

## MULTIDISCIPLINARITY AND REFERENCE AS A SOLUTION TO INWARD-FOCUSED APPROACHES IN MUSIC COMPOSITION

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**Abstract:** New Music thought and compositional praxis has excessively focused inward as a source of inspiration. In the last ten years, multidisciplinary composition has offered one possible solution to this problem. By combining music with theatrical elements and digital media, composers have produced works that are ‘not for the ears alone’. This paper offers a typification of its most novel aspects, and traces them in the author’s own creative work, which additionally include the use of borrowed material as a means for establishing referentiality and elaborating semantic narratives.

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### The Inward Focus of New Music

A significant portion of New Music thought and compositional praxis exhibits an excessive inward focus, relying on sounds and musical morphologies discovered and developed by composers from previous generations. In the last ten years, many composers have reacted to this problem by drawing from wider musical influences and enlarging compositional practice with multidisciplinary approaches in order to include extra-musical elements.

New technological tools have facilitated this solution in direct and indirect ways. Digital signal processing techniques that permit precise manipulation of sound and video with unprecedented ease have allowed composers to tackle multidisciplinary projects in which video, lights or theatre reflect on problems of musical composition. These technological changes have also impacted society at large through the overarching presence of the internet, blurring the arbitrary lines between high and low art and giving prominence to the visual in everyday communications and personal interactions, through avatars and video-streaming services, among others.

The question of whether the essential motive for the emergence of these compositional practices and aesthetics is simply a consequence of the larger digital revolution (specifically with regard to the means of production and distribution of music), or the reaction of a community of music-makers seeking to solve the problem of inward focus with new tools available to them, leads us to a chicken-or-egg situation. Philosopher Harry Lehman emphasises the socio-economic changes, by pointing out how the affordable technologies available to combine several media and to self-publish have resulted in a much less

regulated landscape that has, in turn, provoked a shift from seeking novelty within the musical material (i.e., absolute music) to seeking novelty in the relationship between music and ideas. This latter approach Lehmann calls 'relational music': music with precise relationships with the world.<sup>1</sup>

Matthew Shlomowitz acknowledges Lehmann, but also argues that extra-musical elements are not a necessary requirement to achieve the relationship between music and the world: this can be achieved by sound itself.<sup>2</sup> For Shlomowitz critical thinking in contemporary music is often applied to sounds and ideas from New Music's post-war tradition, which he finds 'a bit limited and a bit insular'<sup>3</sup> – what I call the inward focus of New Music. While Shlomowitz's main point is to demonstrate that relational music can be achieved by music itself, I want to explore works that do involve the visual. The question is how these artistic expressions are able to articulate new meaning by creating new contexts for New Music, as Shlomowitz noted in his portrait of Alexander Schubert:

The remit of New Music has moved on and broadened out in the twenty-first century. Composers such as Joanna Bailie, Michael Beil, Johannes Kreidler and Jennifer Walshe have created work that: engages popular and everyday culture; develops historical ideas from the visual arts (e.g. conceptualism); utilises technology to create new musical instruments; combines field recordings with music to form new relationships between music and the world; and, establishes a music-led interdisciplinary practice with multimedia and theatricalised works.<sup>4</sup>

This raises the question of whether musical works must now include visual elements or other multidisciplinary approaches in order to be relevant. While I believe that visual elements do offer a solution to the problem of a narrowly focused approach to composition, it is only one of many possible solutions. Ashley Fure commented on the potential drawbacks of an endogamic creative community, and on multiplicity as a necessary component of the solution, during her participation in the Darmstadt panel 'New Conceptualism: a Dead End or a Way Out?':

We treat our work as isolated aesthetic objects that construct and respond to their own terms. Because these terms are often context-specific and jargon-heavy, the vast majority of those outside our field have an extremely difficult time engaging with . . . what is at stake for us . . . Is replacing sound with idea the only hope new music has of integrating into an expanded intellectual field? . . . The last we needed is a stylistic shift toward the land where 'screeches are bad' and 'youtube clips are good' . . . In order to survive as a creative ecosystem, we need different people doing different things, and with conviction.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Harry Lehmann, 'The Discourse of New Music in the Wake of the Digital Revolution', Lecture at the National Audiovisual Institute in Warsaw, 28 November 2015. Available on YouTube [www.youtube.com/watch?v=csn5IcCtTRo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csn5IcCtTRo) (accessed 1 July 2018).

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Shlomowitz, 'Real World Sound in Relational Music', Lecture given at the University of Bristol, December 2014. Available at [www.shlom.com/?p=relational](http://www.shlom.com/?p=relational) (accessed 21 September 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Shlomowitz, '10 for '10: Matthew Shlomowitz', Interview by Tim Rutherford-Johnson. 21 November 2010. The Rambler. <https://johnsonrambler.wordpress.com/2010/11/21/10-for-10-matthew-shlomowitz/> (accessed 21 September 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Shlomowitz, 'The Composer Alexander Schubert', in *Wien Modern programme book*, 2015. [www.alexanderschubert.net/on/Alexander\\_Schubert\\_Shlomowitz\\_Wien\\_Modern.pdf](http://www.alexanderschubert.net/on/Alexander_Schubert_Shlomowitz_Wien_Modern.pdf) (accessed September 21, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Ashley Fure, speaking on the panel, 'New Conceptualism: A Dead End or a Way Out?', Internationale Ferienkurse für Neue Musik, Darmstadt, 2014. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bhqDjHp2p0&t=3079s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bhqDjHp2p0&t=3079s) (accessed 21 September 2017). The quoted text can be heard at about 42:02.

Fure's commentary not only points to the idea of multiple solutions, but also acknowledges the problem of inward focus in New Music: an enclosed universe of shared but unspoken aesthetics and assumptions.

### Multidisciplinary Composition

Drawing not only from 1960s 'high-art' but also from a wide range of work from the pop-culture and mass-media circuits, Jennifer Walshe has coined the term 'The New Discipline' to denote the practices of several composers who reflect on problems of musical performance by using elements and techniques that come from other artistic realms – such as theatre, dance and installation art – and who nurture themselves with artistic experiences from outside the traditional genre of New Music.<sup>6</sup> For Walshe the term 'discipline' does not denote a new artistic discipline, but rather the rigour with which critical thinking is applied to the extra-musical by reconsidering it to be as important as the sonic element. While labels can be misleading, her New Discipline text has been instrumental in opening up paths for the discussion of these diverse practices, particularly because she includes artists outside the New Music niche. I want, however, to discuss similar multidisciplinary approaches to composition that have occurred within New Music in the past, in the hope that I can open up a deeper understanding of the current phenomena as a whole.

### The Historical Trace

Today, listening to music without seeing the intricacies of its performance is an almost everyday experience for us, but until recently, because instrumental performance was a necessary aspect of music consumption, it was hard to conceive of the consequences of a separation between what was seen and what was heard. Fascinating early attempts at non-local listening<sup>7</sup> were followed closely by radio broadcast. Recording technology not only made non-local listening possible, it also allowed the user to play back music at any time. But although these changes drastically modified the notion of the listener, the invisibility of performance did not trigger a desire in composers of the first half of the twentieth century to create works that specifically dealt with these issues.

The advent of electronic music in the 1950s was a catalyst for a change in perspective. Pieces produced in the studio were later played back in concert, with no performance actions whatsoever. As a reaction, new forms of expression in which the gestural and visual actions that are inherent to music-making were examined. John Cage summarised this in a 1961 interview with Roger Reynolds:

I think that the most important thing to do with electronic music now is to somehow make it theatrical, and not through such means as turning the lights out, but rather through introducing live performance elements. That is to say, people actually doing things ... the actual, visible manipulation of the machines'.<sup>8</sup>

Among the many artists who contributed to this movement, Mauricio Kagel's work in Cologne on what he called 'instrumental theatre' was

<sup>6</sup> Walshe, Jennifer. 'The New Discipline', 2016. Jennifer Walshe's website, <http://milker.org/the-new-discipline/> (accessed September 21, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> e.g. Cahill's Telharmonium and the Théâtrophone in Paris.

<sup>8</sup> John Cage, 'John Cage: Interview with Roger Reynolds', in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, ed. Elliott Schwartz and Barney Childs (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), pp. 335–48.

salient within New Music, and influential overall. Moved by the need to recover what had been lost in Western classical music – the visual nature of Music, the physicality of the performer – he focused on the gestural elements of music making and the choreographies that are inherent to the concert experience. For instance, in *Sonant*, Kagel articulates a characteristically New Music irony, requiring the performers to make movements that produce little sound, thus contrasting the magnitude of the performance actions with their acoustic result. Yet after the heyday of this approach in the 1960s and 70s,<sup>9</sup> the emphasis on physicality decreased or, at least, became peripheral. In the first decades of the twenty-first century, however, it has re-emerged.

### The Return of Choreography and Gesture

Simon Steen-Andersen's work series *Next to Beside Besides* (2003–06), showcases a compositional approach based in the performer's body: the physical movements required to play his solo cello piece *Beside Besides* are applied to a variety of other orchestral instruments for each of the pieces in the series. The performance notes read:

What if the composition was thought of as a choreography for musician and instrument – with sound as a consequence? Then the same piece would sound completely different on instruments with different relations between movement and sound. And would it then be the same piece at all?<sup>10</sup>

While this example asks musicians for nothing other than the exact movements they ordinarily make in performance, other composers have gone further. Falk Hübner has conducted the most methodical research on the subject and has suggested a taxonomy for these approaches, classifying them either as an *extension* or *reduction* of performative tasks: whether the musicians are asked to add *additional* tasks to their normal performance practice, or to *remove* movements, instruments or expressions.<sup>11</sup>

Reflecting on what Hübner would label *extension*, Shlomowitz names it the 'Automaton Approach'. In his view, whereas earlier works that required musicians to perform theatrical roles well beyond their professional reach often had rather naïve results (e.g. Kagel's *Atem*), in the last two decades composers have reached a higher level of maturity by drawing on the physical abilities inherent to music performers, such as performing synchronised gestures. In Shlomowitz's *Letter Pieces* (2007) gestures executed by performers do not necessarily have a direct sonic consequence, as they are often mute. However, they are frequently scored in a one-to-one relationship with a sound produced by another performer, in a practice arguably modelled after the one-to-one relationship that is typical of instrumental performance. Shlomowitz creates artificial relationships and gives them the illusion of credibility by repeating them, only to break them later: his work deals with couplings, de-couplings and re-couplings.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See Paul Craenen, *Composing under the Skin: The Music-making Body at the Composer's Desk* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2014) for a detailed historical account and extensive commentary.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Steen-Andersen, *Next To Beside Besides for amplified solo instruments or ensembles*, 2004. Simon Steen-Andersen's website, [www.simonsteenandersen.dk/NTBB-family-eng.htm](http://www.simonsteenandersen.dk/NTBB-family-eng.htm) (accessed 21 September 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Falk Hübner, *Shifting Identities: The Musician as Theatrical Performer* (Utrecht: HKU Research Centre Performative Processes, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Shlomowitz, 'Der Spieler als Automat', *MusikTexte* 149 (May 2016). English version: 'The Automaton Approach', <http://musiktexte.de/WebRoot/Store22/Shops/>

These pieces by Shlomowitz and Steen-Andersen are excellent examples of the application of compositional ideas to performers' bodies but they do not use technology, except marginally, in the case of Shlomowitz's use of a sampler. In this sense they captured something of the need to recover the visual in a visually oriented world with remarkable insight and execution, albeit with very simple means. For Steen-Andersen this focus on physicality and on the sonic consequences of imagined or prescribed actions situated his work within a realm in which his aesthetic could navigate toward more ambitious multidisciplinary approaches.

### Technological Expansion: Hybrid Spaces, Hybrid Instruments, Hybrid Bodies

In Steen-Andersen's *Piano Concerto* (2014), we see the exploration of *virtual* ultra-extended instrumental techniques through the use of standard piano sounds contrasted with sounds from a destroyed piano. In concert, the latter is seen in the form of a projection of Nicholas Hodges, the soloist who is also performing live on a 'healthy' piano, sitting at the destroyed piano. The documentation of the piano destruction is shown on a second screen, accompanying certain passages of the music; sections of an eight-metre free fall, shot in slow-motion, are projected forwards and backwards at different speeds. In this way, *stage space* and *instrumental technique* become part of the composition.

Other artists, such as Brigitta Muntendorf, have focused on the *expanded space*. In her piece *Public Privacy*, she explores the intimacy of online instrumental music learning typical of the twenty-first century. In the first three numbers of this series, she deals with 'the phenomenon of *covering*', or 'the transformation of the private youtube-living room into a public stage and happening',<sup>13</sup> by projecting fragments of user-generated performances alongside a live performer.

The expansion of bodies, instruments and spaces via technological means has been the central theme of the output of Stefan Prins, whose PhD composition portfolio was entitled *Hybrid Bodies in Hybrid Spaces*.<sup>14</sup> In *Generation Kill* he makes 'invisible technologies visible' by focussing on a non-classical instrument, the game console joystick, referencing the use of these devices during the Iraq War to remotely drop bombs from drones.<sup>15</sup> During *Generation Kill*, joysticks are used by four performers who, facing the stage, control audio material and video pre-recordings of four musicians performing on stage. While the pre-recorded videos consist of instrumental actions by the performers, the whole setup of the piece is a recreation of the hybrid reality that is characteristic of contemporary society. Not only has a significant portion of socialisation shifted to the internet, wars are now also remote, fought by digital natives who expertly manipulate the instruments that are trademarks of their upbringing. The subversive and revelatory qualities of *Generation Kill* lie in the presentation of hybrid realities as unquestionable and irreversible.

Multiple relationships can be traced between the real and the virtual. Throughout his work, Alexander Schubert has explored this,

[dc91cfee-4fdc-41fe-82da-0c2b88528c1e/MediaGallery/Shlomowitz.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298218000359) (accessed 21 September 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Brigitta Muntendorf, *Public Privacy #4 Leap in the dark* | english version, 2015. Brigitta Muntendorf's website, [www.brigitta-muntendorf.de/public-privacy-4-leap-in-the-dark-english-version/](http://www.brigitta-muntendorf.de/public-privacy-4-leap-in-the-dark-english-version/) (accessed 21 September 2017).

<sup>14</sup> Stefan Prins, 'Hybrid Bodies in Hybrid Spaces' (PhD portfolio, Harvard University).

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Eckle, Extract from programme book for 'Forum Neuer Musik 2014', Deutschlandfunk.

paying particular attention to gestural movements. In his earlier pieces he used wearable sensors to investigate the relationship between humans and technology. His more recent work, *Hello*, includes a video projection in which he sits in his living room performing a series of bodily gestures (e.g. a tennis stroke, eating a snack). The open score lets the performers choose sounds to correspond with each of the gestures, within certain guidelines. Schubert appears as a virtual gesture-maker who directs the live musicians. By conducting the ensemble from his living room, Schubert expands the notion of the stage, inviting the audience into his own 'personal world'.<sup>16</sup>

Because of their use of custom digital signal processing techniques and their reflection on contemporary topics or media, these compositions by Steen-Andersen, Muntendorf, Prins and Schubert are unquestionably works that bear the signature of their time. The effects of the Digital Revolution are palpable both instrumentally and conceptually. On the one hand, powerful yet affordable technologies enlarge the toolkit available to the composer; on the other hand, the effect of these technologies in societal change becomes a topic for the composers' reflection. The characteristics of the machine are explored, its transparency as well as its deceptions. Overall, the engagement with new technologies, with their socio-cultural implications and with contemporary realities is an antidote to the inward focus of New Music. This results in a change of focus and a letting go of the compositional methodologies implicitly or explicitly prescribed within the frontiers of New Music ghettos.

### Strategies for Audiovisual Composition

The risk of incorporating video into a musical work is that the image takes precedence and distracts the listener from the music. Michael Beil's solution is to make the video 'part of the conceptual strategy of an audiovisual composition',<sup>17</sup> by making music and video doublings of each other, two layers with the same strategy. In many pieces, Beil has drawn from the choreographies inherent in instrumental performance and then extended them with small dramatic actions such as walking, hat tipping, or performing fake percussion strokes. The musicians are usually seen performing these gestures in the extended space of the video projection, itself subject to the same strategies present in the music: for instance, speeding up and slowing down.<sup>18</sup> The audience's attention constantly shifts between the observation of real-life performers and their duplicates or virtual counterparts – an experience akin to socialisation in our image-mediated society.

Audiovisual compositions relate to musical topics in a variety of ways. In articulating visuals and audio, a procedural strategy imprints macro- and micro-formal elements of the visual and musical layers with a single overarching principle. For instance, in Beil's *exit to enter* (2013), the choice of visual material (a collection of gestures executed by performers and captured by live camera) seems to be guided by their function within the work as a whole, rather than by the

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Schubert, *Hello*, for flexible group of instruments, live-electronics and video. Performance notes. 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Michael Beil, 'AV – Music and Video', *eContact! Online Journal for Electroacoustic Practices* 13 no. 2 (2011), [http://econtact.ca/13\\_2/beil\\_AV.html](http://econtact.ca/13_2/beil_AV.html) (accessed 21 September 2017).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Beil, 'Material Shift', in *Musical Material Today*, ed. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Frank Cox, and Wolfram Schurig (Hofheim: Wolke Verlag, 2012), pp. 9–20.

semantical implications of each action. In Beil's view, the important properties of material 'lie in the medial domain; . . . the specific material composers choose to use and the structural contexts in which they place it are no longer decisive for the success of their music'.<sup>19</sup> This leads him to use quotations, particularly those which can be 'quickly recognized and quickly forgotten',<sup>20</sup> as the most effective way to produce carriers for his strategies.

Other approaches are more concerned with the semantic implications of the scenes portrayed. While, on the surface, Schubert's audiovisual messages are mostly structured around common cues for visuals and audio – a one-to-one approach that could arguably be described as *audiovisual sampling* (especially in his piece *Sensate Focus*) – Schubert seeks 'a balance' between the rigid rules he establishes and the possibility of breaking them as he 'gets bored' with these static relationships. It is here that narrative elements come to the foreground. For instance, in *Hello* the video shows Schubert prank-calling his neighbours, uploading a video of the performance of the piece to YouTube, and telling the audience how the piece will end in an interview about the work in progress. In this way, the piece is self-reflective, both in itself and about New Music as a whole.

In my piece *El libro de los flasheos*, music, video and drama are articulated using a similar strategy, but one that is semantic rather than procedural. The music, video and text question hierarchies and the status quo in society and art: the music by blending recent Western classics with popular music; the theatrical gestures and the video by portraying sacred poses of Christian iconography alongside remakes of 1990s MTV-style music videos; the text by offering a version of the Bible in the language of the streets.

### Distribution and Consumption of New Music in the Twenty-First Century

Schubert's portrayal of the YouTube upload as part of the compositional process is an acknowledgement of the fact that, as Walshe points out, 'digital documentations can have a supremacy over live performances'.<sup>21</sup> Schubert is aware of this and post-produces the documentation of his own performances, adding an additional compositional layer by performing further video edits and combining the documentation material with the source video files used for live projections to deliver a distinct YouTube experience.<sup>22</sup> The composer now has potentially two spaces for which she is composing at the same time for every piece: the concert hall and the internet.

Changes in distribution naturally result in a change in the way art-makers consume art themselves. This idea is present in Walshe's text: while the ancestors inhabited high-art niches like Dada, Fluxus or Situationism, much of what 'has happened since then' inhabits more mainstream or pop domains. This signals an engagement with a culture far wider than academic composition. The restructuring of power within New Music institutions that has been the outcome of the Digital Revolution has opened up spaces for aesthetics that are not

<sup>19</sup> Beil, 'Material Shift', p. 9.

<sup>20</sup> Beil, 'Material Shift', p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Walshe, 'The New Discipline'.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander Schubert, HELLO (Remake), Decoder Ensemble. Available on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BZ0V2LJdI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BZ0V2LJdI) (accessed 21 September 2017).

concerned with a sense of belonging but rather draw freely on the diversity of hyper-information.

### Fast-paced work and composers as performers

In New Music composers increasingly include themselves as actor-performers – a practice I undertook in *El libro de los flasheos*, in which I performed as actor-narrator. I made voice-over recordings to accompany the music and as I began to manipulate these recordings it became clear that my voice was part of the piece. Later I developed a concept for the video that required an actor-narrator to recite portions of the same text I had used for the voice-over recordings. Matching the voice of the live actor with the voice-over recordings was the most organic solution, so I took on the role of the actor. In such cases the multidisciplinary nature of the compositional approach goes beyond the standard roles of concert music and pragmatic decision-making may result in the composer's involvement in the performance of their own work.

While Walshe agrees that extended concert music practice is 'always working against the clock, because the realms from which it draws have the luxury of development and rehearsal periods far longer than those commonly found in new music',<sup>23</sup> her assiduous composer-performer practice is not necessarily based on pragmatic decisions. Walshe notes that she doesn't fully ascribe to the dominant model of Western concert music, under which composers create works that many people can perform. She instead creates music for her own voice, a practice common in the pop world. Nevertheless, Walshe's practice involves notation so other people can perform her music – a phenomenon she refers to as *covering*.

### Performability in Electronic Music

The technical and socioeconomic changes triggered by the Digital Revolution have changed perspectives among art-makers in general, and New Music composers in particular, and resulted in a new artistic practice. This change is akin to the one that occurred after the advent of electronic music. In the 1950s and 60s the disappearance of the performer from the stage of electroacoustic concerts led to work which engaged with physicality and theatricality. Today the supremacy of the visual image and the availability of affordable instruments to manipulate the virtual space have also resulted in a focus on the visible aspects of music-making. Works in which procedures that are fundamental to electronic music can be experienced visually imbue electronic sounds with a new sense of corporeality.

### *El libro de los flasheos*

My work, *El libro de los flasheos* (The Book of Trippin') for string quartet, narrator, live and fixed electronics and video, was commissioned by Centro de Experimentación Teatro Colón and premiered in June 2016 in Buenos Aires by Cuarteto UNTREF. As the programme notes say:

*El libro de los flasheos* (The Book of Trippin') is a composition for string quartet, electronics, narration and video inspired in the aesthetic, the compositional

<sup>23</sup> Walshe, 'The New Discipline'.



procedures and the spirit of democratization of hip-hop.

The text by Santiago Llach revisits the most symbolic chapter of the most successful work in the history of literature – the Bible – and adapts it to the street language of Buenos Aires (and Los Angeles). Therefore, I worked with two symbols of hegemonic culture: one for its ethics, the Book of Revelations, and one for its aesthetics, a string quartet. Their words, imagery and sounds, are recycled and re-contextualized with a knowledgeable but anti-snobbish approach.

We see Sal and Crazy John reading from the *El libro de los flasheos* (Book of Trippin') and rapping the message from the Man Upstairs to the seven hoods of Los Angeles with a playlist built from the digital age's Babel Library of Music: we hear electronic and algorithmic music, jazz, tango and noise.<sup>24</sup>

The use of sampling techniques is evidence of the influence the hip-hop tradition has had on me. I am primarily moved by the genre's expression of the social and political concerns of the Black community and its ability to create music from borrowed material. The use of borrowed material allows me to articulate musical discourses in which sound semantics have a prominent role. I place a special emphasis on the *meaning* of the sound, not as an isolated object for aural appreciation but as something imbued with narratives and cultural connotations. In *El libro de los flasheos* sounds that are idiosyncratic to New Music coexist with sounds and musical morphologies associated with other musical experiences; thus, both types of sounds become *referential*. I use this method to articulate a critique of the state of New Music in the early twenty-first century. The main purpose of the piece is to debunk the myths both of the post-war tradition of New Music and of the Book of Revelations, positioning New Music as a myth that must be destroyed in order to re-invent itself.

### The Music

The music references certain styles to provoke the expectation in the listener of certain *hybridisations*. These are not explored in depth or intended to generate a crossover aesthetic; instead *referentiality* is the underlying strategy of the conceptual narrative, a strategy implemented by the use of style clichés. Examples of this are the filter-sweeping at 4:57<sup>25</sup> and the vocoder-like treatment of the voice at 4:45, both typical in electronic dance music, as well as Dave Crow's beatbox sounds (0:00–1:00 and throughout the piece, often as a rhythmic section to Tom Johnson's *Chord Catalogue* harmonies). Bartok's fourth string quartet (6:20), a passage of abstract pitch-free graphic notated sounds (12:20), Lachenmann's second string quartet (7:20 and throughout the piece, briefly accompanying a manipulated version of John Coltrane's solo on 'Moment's Notice' at 14:47) are deployed either as clichés or as glorified objects from the New Music tradition. They are then destroyed (particularly the Bartok passage), presented ironically, or deconstructed.

Towards the end, after an abundance of sampling techniques have been presented, the aesthetic of the piece is conceptually closer to a *remix* aesthetic in sections T–U, and is structured with samples of the piece itself. To reinforce this idea, when combining these *self-referential* samples with samples of the composition *Desde el alma*

<sup>24</sup> Federico Llach, Programme notes for *El libro de los flasheos* (The Book of Trippin'). [www.federicollach.com/filter/composer/El-libro-de-los-flasheos-The-book-of-trippin](http://www.federicollach.com/filter/composer/El-libro-de-los-flasheos-The-book-of-trippin) (accessed 21 September 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Federico Llach, *El libro de los flasheos* (The Book of Trippin'), Cuarteto Untref. Available on YouTube, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK2YGV6P79Q](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JK2YGV6P79Q) (accessed 21 September 2017). All time cues refer to this source.

(by the Argentine-Uruguayan composer Rosita Melo), I first created an audio sample that was itself a collage made with different instrumental versions of this waltz-tango. These hybrids are not explored in depth because the semantic narrative is more important than the structure. The fundamental meaning of the piece is that New Music need not face inward or be based on its own sonic tradition; instead it can face outward and relate to elements of contemporary culture and society.

### The Text

Similarly, the text of *El libro de los flasheos*, written by Santiago Llach and Carlos Godoy, uses everyday language to amplify the narratives of the Book of Revelations. References are made to contemporary characters: the football players Palermo, Ortega, Maradona and Pelé, and journalists Victor Hugo Morales and Jorge Lanata; or, in the L.A. adaptation, basketball players Kobe Bryant and LeBron James, musicians Kanye West, Beyoncé and Motorhead's Lemmy, and Star Wars' Darth Vader.

### Audiovisual Strategies, Body and Space Expansions

The semantic narrative draws together the video, developed in collaboration with Gaby Goldberg, the text and the music to desacralise established discourses. The narrator and video do this through gestures and objects typical of Christian iconography, both on stage and in the video (1–3.20), and the manipulation and destruction of orchestral instruments. The narrator also holds a book at the beginning of the piece – implicitly the titular Book of Trippin' – and later, implicitly, the Book of Revelations (6.45–7.45). Elsewhere the video invokes an MTV music video aesthetic, with narrator/singer/MC rapping lyrics directly to camera with California's endless suburbs as backdrop (9–12.45). The third section of the video (16:34–20:00), showing scenes in the workshops and corridors of Teatro Colón, manipulates the audience's sense of expectation: will the narrator come back to the scene?

I prefer not to dictate the relationship between visuals and sound. I draw from strategies that have proven to be effective, such as the strategy of couplings and de-couplings between gestures seen and sounds heard. All the layers are connected, however, because they express the same meaning. If a listener does not grasp all the details the main idea will still come through. At 6:18, for example, a sense of destruction is intended by the quotation of chords from Bartok's fourth string quartet in the midst of a multitude of samples. Later, in the video, the narrator rips pages from that same score; the title is legible. A sense of body expansion and concert space expansion are created in the first part (1–7.45) of the work by having the narrator both on stage and in the video, in the same attire. The space expands further in the middle portion of the video to include Southern California's iconic urban sprawl (9–12.45). In the last portion (16:34–20:00), the space expands again, 'breaking the fourth wall' to include the theatre's rehearsal spaces and corridors.

### Conclusion

In the opening paragraphs of this article I argued that New Music has excessively focused inwards, that critical thinking in New Music has

been applied to the selected corpus of sounds that belong to its own tradition. Multidisciplinary approaches to composition and referentiality are possible solutions to this problem.

We are living in times of change – technological, political and interpersonal –and change can be both exciting and frightening. In the past, artists have responded to agitated times by urgently referencing the new realities in their work, by taking its raw elements and placing them ‘in your face’. Multidisciplinary composition is demanding, and referencing reality takes courage, as it has a higher risk of coming across as low-fi in comparison to more established cultural artefacts. I type these lines into the dystopian and all-encompassing container of private and public information called the internet: we can make art with this mess.