016). The "Mobiles" are characterised by their constant movement, which not only changes the general form of the sculpture but also continuously reshapes the space they occupy. In this way, they interact simultaneously with the space and the public on different levels: one the one hand independently and on their own, on the other hand according to the position of the spectators.

American composer Earle Brown "was stimulated by the integral but unpredictable "floating" variations of [the] Calder mobile" (Griffiths, 2010, p. 32) and developed a composition for four percussionists playing around and on the sculpture. As stated by Brown in the program note, his "Calder Piece" was constructed "with the idea that it would be "conducted" by a mobile in the center of the space with the four percussionists placed equidistantly around it, the varying configurations of the elements of the mobile being "read" by the performers and the evolving "open form" of each performance different and changing perspectives in relation to it" (Brown, n. d.).

This idea refers clearly to Eco's "Open Work" (1989) and the thought of transformation and potentiality that was present during the elaboration of "Still, Unfolding!".

Continuing these themes, another audio-visual exercise was carried out, which eventually formed the conceptual basis for the final work. Again starting from a stone as a concrete object, the focus was on its continuous transformation and structural redefinition. As Parmegiani explains, when developing a musical work on an object, it is

necessary to focus deeply on the essential characteristics of the object in order to understand how they can shape the actual construction of the piece (Mion et al., 1983).

Alongside this statement, the experiment was divided into a repetitive cycle that focused on the characteristics of the stone. The cycle consisted of three phases, which are shown in Figures 16 – 18:

- 1) The Contour
- 2) The Filling
- 3) The Clearing

All phases represented the object differently and evoked certain musical reactions. By repeating the cycle in different orders, the visual representation of the stone was continuously transformed and reshaped, while the object itself remained.

Alongside transformation as the central theme of the exercise, the idea of potentiality emerged as a conceptual essence. As each cycle changed the form of the object, innumerable possibilities of transformation arose, which only crystallised in the performance act. Consequently, the two main conceptual pillars of the final composition were defined as transformation and potentiality. Here a direct connection to McNair's (2022) idea of openness through continuous possibility is apparent, i.e. a close relation to improvisation.

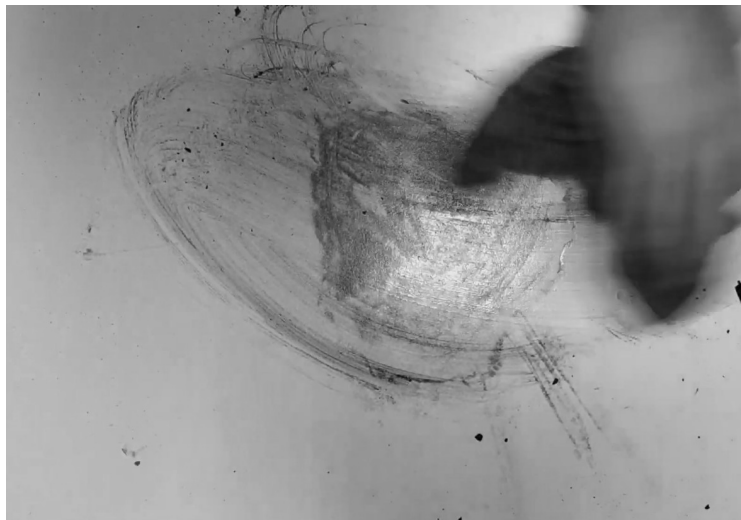
Figure 16: The Contour



Figure 17: The Filling



Figure 18: The Clearing



In a further step, this conceptual basis was transferred to a larger setting outside the audiovisual improvisation format. A central thought was to address the readjustment of the roles of composer, performer and audience described above.

The composition was thus divided into three phases in which the performers and the audience move and interact. In order to involve the public in the musical creation, it should have a direct influence on the shaping of the musical material through its movement. Consequently, the musical actions of the performers were activated by the mere presence and motion of the viewers.

In order to influence and guide the movement of the performers and the audience, a physical material had to be defined that would serve as a delimitation. Eventually we decided on cloths (textile) as the main material of the piece, a medium Ghira frequently works with and which also refers to the idea of transformation: while a cloth serves as a (de)limitation of auditory and visual perception, it is at the same time an extremely light and volatile material that rarely retains a specific shape. In this way, the physical and visual qualities such as light transparency, shape and configuration of the cloths would be automatically influenced by the participants and in turn influenced their movements.

Moreover, the emptiness of the visual material was at the heart of the composition. Through the application of the empty cloths as the basis of the piece, the work would be created, shaped and embodied by the performers and the audience in real time. This also refers to improvisation, in the sense of a neutral, selfless state for creation and the embodiment of the work through the improviser.

While thinking about the type of physical structure that should guide the movement of the participants, but with the possibility of leaving several paths/possibilities open, the idea of a labyrinth arose. This led us to reflect on the metaphorical meaning of the labyrinth and its possible interpretations, which in turn influenced the general conception of the piece. In this sense, one of the predominant themes during the elaboration process was the labyrinth as a close link to the creative process itself.

The traversal of the labyrinth can be seen here as a complex process of a creative idea, the essence of which is pushed into materialisation into a concrete form, but limited to the artist's means. Another point is the labyrinth one cannot escape from, as a metaphor for the confrontation with one's own self (with the ego) and the relationship with the surroundings.³² In his reflections on the meaning of labyrinths, British artist Michael Ayrton considers the question “what it is that we *are* and how we relate ourselves as individuals to each other; how we each inhabit ourselves and occupy the curious and complex structure which, to each of us, is his or her own body (Ayrton, 1974, p. 6 f.).

This led to the conclusion to build a labyrinthine structure made of cloths that could be entered and traversed, defined by interactive events between performers and audience. In addition, the positioning of the audience should influence the musical material played by the performers, an idea also influenced by a statement of Kagel

³² These topics have been continuously approached in conversations with João Ghira and the audience that assisted the performances.

(1991) in which he describes the idea of creating a three-dimensional musical score into which the observer can enter and experience the organisation of musical layers.

Consequently, the labyrinth describes a metaphorical organism creating musical and visual information as an open work. The concept of multiple possible forms in constant transformation within the labyrinth also goes back to the idea of an artwork as the decoding of puzzles in order to create new puzzles (Hahl-Koch, 1984). In addition, Adorno states: "The better an artwork is understood, the more it is unpuzzled on one level and the more obscure its constitutive enigmaticalness becomes" (Adorno, 1997, p. 121).

These considerations became the framework of the main part of the composition that corresponds to the second phase of the exercise (the Filling). In continuation, the other two phases were defined.

The initial section, corresponding to the Contour, should lead the audience to the main part of the piece by introducing the visual and musical dynamics as well as the theme of interactivity and transformation at certain points along the way. This moment, which again refers to the metaphorical meaning of the labyrinth, should allow the viewer to move freely within a fixed system that was yet to be explored. The audience would become aware of this process from the beginning and be "trapped" in the piece, while at the same time inevitably shaping the work.

Finally, the last phase should approach the urge for a final, concrete "object", a conclusion drawn from the multiple form possibilities experienced during the piece. This idea refers to the urge in the creative process to capture an idea in a fixed form. However, there should be no concluding element in the performance, leaving the performers and the audience in a fragmented state. The continuation of the principle of forming form in a physical and visual sense to be applied here points to the idea that the pure essence of a creative idea can hardly be materialised, since in the process of materialisation it is inevitably bound to various conditioning factors.³³ Ultimately, the last phase should be connected in some way to the beginning of the performance, thus forming a closed structure.

To repeat the cycle as realised in the exercise, the exit of the audience passed again through the second and the first phase and left the performance at the same point

33 J. Ghira, personal communication, September 11, 2023.

where it had started. However, the viewer never experienced the musical and visual components of the composition in the same way, as their interactive role continuously transformed the piece. In this way, by re-crossing the sections, a different experience would be enabled within the same concrete structures.

Only after defining the three phases of the performance and the reflections on the labyrinth did I realise how closely the ideas are linked to the "Hidden Order of Art" by British theorist Anton Ehrenzweig (1969). He describes three stages in the consolidation process of a creative idea that will be taken up again below:

An initial ('schizoid') stage of projecting fragmented parts of the self into the work; unacknowledged split-off elements will then easily appear accidental, fragmented, unwanted and persecutory.

The second ('manic') phase initiates unconscious scanning that integrates art's substructure, but may not necessarily heal the fragmentation of the surface gestalt. For instance the systematic disruption of the surface faculties in much modern art remains partly unresolved in the final result. But the unconscious cross-ties still bind the single elements together, and an unbroken pictorial space emerges as the conscious signal of unconscious integration.

In the third stage of re-introjection part of the work's hidden substructure is taken back into the artist's ego on a higher mental level (Ehrenzweig, 1969, p. 102 f.).

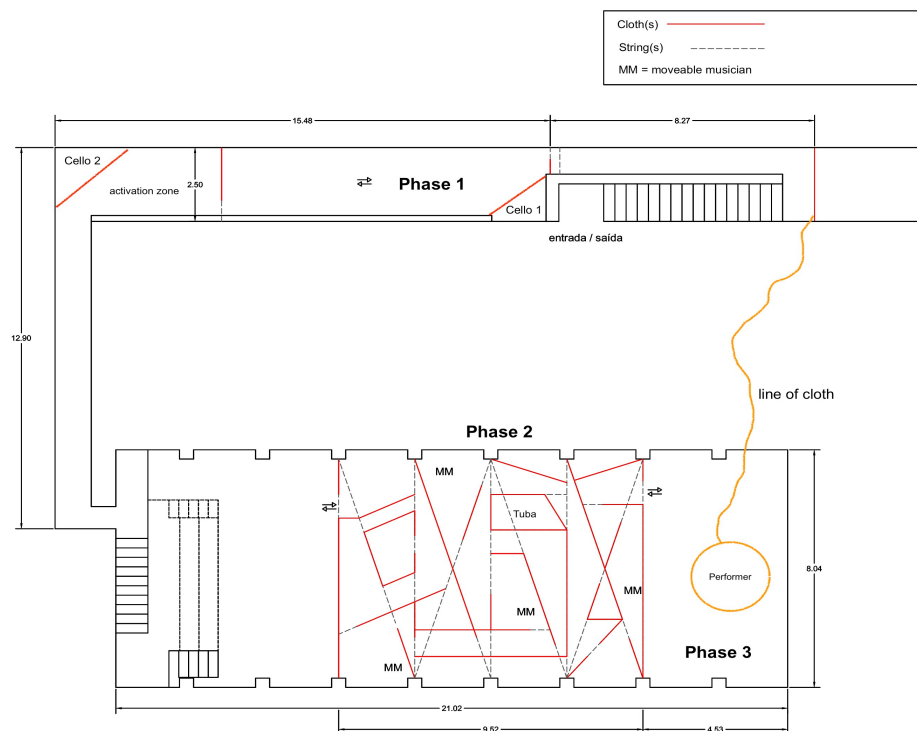
In "Sentido Improvável", my role as composer was to conceive and define the musical material, which is characterised by its open form and the constant possibility of transformation. In many sections, the only fixed parameters were dynamics, rhythm or range, leaving pitches and even instrumentation open. In this way, even when the same material was played repeatedly, it always changed shape, as each instrument performed each section differently in each execution. Addressing here the intermediate area between improvisation and written composition, the piece also contains fully improvised and fully through-composed sections, so that all three categories defined at the beginning of this report are represented.

It is interesting to note that the conceptual basis of all three phases points to the specificities of the creative process of the works examined in this report. Thus, "Sentido Improvável" can be seen as the consolidation of the themes studied in the Master's Degree in Composition and their conceptual implementation in a single artistic work.

5.5.3. The structure and musical material of the piece

In contrast to the purely musical compositions examined previously, "Sentido Improvável" is a site-specific work that depends on the physical realisation of the three phases of the composition. During the examination of different possible locations in the city of Lisbon, I discovered an historic cistern at FBAUL that is regularly used for exhibitions. The physical features of the location fitted into the conceptual framework of the composition, which was in fact partly influenced by this space. However, an essential characteristic of the composition is its possible adaptation to different spaces and settings, according to their applicability to the work as a whole.

Figure 19: Schematic plan of the composition at FBAUL



In the following, the three phases of the composition will be explained in detail regarding their realisation at FBAUL, shown as a schematic plan in Figure 19. Special attention will be drawn to the musical material, the interactivity between performers and audience as well as the conceptual fundament of each section, which then leads to a brief, broader conclusion about the piece and the creative process in general. The written musical material as well as some exemplary recordings of the performances can be consulted in Appendix E.

5.5.3.1. Phase 1

Figure 20 shows a photo from the initial phase of the composition in FBAUL. Two cellists were part of the section, one at the beginning of the corridor, right at the entrance, and the other at its end. Both instrumentalists were covered with transparent cloths. Furthermore, the corridor was divided into two parts by another cloth.

Figure 20: Photo of Phase 1 at FBAUL



Here, the musical part consisted of two parallel layers that assigned each of the cellists a different role in terms of interactivity with the audience. In the first layer, the first cellist was activated by the audience through their entrance in the performance. Each time a new person (or group) entered, a very short musical gesture was triggered. Some suggestive musical material was predefined, however the cellist was free to improvise further miniatures in the same style. The second cellist reacted to the played sequence with an improvised miniature, which at the same time triggered a reaction in the second phase, as shown below.

The second layer mainly concerned the cellist at the end of the corridor. As soon as the audience passed the cloth separating the passage into two parts, it entered an interaction area in relation to the second cellist. A through-composed piece for solo cello, consisting of many successive miniatures separated by long pauses, was activated as long as there was audience in the area. While the cellist performed the piece, he remained unaffected by the signal of the first one (first layer). Thus, he could only react to the first cellist when the interaction area was empty.

The interactive dynamics between audience and musicians on the one hand and among the musicians on the other led to endless musical possibilities right from the beginning of the piece. Here, the audience became aware of its role, but did not decide to actively participate in the shaping of the musical material. Accordingly, the musicians did not decide to play, but depended on the presence and movement of the audience.

Coming back to Ehrenzweig (1969), the first phase of the performance can be considered as a fragmentation of the viewer's state. Through the act of entering the performance, through the desire to "consume" it, uncontrolled and seemingly accidental split-off elements emerged that automatically influenced the further course of the piece.

5.5.3.2. Phase 2

The second phase of the composition consisted of a labyrinthine structure, which can be seen in the photo in Figure 21. The structure consisted of cloths hung on strings attached to the side walls of the room. While traversing the labyrinth, the audience could choose freely among multiple possible ways. However, all routes were designed to guide the audience to the other end where it entered the last phase of the

composition. Consequently, the seemingly free decision of the audience led inevitably to the third phase. This idea refers to the creative process discussed in the previous works: letting the piece construct itself while the author decides between already existing models that determine its form. As Kandinsky states: “I do not have to worry about the content, but only and exclusively about the right form. And the correctly extracted form expresses its gratitude by taking care of the content all by itself” (Kandinsky, 1963, p. 207).

Figure 21: Photo of Phase 2 at FBAUL



Within the labyrinth, five instrumentalists (flute, clarinet in Bb, female voice, tenor saxophone, tuba) acted musically in two parallel layers. The tuba, as the only non-moving instrument, was placed in a closed area and was neither visible nor accessible to the audience or the other musicians. The other four instrumentalists, like the audience, moved freely within the structure, however being constantly aware of their position in the labyrinth, that was subdivided into four sections.

The first musical layer was triggered by the second cellist in the first phase. The musicians in the labyrinth reacted to some of the excerpts they could hear from the cellist with a short imitative, improvised gesture. The constant movement of the musicians resulted in different physical configurations with each musical intervention.

On a second level, the tuba player constantly played a series of written miniatures, interrupted by pauses whose duration he freely chose, between 15 seconds and one and a half minutes. One of the miniatures was a recurring cell that triggered predefined reactions in the four moving musicians. These reactions depended on the musicians' position in the four sections of the labyrinth, where each section was assigned to a certain written musical material. Both the pitches of the tuba player and the pitches of the musical responses were left open and chosen by the musicians in real time, creating countless harmonic configurations.

The musical formation of this phase was chosen according to the acoustic differences of the instruments to ensure a varied soundscape. However, the instrumentation is exchangeable, in fact the only essential parameter for the choice of instrumentation is the mobility of the musicians. In this way, the piece can be performed with the most diverse combinations of instruments, which points to the prevailing theme of potentiality.

The role of the audience in this phase was the deactivation of the performers: each time a performer entered into visual contact with an observer, he/she was prevented from playing. In this sense, the music achieved its maximum capacity without any audience. Entering the labyrinth suggested the idea of deciphering its enigmaticalness and locating the origin of the sound, but there was no way to solve it.

Consequently, Phase 2 was characterised by a constant transforming, organic body of musical and visual interaction which never developed two identical forms. Once again, neither the performers nor the audience were in the position of conscious decision-making but found themselves captured in a fixed system of infinite possibilities.

Following Ehrenzweig (1969), here the fragmented state experienced in the first phase attempts to reorganise itself by unconsciously scanning the previously introduced elements and the existing materials (which correspond to the artist's means). No conclusion can be drawn, yet the individual elements begin to coalesce into a larger framework.

5.5.3.3. Phase 3 and conclusion

The last phase of the composition contrasted the previously experienced labyrinth as a

more open and empty space. In this sense, no musical information was added here, also because the audience was still able to hear the acoustic events of the second phase. The section focused on a purely performative act carried out by a dancer who was inside a physical structure made of several cloths sewn together, shown in Figure 22. Part of the structure was a long and thin line of cloths that reached up to the ceiling of the room, exiting it through a hatch and connected to a cloth at the entrance of the piece. The line of cloths outside the cistern is shown in Figure 23.

Figure 22: Photo of Phase 3 at FBAUL



Figure 23: Photo of the line of cloths at FBAUL



By the movement of the performer in the interior of the cloths she constantly constructed and deconstructed the form of the structure. The performer was aware of the interactive dynamics of the composition and the characteristics of the sound and transferred them into a more plastic and visual setting. She had almost no specific instructions for her movements, allowing her to perform on the basis of improvisation.

After Ehrenzweig (1969), in the last phase a conclusion is drawn from the creation process in which the artist "solves" the labyrinth and forms a conscious final result from the fragmentation experienced beforehand. However, the crucial idea of Phase 3 and the work in general was not to focus on a concrete conclusion of the composition, but

to continue the prevailing phenomenon of forming form. This points to the problem that a creative idea can only be materialised if there is a concrete, formal setting, which, however, automatically decontextualises its essence. The physical connection of Phase 3 with the entrance/exit of the performance delimits the structure in which the work is created and refers to the limitation of the author's means. These limitations can be transformed and expanded, but it is impossible to escape them, just as all the musical and visual components of the piece were conceived to be malleable, yet designed and fixed by ourselves and for the presentation of the performance.

This is the essential point of the work: despite the complex and carefully elaborated interactive dynamics that attempt to escape the formality of the work through potentiality and transformation, it *is* still a concrete work bound to our own means and in a formal context of public presentation. However, we believe that the essence of the piece does not require a specific form or context of presentation.³⁴ In this sense, the fundamental thought of the work does not depend on specific objects like the labyrinth, the instrumentation or the cloths. Therefore, the piece can be adapted to different spaces, instrumentations and formats, to completely different settings. Certainly it would be a different kind of work, but that does not speak against the essence of the piece.³⁵ Our idea is (and has been from the beginning) not to conclude the process of the project here. In fact, we invited the audience to attend the performance in order to begin a comprehensive dialogue about individual perceptions and approaches to the event, and then to continue the process towards the very core of the work.

6. Conclusions

After the close examination of the five musical works, it can be said that even though their creative process differed in certain aspects, all of them relate closely to improvisation as a central pillar. It has been shown that the characteristics and values of improvisation generally influence my compositional thinking, not only in my improvisational practice but also in the other two categories – partly improvised, partly through-composed music and fully through-composed music. Although my aesthetic goal in improvisation differs from that of written composition, this has not prevented the improvisational mindset from being incorporated into written composition.

³⁴ J. Ghira, personal communication, September 11, 2023.

³⁵ Idem.

For the through-composed works, the concept of forming form, which originates in improvisation, was applied above all. The successful realisation of the works has shown that it is not necessary to apply prior structural thinking in order to elaborate a written composition and that the development of the musical material can be approached in an improvisational way.

Although the creative process of all five works focused on specific aspects of musical creation, they were all intertwined and interrelated. In this sense, the interactive performance was the most comprehensive work, as it contained all the themes previously discussed and transported them into a larger, interdisciplinary and philosophical framework. Here it has become clear that the essence of the creative idea does not necessarily depend on the final form that the work takes during the creative process, as this process is tied to various external factors and ultimately to my own means as the creator.

These means are constantly being shaped and expanded through my practice as a composer and improvising musician, which sets my work in an evolution that leads to different and probably increasingly challenging forms. However, these forms do not define the core of my work, which is essentially determined by my general approach to creation and is therefore independent of the three categories mentioned throughout this report. This clarifies why I am involved in such seemingly different and contrasting areas, as they are all united in a single body of work through my way of doing. Looking forward, I plan to continue this research in various musical and artistic areas and beyond - regardless of what the forms of future works may look like - in order to get even closer to the essence of these questions and my own creative process.

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10. Appendices

10.1. Appendix A – Video of live performance – Piano Duo with Nicholas McNair

Appendix A – Video of live performance – Piano Duo with Nicholas McNair

10.2. Appendix B – Score and recording of “Piece for Large Ensemble and Piano”

Appendix B - Score and recording of “Piece for Large Ensemble and Piano”

10.3. Appendix C – Score and recording of “Still, Unfolding!”

Appendix C - Score and recording of “Still, Unfolding!”

10.4. Appendix D – Score and recording of “Almejar, em sonho”

Appendix D - Score and recording of “Almejar, em sonho”

10.5. Appendix E – Scores and exemplary recordings of “Sentido Improvável”

Appendix E - Scores and exemplary recordings of “Sentido Improvável”