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THE INSTRUMENTALISED CONDUCTOR

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Abstract: This article explores ways in which artistic directors and composers of new music ensembles have developed and redefined the role of the conductor to achieve specific goals and fulfil musical and artistic need. It will explore various manners in which they have instrumentalised the conductor – literally an embodied role – and opened new possibilities for musical expression. The analysis and examples provided will rely for the most part on material gathered during in-depth interviews conducted with artistic directors, composers, conductors and musicians who are professionally active in the new music field in Europe and beyond. The article endeavours to bring into greater detail artistic and socio-economic motivations for utilising conductors in new music ensembles.

Foreword

While preparing to write this article, I found myself needing to formulate a few definitions. In these pages, I will often refer to 'conductors', 'new music' and 'instrumentalisation' (or forms thereof). All three can be considered broadly and applied across several spectrums, and they depend on context for their specific definitions. Unless otherwise specified, the conductors to whom I refer are those specialised in working with contemporary music ensembles, and they have all (both ensembles and conductors) arisen out of the Western art music tradition and perform integrative concerts.[1] New music refers to music written since 1950 within the Western art music tradition, mostly ensemble music; I make it clear when it means something other than this. My spell-checker does not even recognise, finally, 'instrumentalisation'. Wiktionary.org defines the verb as 'making [something] into an instrument for achieving a goal'.[2] In their paper on digital musical instruments, Giuseppe Torre and Kristina Andersen designate instruments as 'personalized tools developed and continuously redefined by the artist to fulfil artistic and musical need'. Further, they state that 'instruments… provide integrated and embodied possibilities for musical expression'.[3] This article will delve into the ways in which artistic directors and composers have 'personally developed', redefining

[1] Integrative concerts, such as video, light and sound design (for example, live electronics), decor and the utilisation of a conductor, are all integral parts of the concert programming.
[2] https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/instrumentalize.
[3] Giuseppe Torre and Kristina Andersen, 'Instrumentality, Time and Perseverance', In: Bovermann T., de Campo A., Egermann H., Hardjowirogo SI., Weinzierl S. (eds) *Musical Instruments in the 21st Century* (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd, 2017).

the role of the conductor to achieve specific goals and 'fulfil artistic and musical need'. I will explore various manners in which they have instrumentalised the conductor, literally an 'embodied' role, and opened new 'possibilities for musical expression'.

Introduction

Wim Henderickx, a Belgian composer and conductor, summarily stated during our interview, 'The function of a conductor now depends on the project'.[4] He continued in a vein that many composers and artistic directors expressed during our interviews, namely that conductors of new music are often utilised and applied as instruments. Pieter Matthynssens, artistic co-director of Nadar ensemble goes even further, declaring that 'you can only do something with a conductor if there is an artistic need for one'.[5] In other words, if a conductor is present, that represents an active choice.

For example, composer and artistic co-director of Nadar ensemble Stefan Prins described his deployment of the conductor in his piece *Third Space* (2018) as follows:

> The other reason we have the conductor out front at the beginning, turned around to face the audience was because we wanted to create this feeling of intimacy. Normally the audience cannot see his face. It's the privacy and the privilege of the orchestra. By turning that around he suddenly becomes very vulnerable. This vulnerability gave us a way to create a feeling of intimacy. It made it possible early on in the piece (and the process, too) to ask the questions, 'What is privacy?' And, 'What is intimacy?' In that sense, we instrumentalized the conductor.[6]

As part of my doctoral research, I had the good fortune to meet and interview a diverse array of professionals in the new music field. I talked with 30 composers, conductors, artistic directors and musicians across Europe in an attempt to gain new and first-hand information on the artistic and socio-economic motivations for utilising conductors in new music ensembles. During and after the interviews, it became clear that artistic directors and composers have instrumentalised (the role of) the conductor. This article, organised in two parts, will synthesise those interviews and describe the various ways in which conductors have been deployed. The first section will focus on how the conductor's physicality has been manipulated directly, the second on how the conductor is utilised to shape others.

The moving conductor

Conductors and musicians in general are moving figures on stage. They are performers who must utilise movements to generate and stimulate the sounds that audiences perceive as music. Composers and artistic directors today have grown more aware of conductors' repertoire of performative and everyday movements. They are utilising it as artistic stimuli and framing it to enhance the audience's perception of a piece or programme. During our interview, composer Simon Steen-Andersen described how he deployed the 'image of the conductor to play on the audience's expectations' in his piece *Black* Box M*usic* (2012), for performer, amplified box, spatialised

[4] Wim Henderickx, interview, 22 January 2020.
[5] Pieter Matthynssens, interview, 21 January 2020.
[6] Stefan Prins, interview, 23 August and 10 November 2019.

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sinfonietta and video.[7] He explained that this kind of usage had already surfaced in one of his earlier works for small ensemble, *AMID* (2004):

> For me, the conductor also gives a focus in a concert and even gives fullness to long silences, puts them into context. Sometimes a conductor can even make the difference between [a silence] being too long and actually being just a long break. The fact that you can see that time is still continuing – and maybe even just see that since it's still being beaten, we are not yet at the end. You [the audience] know it's going to continue and [the conducting] becomes a different part of the music, creating some kind of tension.[8]

In my conversation with Matthynssens we also talked about redeploying a conductor to frame silences in *EXIT F* (2011–12), by Michael Maierhof, for ensemble and four hot-air balloons:

> It's interesting to me that we now consider bringing back a conductor after having removed it from the line-up. Originally we did do it with a conductor because all the musicians were together on one stage. This was great for music making. However, now I really like the spatialised setup [with the musicians spread out on eight stages surrounding the public] and probably wouldn't accept it if we had to do it on one stage again. That said, I found it really interesting to see how the silences were perceived in *Zonen 6* (2018, Michael Maierhof) when you conducted it. So now we've started to think about re-integrating the conductor [in *EXIT F*] but just to give the silences. [laughs] A conductor not to get the musicians together, but just to hold the tension of the silence, to show the audience that the piece continues and to show the ending. With a conductor you feel when a piece has begun and when it has ended. They clearly provide a frame.[9]

Steen-Andersen and Matthynssens demonstrate a willingness, even eagerness, to use a conductor for artistic reasons that are not purely musical. Their motivations rest on conductors' movement repertoire and the audience's perceived visual appreciation of it. The conductor, while using traditional and understandable body language and conventional conducting gestures, is being utilised to physically frame measured and unmeasured silences in their pieces and programmes.[10]

Composer Alexander Schubert has written a series of four pieces that he calls 'sensor' pieces.[11] In each of these pieces, in his words, he 'designed [something] that would put intuitive control into the hands of the musician as an expressive tool'.[12] The fourth piece in this series is *Point Ones* (2012), for augmented conductor and small ensemble. The conductor has two accelerometers, one attached to each wrist. His or her gestures are mapped electronically and in real time trigger live electronics. This augmentation causes a palpable tension on stage between the conductor's role as an ensemble conductor and a movement-based soloist. Like Steen-Andersen, Maierhof and Matthynssens, Schubert has utilised a conductor in *Point Ones* because he or she is a moving figure. Instead of framing silences, Schubert deploys the conductor's gestures to trigger electronics and question the role itself:

> Is the [conductor's] movement directed towards the musicians or towards the computer – or doesn't it go anywhere?... I also like to think about where the

[7] Simon Steen-Andersen, interview, 10 November 2019.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Pieter Matthynssens, interview, 21 January 2020.
[10] Thomas R. Moore, 'Conducting Silence: The Use of Conducted and Measured Silences in Michael Maierhof's *Zonen 6* for Guitar Orchestra (2007–2008, 2018)', in *FORUM+* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2019).
[11] Schubert's sensor pieces: *Laplace Tiger* (2009), *Weapon of Choice* (2009), *Your Fox's a Dirty Gold* (2011) and *Point Ones* (2012).
[12] Alexander Schubert, interview, 3 March 2020.

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> gesture is directed, this communicative aspect of it: what does the gesture want to tell me? And what is it linked to in meaning?[13]

Specific conducting gestures are universally recognisable, and their meanings, although open to interpretation, are in a broad sense also universal. For example, many interviewees indicated that a conductor's downbeat is recognisable as a starting point. The gesture is a downward motion made with one or both hands with an ictus (perceivable bounce) at the lowest point of the movement. Specifically, the ictus itself is recognisable as the exact point at which a beat begins. The interviewees agreed that we could expect that within the context of an art music performance both the audience and the musicians would recognise this gesture as a beginning.

This gesture, the downbeat, can be found at many points in Alexander Khubeev's *Ghost of Dystopia* (2014), a work for conductor-soloist and ensemble. Khubeev deploys downbeats both functionally and non-functionally, demonstrating a motivation to utilise a conductor for visual reasons. In this piece, the conductor is literally bound to a composer-designed instrument, and every gesture, willingly made or not, creates a variable multiphonic.[14] The composer, using gesture-based notation, wrote a part specifically for the conductor, choreographing every gesture. Each movement results in a specific generation of sound. In summary, Khubeev has directly employed conducting gestures as a tool for his artistic goals, both visual and aural.

This attention to the conductor's gestures, their choreography and their appearance to the audience was eloquently described by percussionist, conductor and concert organiser Tom De Cock:

> Conducting is like percussion for me. Every small thing that you do, everybody sees it. If I put a stick down in the wrong way, everybody sees it. It can be clumsy. This is something I took with me to conducting. Every small detail that I do or give, it also has to be beautiful. Perhaps not beautiful, it can be awkward, as well. But it must be thought through and have intention – like a dancer.[15]

In 2018, Stefan Prins collaborated with choreographer Daniel Linehan on *Third Space*, an integrated piece for dancers, ensemble, electronics and video. For the first part of the piece, they specifically cast the conductor in a solo role. The conductor for the premiere and throughout the creative process was Klangforum's principal guest conductor, Bas Wiegers, but, apart from the result-based notation in the score (time meters and sonic material), they did not choreograph any of his gestures. Instead they allowed themselves to be inspired by his movements and applied them towards specific actions in the dance. They did, however, instrumentalise the role itself. Prins and Linehan took the familiar performance ritual of the conductor standing with his or her back to the audience and literally turned Wiegers around. Instead of being able to directly share his physical expressions with the musicians, they were put on display for the audience. The musicians on stage were able to enjoy this view only through local video monitors. By instrumentalising the conductor in this fashion, they also intended to activate the 'third space' between the stage and the tribune. Stefan Prins described it as follows:

[13] Ibid.
[14] Alexander Khubeev: *Ghost of Dystopia* – Nadar ensemble: https://youtu.be/fpPTaMCQ3YY.
[15] Tom De Cock, interview, 22 October 2019.

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Figure 1:
Hiatus and Nadar ensemble performing *Third Space* by Prins and Linehan (photograph © Danny Willems)

> In *Third Space*, we, Daniel and I, first asked ourselves, 'what can a conductor give us?' The physicality of this conducting became something really important to that piece. Daniel and I chose him (Wiegers) to be the only physically present person in the first part [of the piece]. We had him facing the audience so that we could literally draw attention to his gestures. Instead of hiding them, we wanted to spotlight them. His movements then served as bridging material with what the dancers would do throughout the piece. The physicality of his gestures became part of the choreographed material. We weaponised his gestures.[16]

The artistic goal of each of the composers and artistic directors discussed above was to frame silences and pieces, generating sonic material, questioning the purpose of gesture and creating a level of intimacy. In each example, these actors employed a moving conductor and their recognisable conducting gestures. It is clear that they have used the (role of the) conductor as a tool. Torre and Andersen said of their use of digital interfaces that an artist has raised a tool to the level of an instrument when they have 'developed' and 'redefined' it for their artistic purpose. In *Third Space*, Prins and Linehan developed the conductor in two ways. First, they redefined the conductor's role in performance ritual by having the conductor perform typical responsibilities using recognisable conducting gestures, to show the beat, assist and cue musicians' entrances and sculpt musical phrases, though not in a manner that the audience is used to witnessing. The creators in this work have made the role more 'vulnerable' and invited an atypical familiarity to the conducted ensemble practice. Later in the piece, when the conductor is in a more conventional position, with his back to the tribune, a part of the audience is invited to take seats on the stage, once again privy to the typically exclusive communication between conductor and musician.

The second way in which they have developed the conductor is more directly related to gestures. Again, Wiegers' gestures were not choreographed: he was allowed and even encouraged to conduct in a functional manner. However, Prins and Linehan gave his gestures a redefined function as they became part of the dancers' choreography and role. During parts of the piece, the dancers' gestures so resemble Wiegers' conducting that one may begin to question who is really

[16] Stefan Prins, interview, 23 August and 10 November 2019.

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doing the physical conducting. The dancers' proximity to the musicians (they are staged very close to each other) also encourages greater than normal interaction between the conductor, dancer and musicians (see Figure 1). As the piece draws to a close, Wiegers takes on a less functional role towards the musicians and becomes one of the dancers himself, moving off stage and visible to the audience only through a live camera feed. There is a clear and developed arc in the conductor's role, and while Wiegers was deployed in a traditional sense to conduct musicians, his role was also clearly instrumentalised to reach Prins' and Linehan's artistic goals.

In *EXIT F*, both Matthynssens and Maierhof expressed an interest in reintegrating a conductor in the performance, not to organise the musicians, but as a tool to frame the piece and the silences within. In that case, the primary function would be redefined. Instead of being present to keep the band together, the conductor's gestures are deployed for a composer's and artistic director's broader artistic goals.

Perhaps the most blatant and explicit examples of composers redefining the role of the conductor can be found in Schubert's *Point Ones* and Khubeev's *Ghost of Dystopia*. In both pieces, the composers have literally deployed the conductor's gestures to generate their self-invented sonic material. Khubeev binds the conductor hand and foot to 'acoustic sensors', and every move has been strictly choreographed. Schubert, using WiiMotes, maps the conductor's moves to trigger live and prepared electronics. He too has choreographed the entire piece for the conductor. Of the two, *Point Ones* balances the conductor's role on a finer point. Schubert asks his conductor to use conventional and recognisable gestures to cue the musicians as well as 'cue' the electronics. His choreography is a combination that leans on the conventional duties of beating the written pattern to activate the electronic interface. During our interview Schubert said that 'the visual or performative gestural aspect of it, I found as important as the art. This is an integral part of the performance'.[17]

Schubert and Khubeev instrumentalised the conductor by redefining and expanding upon the purpose of the conductor's gesture and developed it to generate new sonic material and tell their artistic stories. Khubeev told me during the preparation of his piece that 'the more appearance of freedom he wanted to give to the musicians and make apparent to the audience, in fact, the more restricting [he made] it for them'.[18] In *Ghost of Dystopia,* the conductor does indeed break free of the composer's instrument, but the choreography grows stricter and more detailed as the piece progresses. The conductor is, without a doubt, Khubeev's instrument (see Figure 2).

The conductor moving

The previous section was about affecting the (role of the) conductor; this section is about applying the conductor to affect others, the ways in which conductors can redefine and develop creative situations like concerts and rehearsals. These ideas are not mutually exclusive, and I will cite some of the same pieces, composers and artistic directors, but view them through a different lens.

[17] Alexander Schubert, interview, 3 March 2020.
[18] Alexander Khubeev, interview, 27 March 2019.

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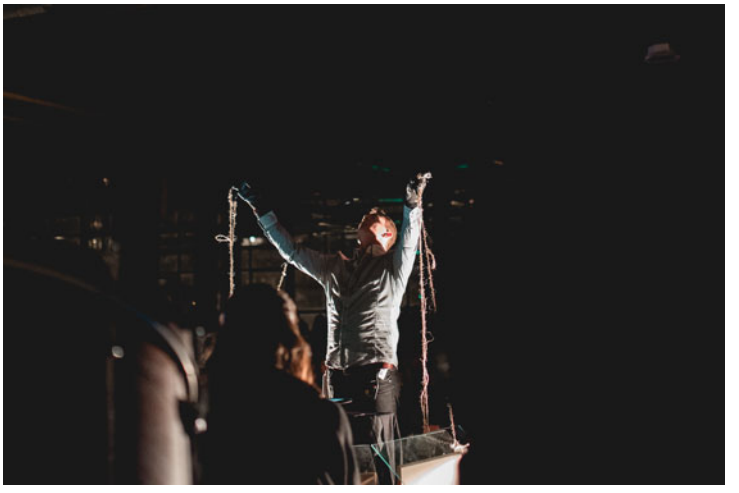

Figure 2:
Nadar ensemble performing Ghost of Dystopia by *Khubeev* (photograph © KlaraFestival)

Economics

In its broadest sense, 'the economy is defined as a social domain that emphasizes the practices, discourses, and material expressions associated with the production, use, and management of resources'.[19] There is a tradition of conducted new music ensembles in which the 'practices, discourses, and material expressions' would include the relationship between the musicians and a conductor, two of its 'resources'. This relationship is defined by certain keywords and key gestures. For example, as Paul Verhaege explains it in his book *Identity*, within a group of musicians, when one suggests that the music should be more *agitato* or when a conductor prepares and then gives a downbeat gesture, everyone will understand.[20] Without this tradition of conductors' and musicians' universally recognisable keywords and gestures, instrumentalising the conductor would be meaningless. It relies on the audience's understanding that there is a traditional relationship between the cue-giver (the conductor) and the cue-followers (the musicians). In this sense, economical utilisation can serve as a motivation for a composer or artistic director.[21]

Steen-Andersen deployed the 'image of conductor' to play on the audience's perception and expectations in *Black* Box M*usic*. It is 'a situation we all know… and the conductor is an official component of a concert', according to the composer.[22]

> I think there is a huge group of people who go to classical concerts for whom you could say a lot of what the conductor does on stage is recognisable to them. There is a second group of people who knows the situation from other places, like a Bugs Bunny cartoon, movies or television. And then I think there is a group that really doesn't have any relation to this. They, of course, know what a conductor is, but wouldn't necessarily know what a conductor does or what to expect. I think [Black Box Music] works on all three levels because of things like simultaneous-ness, togetherness, or even the opposite. In the piece there is a connection of gesture and sound – a thing of

[19] Paul James with Liam Magee, Andy Scerri and Manfred B. Steger, *Urban Sustainability in Theory and Practice: Circles of Sustainability* (London: Routledge, 2015).
[20] Paul Verhaege, *Identiteit* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2012).
[21] Thomas R. Moore, 'Hybrid Conductor', in the proceedings of the International Conference of Live Interfaces, March 2020.
[22] Simon Steen-Andersen, interview, 10 November 2019.

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> togetherness – because when two events happen at the same time, we tend to connect it.[23]

In Khubeev's *Ghost of Dystopia*, the choice to stage the soloist in a position that, given familiar performance ritual, causes the audience to consider that person to be the conductor demonstrates a motivation of economic considerations. The soloist stands centre-stage and is the focus of the musicians' arc. Khubeev further strengthens the impression that the soloist is a conductor by choreographing recognisable conducting gestures. *Ghost of Dystopia*, according to Khubeev, tells the story of a figure rising above his fellows to become a ruler, then dictator, then god. His story and instrumentalisation of the role of the conductor are dependent on the audience's understanding of the relationship between conductor (leader) and musicians (followers).

The terms 'economic' and 'economical motivations' can also be applied within a more narrow scope. Utilising a conductor will have an effect on the 'production, distribution, and consumption'[24] of resources such as available finances and time. Steen-Andersen indicated that the conductor can 'facilitate the rehearsal process' and 'save time'.[25] Carl Rosman, a member of the artistic committee and clarinettist for Ensemble Musikfabrik, described that as follows:

> The particular job for a rehearsal conductor in a piece like *Intermezzi* [by Aperghis] or *Delusion of the Fury* [by Partch]. . . is to streamline the rehearsal process more than, as one might assume, to conduct the rehearsals. There is some of that as well, but not so much in the sense of beating time since they're not going to be doing that in the performance anyway. It is 'conducting' more in the sense of centralising the discussion, so that it's not just a matter of each individual ensemble member piping up when they didn't like what we just did – each individual ensemble member saying STOP, we need to do this. When you are working with 15 or 16 players, then you really do need someone to centralise the discussion – some kind of focal point.[26]

In the situation Rosman describes, the conductors were employed not necessarily for artistic reasons such as interpretation or inspiration, but to serve as an organiser. During our conversation about the role of the rehearsal conductor, we talked about two of Musikfabrik's productions: *The Delusion of the Fury* (2013), with music by Harry Partch, and *Intermezzi* (2015/16) by Georges Aperghis. In both productions, a conductor was only present for the rehearsals; the performances were un-conducted, a decision made by the artistic direction as well as the composers.

When a conductor is, however, present for performances, it is representative of an affirmative choice made by the composer and/or the artistic director. Both Christof Löser (head of the new music studio at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst Stuttgart) and Wim Henderickx confirmed this trend and their teaching of it, According to Löser:

> I always try to discuss with my students in seminars and in my conducting class with the composers how music could and can be coordinated. Should it be coordinated? Which concepts already exist? Most often a conductor is used or the click track is used. However, I say this to demonstrate that I try to instil in them that in new music you have to find new ways of coordination. I try to show them music that already exists and work with some specific coordination

[23] Ibid.
[24] Merriam-Webster: www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/economic.
[25] Simon Steen-Andersen, interview, 10 November 2019.
[26] Carl Rosman, interview, 29 October 2019.

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techniques so that if they do use a conductor, it is a conscious choice and not a last resort.[27]

And Henderickx commented that:

> A conductor can also be someone who prepares a piece. It can also be someone who guides it, facilitates it. It's also a question that I ask of my composition students. What is the role of this person in front of this group? It is a kind of hierarchical situation that you create. Is this necessary? Because it's often rather old-school – not old-fashioned, but it's old-school, this idea that someone leads a group with a baton. Having a conductor can or should be a very natural decision, but you have to be aware of what the function is.[28]

Composer and performer Jessie Marino gave a causal explanation of the circumstances in which the presence of a conductor would be necessary:

> So my general thought is that when there's a lot of rhythmic information or there's more than four people on the stage, in order for rehearsals to be run efficiently, and for people to feel like there's a sense of communally felt time, we will have this person stand here to help run rehearsals, listen from an outsider's standpoint and give guidance. . .
>
> I think a lot more of conducting is about politics than it is about gestures. It is an organisation of community.[29]

Besides artistic responsibilities, we can see that the mantle of the conductor, though relieved of some functions, has also been imbued with economic responsibilities such as the planning, structuring and execution of rehearsals. Composer Michael Beil remarked during our interview that these economic duties do not require any 'hand-waving' and suggested that the scope of responsibilities of a modern conductor may actually have widened:

> They should have additional skills like technological, organisational, and curational skills, to name a few. And why shouldn't a conductor become a curator or the technician of an ensemble? Like you [Thomas], you are kind of the conductor of Nadar, but at the same time, you set up the stage. That's a modern conductor for me. Conductor means a leading person; a person with a leading role in the group. The conductor is not a good musician who has special skills with his or her hands. [The conductor] is a person of respect who knows a lot about what he or she should know a lot about. If he or she stands in front of an orchestra, he or she knows a lot about instruments and music history. If [a conductor] stands in front of a contemporary music ensemble, he or she knows a lot about technology, modern playing techniques, the special needs of composers and the special needs of presenters, too.[30]

In Beil's newest pieces, there is no conventional conductor standing in front of the ensemble. For synchronisation, the ensemble relies on a click-track. The duties of rehearsal management are spread between composer, artistic director and sometimes a rehearsalist. Matthynssens noted that for works of this nature, 'we need directors from the theatre instead of musical directors', implying that while an external voice may still be necessary, artistic, musical and physical leadership embodied in one person no longer is.[31]

The economic motivations for utilising a conductor described above are, broadly, a desire to affect, in one fashion or another, the audience's perception of the role, piece or programme and, more narrowly, to generate efficiency in the rehearsal process. Throughout Khubeev's

[27] Christof Löser, interview, 15 January 2020.
[28] Wim Henderickx, interview, 22 January 2020.
[29] Jessie Marino, interview, 10 November 2019.
[30] Michael Beil, interview, 10 October 2019.
[31] Pieter Matthynssens, interview, 21 January 2020.

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and Steen-Andersen's pieces, the solo-conductors perform conducting gestures that are non-functional, meaning that a disassociation grows between recognisable (and choreographed) conducting gestures and global sound presentation. Put more simply, a musician may not respond to a cue in the manner in which an audience might expect. That cue in Khubeev's piece generates sound all by itself. Steen-Andersen, through repetition, teaches his audience to connect gesture with sound so that when this 'gets off, there is a visual dissonance'.[32] Both composers have retooled the role of the conductor based upon their understanding of how that role is perceived by the audience. Without changing its physicality, they have developed the role further to meet their individual artistic goals by adapting or removing the function of certain gestures within conductors' movement repertoire. This demonstrates that both composers have instrumentalised the role of the conductor in their respective pieces for economic motivations.

Viewed in the narrow scope, the artistic direction of Ensemble Musikfabrik and Nadar ensemble as well as composers Beil and Marino utilised conductors for the efficacy of their rehearsal process. Rosman described the need for a focal point, a centralised figure to keep every nose pointed in the same direction, and Marino felt that a conductor was required to streamline the process and create a sense of community. Musikfabrik's redefinition is quite clear. They gave the figure in question a new title (rehearsal conductor) and deployed a trained conductor to meet their goals, an efficient and artistically productive rehearsal process. Beil and Matthynssens approach the role in a more à la carte fashion. They recognise that typically and inherently conductor-specific duties such as rehearsing and having a complete knowledge of the score and programme, as well as a comprehensive understanding of a composer's, presenter's and/or venue's requirements, all make up the performance practice of a conductor. However, this is not necessarily a package deal and instead the role should be instrumentalised on an individual, piece-to-piece basis, redefining the conductor each time to fit specific needs.

Arts

Composers and artistic directors also deliberately apply conductors to concert situations to centralise the spontaneity of a concert, create a 'tempo in space', or inspire their (fellow) performers. This may seem a banal statement but, viewed within the context of contemporary music ensembles that have attempted to democratise and decentralise their ensembles, the very presence of a conductor represents an affirmative choice.

Having considered economic motivations for choosing to instrumentalise the conductor, we will now delve into detailed artistic motivations.

Maierhof and I discussed the democratisation of ensembles and why, even in these situations, he usually chooses to use a conductor:

> The conductor, which I also really like about live performing situations, can get in a sort of feedback situation with the musicians and the audience. What I really appreciate from a conductor is that he or she feels the audience in his or her back and speeds up when it's necessary or slows down, or points out a certain passage – which is kind of a whole dramaturgy based on what the

[32] Simon Steen-Andersen, interview, 10 November 2019.

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> conductor feels on his or her back. That's the best optimum we have. And when it really succeeds, then you create something that you will never forget. There is a feeling of tension when you push to a point live, something that cannot be made in the studio alone.[33]

Henderickx remarked that in any concert situation in which he, as a composer, inserts a conductor, he anticipates that for the audience 'the conductor is the fixation point, the orientation point'.[34] The members of Decoder Ensemble are also aware of this centralising condition, but they consciously avoid it. Alexander Schubert explained their motivation: 'In the original self-definition of the ensemble, we considered ourselves more like a band rather than a chamber music ensemble; so this kind of directness of agency of a group of people addressing the audience rather than a group of people being managed by a conductor'.[35]

During our discussion on the influence conductors can have on the audience's perception of a piece, Löser described what he calls 'tempo in space', referring to the impression of time that is collectively palpable to an audience during a performance.[36] The particular pieces to which he applied this term were Maierhof's spatialised compositions. Often in these pieces, the conductor was purposely hidden from the audience, staged behind them. So the tempo the audience feels in space is not one that is perceived visually based on the conductor's gestures. It is instead a discernable feeling of collective tension that the players create. That tension, focused and unified by the conductor, is essential for the audience to discern the players' actions as performance.[37] Maierhof has thus redefined the conductor in two ways. First, for the audience, the conductor is only perceivable vicariously, through the performing musicians, because he has staged the conductor behind the audience. Second, Maierhof has developed and instrumentalised the conventional conductor's role to make discernable and coordinate shifts in the 'tempo in space' (see Figure 3).

The motivation to inspire performers is both simple and arduous to describe. It seems obvious: everyone wants their leader to inspire them. But do artistic directors or composers willingly employ a conductor specifically to arouse their musicians to greater heights? Dries Tack, clarinettist with both Nadar and the Curious Chamber Players, sees a clear division in the role of a conductor between rehearsals and concerts. He was quite adamant that conductors should still be employed to 'run the rehearsals' but felt that the concert situation demanded a less rigorously business-like approach:

> When the rehearsal process is over, I really want to have an overview of the piece, a sense of 'this is going to be okay'. During the concerts I especially want to receive energy from the conductor and also a kind of inspiration... But if a conductor were to try to inspire you during rehearsals, that would be exhausting. And if he would simply try to keep things together during a concert, I would find that too weak.[38]

[33] Thomas R. Moore, 'Twisting the Arm of Michael Maierhof: Composer, Performer, Concert Organiser', *TEMPO*, 75, no. 295 (2021), pp. 85–93 (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press). https://doi.org/10.1017/S0040298220000698.
[34] Wim Henderickx, interview, 22 January 2020.
[35] Alexander Schubert, interview, 3 March 2020.
[36] Christof Löser, interview, 15 January 2020.
[37] Thomas R. Moore, 'Conducting Silence: The Use of Conducted and Measured Silences in Michael Maierhof's *Zonen 6* for Guitar Orchestra (2007–2008, 2018)' in *FORUM+* (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2019).
[38] Dries Tack, interview, 19 August 2019. (Translation from Flemish by the author.)

Figure 3:
RCA guitar ensemble performing *Zonen 6* by Maierhof (photograph © Klub Katarakt)

An earnest willingness to hire a conductor or conductor-like figure for the purpose of inspiration surfaced during my conversation with Tom De Cock:

> It could be interesting to have someone in the conductor role but without conducting. I like to see the role more as an inspiring personality, but it doesn't have to be a traditional conductor. Personally, I like it when people inspire just by saying something. It doesn't have to be in the rehearsal process. It can be. But I have learned a lot more outside of the rehearsal than in it. Sometimes you can hear one sentence and that sentence can stay with you and be applied throughout many projects. This could come from a conductor in the old sense of the word, but now I see there are many people and roles that could do this too.[39]

Though the many interviewees appeared to express an interest in instrumentalising (the role of) the conductor to meet their artistic goal of inspiring their (fellow) musicians, no specific examples were forthcoming. However, Stefan Prins did share one small story with which I would like to close this thought:

> I actually have talked a little with Bas [Wiegers] about how and if conductors perform during rehearsals. Conducting is very much about seducing, too. Seducing the performers to do the best they can. It's a flexible word, but somehow when you communicate with someone and want to convince that person of something, you have to seduce that person. It's not a sexual seduction, but it is somehow part of your energy and in the communication.[40]

Conclusion

For the musicians, artistic directors and composers cited above, the presence of the conductor at a rehearsal or a concert is not a secondary phenomenon of the music, but evidence of a deliberate choice made by one or all of these actors. That had become clear to me prior to, and was sharpened by, the interviews. However, I wanted to delve deeper and explore whether the deployment of the conductor could be raised from the level of a tool to that of an instrument. Andersen and Torre in their paper on digital musical instruments provided the means with which to test that question and word it more

[39] Tom De Cock, interview, 22 October 2019.
[40] Stefan Prins, interview, 23 August and 10 November 2019.

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specifically. I have argued, through the statements made during in-depth interviews, that in specific situations composers and artistic directors have retooled, redefined and continue to develop (the role of) the conductor to meet their artistic and socio-economic goals. They have instrumentalised and affected the conductor directly and physically for various motivations that include framing silences and pieces, generating sonic material, questioning the purpose of gesture and creating a level of intimacy. Those same actors have also applied conductors to redefine and develop creative situations like concerts and rehearsals and were motivated to do so by both economic and artistic considerations.

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