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L'IMPROVISATION MUSICALE

Mise en regard des pratiques de l'improvisation dans
la musique iranienne et dans le jazz

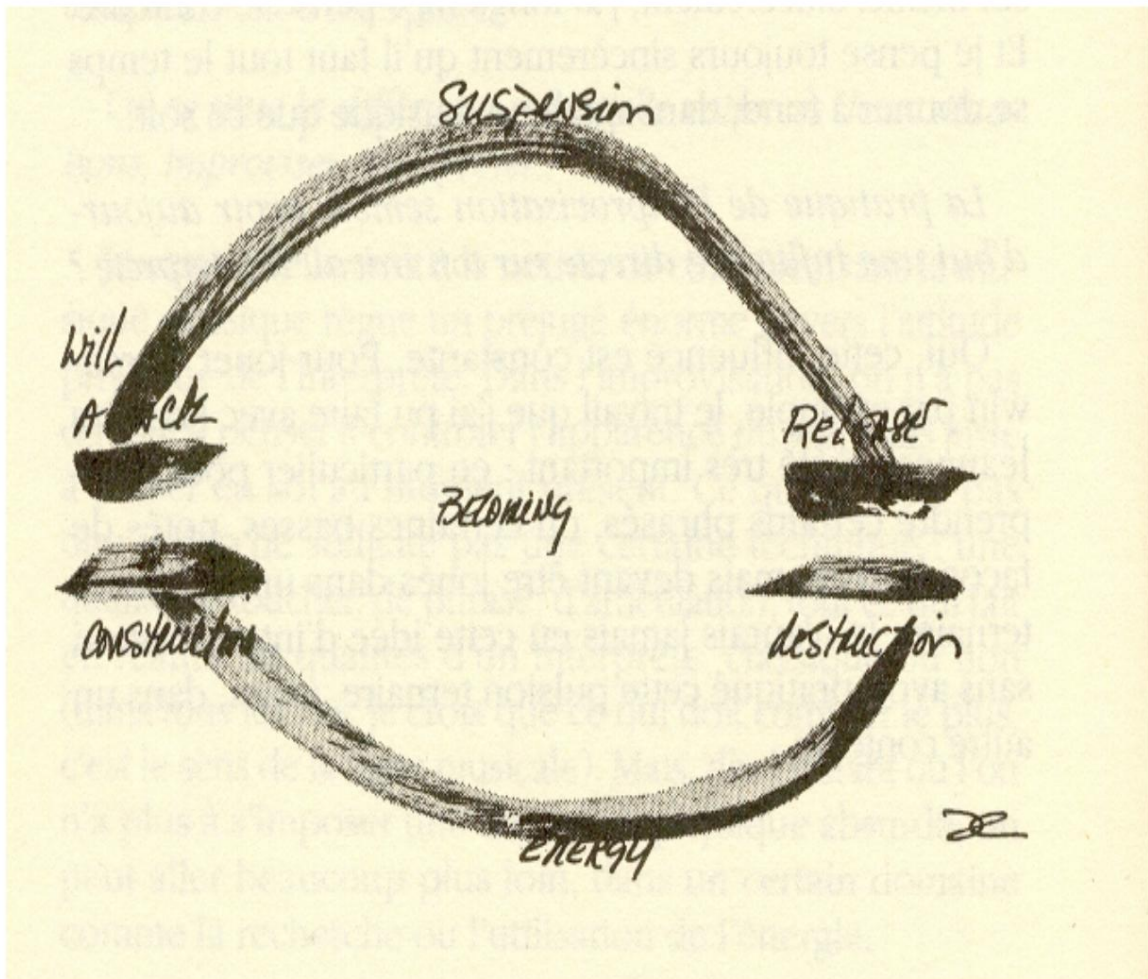
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MUSICAL IMPROVISATION

A JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF



The drawing is by Carolyn Carlson.

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INTRODUCTION

Musical improvisation is a way of life, not merely a specific technique. It is an opening to life, to emotions, to action through non-duality; in improvisation, mind and body unite to try to approach truth, that reality unique to each of us, but not the truth obtained through reason, through the "logos," but that sensed by intuition, that immediate perception of life's phenomena without the aid of reasoning. In this, we agree with Bergson, who considers rational intelligence as an instrument of knowledge specially adapted to the mastery of inert matter, but utterly incapable of grasping the manifestations of life. Only instinct can provide a direct, comprehensive intuition of them.

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Improvisation is embarking on an adventure without knowing the starting point or the destination. During this journey, the improviser learns about themselves, not through analytical thinking but *through* empirical action. It is experimentation par excellence, or as D. Levaillant puts it: "Improvisation is more than an experience; it is an experiment without a subject."² Indeed, the improviser doesn't know what they are looking for (perhaps they aren't looking for anything at all), and it is through action, which comes first, and not through reflection or awareness, that they will find, or not find, the explanation or liberation. The implementation of the improvisation process then leads to the experience of a new reality, quite in the sense that Heinz von Foerster understood it: "If you want to know, learn to act."³ For JF de Raymond, improvising is beginning, and beginning is being free.⁴ The improviser opens himself to the future by embracing the present without allowing himself to be destroyed by the past. He feels that learning to improvise is learning to re

1 See Bergson (1907).

2 D. Levaillant (1996), p. 273.

3 Von Foerster (1988), p.45.

4 See De Raymond (1980).

The improviser enters a creative time: each time they improvise, they experience the feeling of grounding the time in which they are caught, of becoming once again a "contemporary of origins." Subject to the inexorable succession of events, the radical mode of being of all empirical and singular beings, the artist will liberate themselves from History, which imposes its draconian laws on the analysis of production, on that of organized beings as well as on that of linguistic groups. Improvisation is this fleeting, ephemeral, momentary instant. It is a unique moment of grace each time, which brutally confronts us with our illusion of the infinite, reminding us that we are transient, and that death, this ultimate experience, will arise unexpectedly.

V. Jankélévitch supports our point of view by writing in a 1955 text entitled "Liszt, Rhapsody and Improvisation".

"Death is therefore improvisation par excellence; and since dying is both beginning and ending, beginning by ending, ending by beginning, dying is by definition improvising."

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If improvisation means beginning, then the definition needs further clarification. One can, in fact, begin by endlessly repeating an identical structure with varying degrees of nuance in interpretation, as in Hindu art. Beginning can also mean developing. Starting from a coherent unit (a model) and extending it at certain points along a path whose logic was inscribed in the primordial unit. Beginning can signify metamorphosis when there is a qualitative leap from the initial structure to the secondary structure resulting from improvisation. Finally, beginning can correspond to creating from scratch. We can consider that creating consists of abandoning acquired structures, questioning them, and constructing new ones according to a complex psychic process, dominated by originality, adaptability, intentionality, fluidity, flexibility, intuition, and analogical, associative, combinatorial, and dreamlike thinking.

Improvisation embodies the very mystery of creation or the creative process. It is the first step of the creative imagination, starting from the blank page. It is not about representing perception, nor sublimating distant traumas, much less a rational and intellectual elaboration, but rather "[...] an organic process, and, so to speak, a vegetal blossoming." This impulse, this surge, then gives rise to a new form that cannot be describe. ² deduced from the previous situation. This process, which proceeds from beginning to beginning, can be likened to the scientific approach, which consists of formulating research hypotheses and then devoting considerable effort to refuting them.

1 V. Jankélévitch (1955), p.171.

2 *Ibid.* , p. 113.

or to confirm them. From this supreme beginning that is improvisation sometimes springs what Jankélévitch calls *the state of verve*. The inventor then becomes the spectator of his own inventions and witnesses the arrival of inspiration without any control over it. The work creates itself, so to speak. But inspiration is capricious and unpredictable. Sometimes it overwhelms you with brilliant innovations, sometimes it disappoints you with its lamentable poverty. From this alternation between joy and anguish, between silence and violence, masterpieces and monsters are born.

Thus, improvisation proceeds from beginning to beginning, according to a discontinuous process, not devoid of aggression and jubilation. Improvisation then appears as one of the components of the nascent state of love described by the Italian sociologist Francesco Alberoni. For him, falling in love is the nascent state of a collective movement between two people. This nascent state arises, is improvised—in a way—when a prior state of depressive overload exists.

Improvisation in its nascent state is the opening of a realm of possibilities and the emergence of the desire to change one's life. Culture, and a certain disposition of mind, already foreshadow nascent love in a way. The very expression, love in its nascent state, is a cultural product, the result of the elaboration and definition of a certain type of experience. Islam possesses a very rich mystical love poetry, but a literature in which the "recognized figure" of nascent love is absent. We cannot, therefore, understand the phenomenon of improvisation in a society dominated by Islam without discussing the philosophical and aesthetic doctrines that underpin it, without connecting it to its vehicle, which is oral tradition.

In our view, there are as many approaches to improvisation as there are improvisers. This is why improvisation in Iranian music will be the main focus of our study. We believe it is important to examine a so-called traditional culture where orality and improvisation dominate, in contrast to our Western culture where musical notation has prevailed for nearly 150 years. Indeed, since the 1960s, improvisation has permeated all areas of Western music, but it remains problematic even today.

It also seemed essential to us to talk about jazz, not for its history or for its famous musicians today, but rather for the reflection it gives of European culture as well as for that freedom so often coveted by so-called "oriental" musical cultures.

Improvisation today raises a host of questions. What exactly does improvisation reveal? Is it indicative of specific cultural codes involving, to varying degrees, the notion of unpredictability? Is it essential to a fundamental aspect of an individual's development, namely their freedom of choice and creative imagination?

1. STORIES ABOUT IMPROVISATION

1.1 The word improvisation in its history

Improvising, Larousse tells us¹, It is to create, without preparation and on the spot, a speech or a piece of music, presenting it using only the means at one's disposal. The Larousse dictionary of music² tells us that the verb "to improvise" comes from the Italian "*improvvisare*" (1642), from the Latin "*improvisus*," meaning unforeseen—by extension, unexpectedly, suddenly, without warning. Improvisation is therefore the act, the art of improvising, and by extension, the result of this action. A historical perspective shows that this concept has been, depending on the era, either accepted and accepted as natural, or rejected and considered extraordinary and therefore unnatural. But beyond that, improvisation, as a specific and immediate action, ensures the survival of the individual and the species; this is evident in the first inventions through the discovery of a phenomenon like fire—from which everything originates—or in the first forms of protection. It was a matter of both preparing for the event and provoking its recurrence. Improvisation, an ingenious combination, gives birth to techniques; humankind then distinguishes itself from animals, which merely endure or repeat. These "successful improvisations" are then codified into rituals that bring good fortune and prosperity. These spontaneous acts thus appear as the foundation of art and technology.

Upon entering the world, the infant is guided only by instinct and metabolic rhythms. Without a nurturing environment, it would remain a *feral child*. However, by organizing space and time, by recreating the various elements of the world around it, and by structuring its psyche, the child will establish a cultural foundation that it can transmit or transform.

What would happen if all traces of culture had vanished from the planet following a cataclysm? Would the survivors improvise to survive by drawing on their memories, or would they invent new recipes from scratch? But this modern survivor is not in the same situation as Neanderthals; they would know that there is something to discover, they would even know how to avoid mistakes. In other words, even if everything is yet to be discovered, we always improvise based on what we already know, starting from a history.

The various definitions of improvisation lead to its recognition as a technique, particularly in the history of music. Improvisation is intimately linked to the development of musical notation. Indeed, the written score plays an essential role in Western musical culture and is almost considered a science. But has written music always been considered the only kind worthy of interest?

¹ Larousse Illustré (1999), p. 536.

² Larousse Dictionary of Music (1994), p. 383.

For a very long time, no written composition existed, and music was experienced daily, becoming one with the passage of time. Music was life, and all practice was improvisation. Then, as society evolved, people began to write, to record, to notate. But what exactly do we notate?

Greek notation, which is analytical and speculative, defines pitches and durations. It disappeared between the 3rd and 4th centuries AD. Byzantine notation, from which European notation originates, dates back at most to the 9th century AD.

We are thus left with five centuries without any notation. Should we therefore conclude that these were centuries of silence?

This notation - called ekphonic¹ - traces the relationships between facts. It defines intervals in their direction, but not in their function per se. Of course, this foundation will be enriched, and in the 12th century, other parameters such as nuances and modulations will be notated. Neumatic notation will remain similar in its operation, and it is the directions of pitches that are indicated. Gradually, notators will refine these pitches, which will become points that will themselves become the notes we know. But these points will be more of a reference point, a convention that refers to the mode in which one sings. Then, the focus will shift to pitch, which was intended to be less relative with the invention of the tuning fork.² We can therefore have some doubts about the primacy of pitch as a parameter. The same is true for rhythm, which is the most difficult parameter to notate. Indeed, rhythm leads to duration, to time, and can one truly measure time?

³ The history of the *dot* sheds considerable light on this subject. Originally, this dot indicated that time was ternary, and it has become a division of note values in modern musical notation. We can therefore say that notation has transformed this so-called "perfecting" dot into a dividing value. The mobility and fluidity of the rhythm thus seem better controlled. Notation, therefore, appears as a means of fragmentation rather than as a means of capturing the whole.

Musical events, and the parameters that compose them, are notated with increasing precision, but aren't we losing sight of the essential? What matters to the singer is expressing the fullness of being, not following the written directions. When the melody is precisely notated, the focus shifts to embellishments and ornamentation. When pitches and durations are fixed, performers concentrate on the fluidity of the music, whereas instrumental treatises become filled with nuances, color, movement, and so on.

1 See on this subject J. Chailley (1967).

2 Indeed, the tuning fork which gives the standard pitch (440 Hz) has only existed since 1859.

3 This question is still relevant, because at the time of writing this study, a French scientist, Michel Siffre, has just spent 68 days or 69 cycles 100 meters underground in order to study the effect of circadian cycles on humans.

It would seem, therefore, that what is not written is the authentic and true locus of musical meaning. Over the course of a decade, the system of notation, limited to the staff, has been considerably refined. However, the true message remains inscribed between the lines. Writing is always one step behind, and perhaps we simply write things down to memorize, to remember. The recent resurgence of improvisation brings us back to this crucial role of this living, dynamic memory, which risks becoming rigid by attempting to fix it on paper. Pushing our research a little further, what do these ornaments, these embellishments so often relegated to the status of mere decoration, teach us?

During the Baroque period, it was not uncommon to find only the figured bass on a vocal or instrumental score; the instrumentalist or singer would improvise over this bass line, and this was considered a sign of great skill and talent. In the works of Ferand and Wolff, we find numerous examples of these singers improvising over a bass line, somewhat like in jazz where everyone improvises over a shared bass. It would therefore seem to us that ornaments, within the context of the history of musical notation, are an indicator of the conflicting relationship between musical writing and reality. Ornament is not what is written, it is precisely the opposite, and we agree with Ferand on this point who was one of the first musicologists to suppose that ornaments are a game in themselves, and that the Gregorian or Ambrosian melody is only a pretext for ever-new versions.³ Ornaments therefore cannot be written, and as in Iranian music with the *Râdif* (background), the *Dastgahs* (forms) will always be original versions.

But this unique richness that constitutes the ornament will soon be integrated into the text itself and François Couperin in his books of pieces for harpsichord declares: "[...] that my pieces must be performed as I have marked them, and that they will never make a certain impression on people who have a taste for truth, as long as everything I have marked is not observed to the letter, without augmentation or diminution."

⁴ At the same time, ornamentation is declining, and the gap between the original and subsequent interpretations is widening. It is in the 18th century, with the Classical Age, that the question of "originality" truly arises. Ornaments and embellishments then become pretexts for interpretation. According to Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach, embellishments: "[...] must give the impression that one hears the simple notes; without them, the best melody will seem empty, and the clearest design will appear indistinct."

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1 Cf. ET Ferand, (1956), *Die Improvisation*.

2 Cf. HC Wolff, (1953), *Die Gesangs improvisationen der Barockzeit*.

3 ET Ferand (1956), p. 46.

⁴ Couperin (1717), p.57.

5 CPE Bach (1753), p. 81.

The concept of *rubato* is equally ambiguous in this regard. Applied to singing, but also to instrumental performance from the beginning of the 17th century, *rubato*, which until then had been naturally expressed—at that time it was simply referred to as *discretion*—was theorized and thereby diverted from its original meaning, from its essence. For how can one capture and domesticate "stolen time"—from the Italian *tempo rubato*, stolen time—without straying from reality, from the original? In fact, the more one tries to write what is real, the further one moves away from it; therein lies the paradox of writing.

But, as soon as the ornament disappears, absorbed by the text, it changes its function, and the trill of Beethoven's opus 111 stands out as a revolution in the very heart of classical music.



Through these observations, it would seem to us that the history of music is extremely relative, and that ornaments and embellishments are a kind of summary of improvisation, at the limits of written notation. Indeed, modern improvisation, as well as the fragmentation of notation, constantly leads us back to the premises of written music and to the boundaries of a deliberately forgotten body of knowledge.

The historical cycles used by musicologists are, as André Schaeffner put it, "[...] late periods of pure fixation, in which, so to speak, almost nothing happens anymore."¹ Works, historical texts, testimonies, and anecdotes constitute documentation that is either too realistic or, conversely, too uncertain. However, this can help us understand how the Western system of thought crystallized over the centuries, through extreme categorization.

The history of vocal and then instrumental forms sheds light on this subject.

The origins of Western polyphony date back to the 9th century, and its peak was in the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe, when musical notation was at its highest level. However, we can observe that today there are many complex polyphonic works that are not considered as such. Tertullian (155-122) describes musical phenomena that could be classified as polyphonic: libations of the early Christians combining songs and dances, body percussion, and instrumental percussion. We can therefore assume that polyphony exists wherever there are groups of instruments.

¹ Schaeffner (1936), p. 185.

² Anonymous manuscript *Musica Enchiriadis* where the doubling of the liturgical voice by children's voices is described, as well as its paraphonic repetition, at the fifth and the fourth.

Going further, we can even say that antiphony has existed since the origins of social life. Other civilizations practice forms of polyphony unknown to Europeans.¹ Finally, in all popular music today—as we will see later in the case of Iran—there exists a more or less developed practice of polyphonic playing thanks to drones and sustained notes that are strangely reminiscent of the European organum of the 9th and 10th centuries.

We see, therefore, that official history based on texts offers a fragmentary, partial view of musical developments. This brings us to a crucial point in European—even Western—thought: the notion that consciousness originates from writing. This amounts to saying that the Iranian *tar* player doesn't know what he's doing, or else another form of consciousness exists. A striking example is provided by the great theorist Johannes Tinctoris, who, in his *Liber de arte contrapuncti* (1477), describes the difference between the practice of written counterpoint and spontaneous counterpoint. The latter prioritizes each individual voice and its privileged relationship to the *Cantus Firmus* (basic chant), while the former has a holistic view of the individual relationships, which then form a single melodic line. The difference is enormous and reveals a reductive way² of thinking. Indeed, the medieval singer sings of his faith; it is a unique gift, each voice a call to God. The guideline serves only as a reminder, and thus these solitary voices form a harmony beyond the written word.

Conversely, if one seeks to unite, to bring together in a single (vertical) line the bundle of voices, this becomes a reasoned harmony, and therefore induced by one and the same person. By virtue of the very act of harmonic writing, there is a twofold movement that narrows the musical space and, at the same time, also narrows the social space through a subject that has become singular. We thus agree with Henri Pousseur, who sees the integration of the third as consonance, and the resulting realization of the perfect chord, as parallel to the constitution of the notion of ego, of which this chord would be the model.³ Variations in pitch are then excluded due to harmonic non-conformity, and progressively, musical science will cancel out dissonances one by one, thus creating an evolving but nonetheless closed system. Indeed, the slow introduction of Mozart's String *Quartet* K. 465 in C Major, nicknamed the "Dissonance Quartet," provoked a general outcry from his contemporaries.

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1 Paraphony by entire choirs, for example.

2 The *Cantus firmus* evolved and in the 17th and 18th centuries it extended to the repertoire of Lutheran chorales (religious cantatas, organ cantatas). From the 17th century onwards, the cantus firmus was transformed into a simple writing device, taught as the basis of counterpoint.

3 Cf. Pousseur (1972), pp.36-42.

4 This quartet, dated January 1785, is the last of the six dedicated to Joseph Haydn. Prince Krazalkovicz, an "enlightened" music lover, had these quartets played for him, stopped the musicians mid-concert, and shouted that they were playing out of tune. They assured him they were performing exactly as written, at which point the prince rushed to the scores and tore them up.

It took true musical genius to use the existing system in this way and elevate it to such a level. But Mozart wasn't the only one to break away from it. English descant uses so-called imperfect consonances in parallel motion ; the *Gymel*, of Welsh origin, favors the third and the sixth; further afield, antiphons from the Caroline Islands employ parallel motion of seconds and ninths. It would therefore be more accurate to say that the written polyphony of the 16th century, considered by Western musicologists as the pinnacle of abstract art, was in fact the culmination of five centuries of common practices in collective improvisation. The image of all-powerful notation is thus somewhat shaken.

In fact, over five centuries, musical writing progressed slowly from free four-part improvisation on a chorale melody to improvised counterpoint such as Josquin des Prez's *Stabat Mater* . Only liturgical chant resisted this advancement longer, due to differences in social utility—some 18th- century *Introits* are, in fact, an accumulation of various antiphonal improvisation techniques (organum, dechant, etc.).

Harmony, then, is indeed the theorization of common and fluctuating practices spanning five centuries. But this theorization, this analytical framework, is merely one way of addressing the movement of voices, the position of the principal voice, the role of rhythm, and so on, and therefore cannot be considered the exclusive domain of composition. Bearing this in mind, we can no longer say that Monteverdi dared "harmonic audacity" because he wasn't even aware of it, nor can we admire Debussy for his "anti-harmonic daring" because he was no longer operating within that system.

In the development of instrumental music, we find the same rejection of written representations of living performance. However, the instrument, by virtue of its organology, is treated differently from the voice. For example, the tablatures of lutenists or viol players, which describe only how to produce a particular effect, remain very close to improvisation. Moreover, guitarists today still use these tablatures. But improvisation always stirs up controversy, and up until the 16th century, we find those who rejected it, considering these frictions as dissonances, and then others, such as Adriano Banchieri, who considered spontaneity something superior.³ It should be noted that at this time, the concept of instrumentation did not really exist, and that very often instrumental pieces were, in fact, transcriptions of improvisations based on religious cantus firmus. Instrumental music was therefore inspired by

1. The English descant, practiced in the 11th and 12th centuries, places the cantus firmus in the middle voice, the lower voice at the third, and the upper voice at the fourth, for example. 2 cf.

Roland de Lassus, A. Willaert, Josquin des Prés etc.

3 A. Bianchieri (1567-1634) was, in fact, nicknamed *Il Dissonante* by his fellow musicians. He wrote numerous theoretical works such as the *Cartella Musicale* (1614) concerning vocal ornaments or *the Organo Suonarino* (1605) which specifies the rules of accompaniment on a figured bass.

Linear vocal ornamentation and polyphonic conducting, along with the addition of instrumental techniques, led to the instrumental music we know today. For many years, ornaments remained the individual mark of each instrumentalist or singer.¹ But, as we have seen, ornaments would be notated and rationalized to an extreme degree, reducing spontaneous expression to a table of contents.

In contrast, the art of polyphonic conducting developed very early for keyboard instruments, primarily the organ and harpsichord.² Accompaniment is one of the forms of instrumental playing most imbued with the spirit of improvisation. Indeed, we find numerous songs for four or five voices reduced to a single solo voice accompanied by the lute.

Petrucchi's *Frottole* collection perfectly describes these special improvisation techniques, which were practiced on the lute, the viol, and the portative organ. Perhaps the finest application of this instrumental polyphonic art is found in the pieces for solo cello by Johann Sebastian Bach, in which the composer managed to filter all the voices to obtain a pure melodic-harmonic line.

The cadence is a kind of synthesis of the two preceding processes. Cadences, as ornaments, gradually became a form in their own right. The concluding ornaments of instrumental works in 15th- and 16th- century polyphonic compositions lengthened and expanded, and from a simple "passage," the ornament transformed into a space for free expression for the individual. It was only with Beethoven that the cadence was written down. Thus, the rationalization of the cadence led to the spectacle of the free individual becoming a specialist. The art of the cadence is a formidable combination of various processes, subtly associating the ornamentation of the melodic line, the development of a bass line, and the transcription of polyphonic parts. The musician mastering these different techniques could thus create a work improvised beforehand which, through the act of writing, became a composition that would be inscribed in the history of music.

The best-known example is undoubtedly the famous *Musical Offering* by JS Bach composed for the King of Prussia in 1747.⁴ This "composition on the spot" then takes on a date and is "substantified" by writing.

The prelude is another of those instrumental forms that have become musical forms in their own right. François Couperin describes it as: "*A free composition, where the imagination gives itself over to everything that presents itself to it; not*

¹ It is important to note here that most of the time it was the same musician.

² Transcriptions can be found in Germany, Italy, and Spain from the 14th century onwards.

³ Bach and Mozart were "specialists" in this form, as were later Beethoven, Liszt, Chopin and Schubert.

⁴ J.S. Bach, invited by the King of Prussia, improvised a six-voice fugue on a theme for him. Returned In Leipzig, Bach took up this theme and wrote it down.

*Not only does it pleasantly announce the tone of the pieces to be played, but it also serves to loosen the fingers and often to test keyboards on which one has not yet practiced.*¹ This simple preparatory gesture is akin to the gesture of the Iranian *tar* player or the Indian *sitar* player as they make contact with the sound of the instrument. We see, therefore, that until the 16th century, the written score was not the most important element. In the manuals of Couperin and many others,² the written score is in fact only a suggestion, a given framework upon which the musician can give free rein to their imagination. We even find, until the 17th century, different versions of the same work, one in simple notes, another ornamented, for example.³ Instrumental music, whether individual or collective, remained for a long time situated between improvisation and pure composition.

The sonata and the toccata also travel within this space of improvisation and composition; in D. Ortiz's *Tradato de glosas sobre clausulas*, the former is often a four-voice madrigal that instrumentalists use as a basis for improvisation, the keyboard outlining the four voices, the other instrument inventing a new voice. The latter, for its part, is a liberation of the basso continuo through increasingly sophisticated technique. It is very interesting to note, when examining 17th-century treatises, how much improvisation was considered both a theoretical and a creative activity. All techniques were used (instrumental, counterpoint, ornamentation), and imagination took on all sorts of forms (rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, solitary, collective). The fundamental force contained in these instrumental forms would be extinguished or diluted in the virtuosity of the 19th century. This rationalization would be the fundamental achievement of classicism. Musical freedom, the very essence of the fugue, prelude and fantasy, will then be reduced to a highly technical and complex assemblage which will take the name of *pure composition*.

To try to better understand this activity, considered nowadays as the pinnacle of musical practice, we still need to embark on a journey, between JS

Bach and Ludwig van Beethoven. A significant point in common: they were both great improvisers. A strange paradox when approaching the shores of composition.

Bach wrote a great deal, but his writing is relative, and if the instrumentation was

Precisely notated, the movements and nuances are absent from the scores. Bach constantly transcribed his own works as well as those of other composers (Frescobaldi, Buxtehude, etc.). This activity stemmed from a need to produce and to learn. Finally, Bach played the organ and possessed exceptional mastery of this instrument. His playing is a skillful blend of the German and other traditions.

¹ Couperin (1717), pp. 51-60.

² See in particular Diego Ortiz, Conrad Paumann, Thomas de Santa Maria.

³ Cf. M. Preatorius (171-1621) and T. Michael (1592-1647).

⁴ Cf. the *Treatise on Viola* by J. Rousseau for example.

16th-century Italian music. This is why Bach is a *model* as a composer, because he was able to synthesize tradition with the beginnings of a new style. The first historical break: there is a time *before* Bach and a time *after* Bach.

He also succeeded in encompassing and unifying two seemingly separate domains: pure harmony, as developed by Rameau,¹ and the continuo technique.² These two dimensions, one vertical and the other horizontal, merged into a rich and new music, often inspired by spontaneous playing; Bach's improvisations were more fervent and sublime than his compositions, and "[...] his thoughts were not yet dulled by the arduous work of transcription," notes Forkel.³ This proliferation of writings, often cited, about Bach closely resembles a didactic abridgment. This perfect balance between writing as a means and not as an end in itself, and spontaneous and free playing makes Bach a model as a composer.

In contrast, C.P.E. Bach wrote everything down, and the variation—typical of this period—became a *composition* in its own right. While Corelli offered several versions of his famous violin sonatas, Opus 5, 4, C.P.E. Bach, increasingly distrustful of performers, chose the combination, the version, that seemed best to him.

The initial improvisation then becomes totally productive of composition, taking the form of sonata as structure.⁵ The composer then detaches himself from the performer, the roles and functions of each becoming increasingly determined.

This perfect harmony between compositional techniques and creative impulse would be brought to its zenith by Beethoven. With him, improvisation *is* a form, a structure that he manipulates, changes, and transforms endlessly. Variation, in the Baroque sense, becomes development; spontaneity "takes shape," and structure bursts forth in dramatic bursts. This organic material, formed in the moment, remains very close to improvisation, and as Furtwängler would write: "[...] everything seems invented in one go."⁶ Beethoven is more than a model. This extraordinary ability to integrate spontaneity into dense and energetic writing, this unique mastery of content and form, this capacity to manipulate structure, material, and creative impulse make him the archetype of classical, modern, and conventional musical discourse all at once.

Here is the second break, which perfectly corresponds to the notion of "public". Beethoven's music produces a spectacular effect, and from that moment on, the written word becomes more important than the performance.

1 Cf. Rameau, *Treatise of Harmony* (1722).

2 see Gasparini, *Armonico pratico al cimbalo* (1708).

3 Forkel (1802), p. 156.

4 The first edition dates from 1700, then they were reissued in 1710 with the author's variations, then a new edition in 1748 by his student Geminiani.

5 See especially the sonatas of 1760. 6 Furtwängler (1979), p. 76.

The classical style created new practices (composition, interpretation, improvisation), but academic discourse turned them into categories much later, in the 19th century.¹

We then observe that improvisation was elevated to the highest compositional rank at the very moment when pure composition—pure writing—was the essential activity of creators. A paradox that could not last beyond Beethoven. It was after him that improvisation was "degraded" by the academics to the status of variation or ornamented repetition. Improvisation was thus relegated to the status of written music, and therefore considered a pale imitation of the original. This pejorative connotation of "distortion" that the word improvisation carries today is largely due to Czerny—him again—who, in numerous works for piano, explains at length how best to distort Beethoven's scores.

But another turning point was on the horizon. In the 19th century, the public became a reality, and thus the need for transmission expanded. Transcriptions then took on great importance, and this practice encompassed the birth of modern performance. This break with Romanticism was certainly initiated by Franz Liszt, who transcribed everything: Beethoven, Schubert, Verdi, and many others. Liszt was also the first to dedicate an entire concert to Beethoven; he premiered works by Weber, Schumann, and Chopin. It is thanks to him that the piano acquired a prominent place, and he is undoubtedly at the origin of the piano recital as we know it today.

In Liszt's music, virtuosity, improvisation, and contemporary influences form a cohesive whole, and he shares his passions, anxieties, and fervor with the audience through a breathtaking technique that leaves them in a state of altered consciousness. This relationship, this exchange between musician and audience, was entirely new for the time. What the Romantics sought was an almost organic state, striving to reach the universal through every means of expression. This total physical commitment of the pianist is a loss of self in order to connect with others. Transcription is a process of self-forgetfulness, just as improvisation is a plunge into the unknown. In Romantic art, there is a diffusion of energy born of enthusiasm and fusion.

Vladimir Jankélévitch notes in his work "Liszt and the Rhapsody":

"The virtuoso man possesses an excess of instrumental mastery, just as the eloquent orator possesses an excess of vocabulary, resources and powers—in short, that exceed the ordinary needs of average life and everyday existence; not knowing what to do with this surplus, these riches, this superabundance, he spends them, or rather wastes them, in acrobatic exercises."

3

¹ See in this regard the theorization of sonata form in Czerny, Vincent D'Indy and the theorization of improvisation was also practiced by Czerny, a student of Beethoven and teacher of Liszt.

² See in particular Opus 200 of 1836.

³ V. Jankélévitch (1979), p.17, 21.

The Romantic style cannot be analyzed in classical terms; form has exploded, expanding into all forms. Developments are sudden, shifts abrupt, variations unpredictable. Improvisation thrives on subtleties that classicism rejected; the musical language no longer strives for coherence. Silences, contrasts, associations of ideas: all this reveals a completely new instrumental vitality.

Certainly, subjectivism is present, but reason has been transformed, substantified into a spontaneously creative subject.

Romantic time is not static like classical time, but neither does it possess the fluidity of baroque time. It is concentrated, then fragmented, then reconstructed; this fragmentation is the sign of its openness. The musician's adaptation is constant, and the journey is more mysterious than the destination.

Schools of interpretation in the 20th century represent these successive ruptures, and the romantic idea persists that the work, as a form, is the sedimentary layer of improvisation. This image perfectly illustrates the history of Western writing, and W. Furtwängler's reflections on this subject are enlightening.

Indeed, the great leader put forward the idea that interpretation is a "reconstituted improvisation" and gives us this astonishing conclusion: *"The law of improvisation, governing all organic forms, requires that the artist identify with the work and the trajectory of its development."*¹

Improvisation is therefore concentrated at the end of classicism in a single field of representation, transformed by writing century after century into its strict opposite. The revolution in recording, broadcasting, and production techniques radically transformed the system of classical discourse, while on the other side of the Atlantic a new tradition emerged: jazz, reflecting back to us like a mirror our forgetfulness and fears.

1.2 Improvisation today

At this point in our discussion, we can see that one problem remains: that of variation, of the same. Recording devices have indeed transformed the situation by allowing us to distinguish between banalities, inconsistencies, and repetitions. Recording then causes a certain detachment in those performing in public, who are thus deprived of their spontaneity. The classical system, the foundational legacy, plays on all separations and oppositions: written versus unwritten, composition versus improvisation, work versus interpretation, original versus transcription. The second term, of course, is only a pale reflection of the first. The game of modern improvisation, played to the fullest as we have seen previously, disrupts all these divisions, and the very question of variation is thereby transformed.

¹ W. Furtwängler (1934), p.332.

Repetition is certainly present in improvisation, but it's a repetition that transforms into something else, into another limit, another boundary. It's true that since Euclid, we recognize "form" because it doesn't vary: invariance in movement becomes the example for recognizing the original. Classical musical thought, as we've seen, is still largely imbued with this.

But in the 20th century, this notion of invariance became the subject of much research, and the problem was reversed: there is no longer an original object moving, but rather the movement is within the very perception of the object. Research in formal logic is at the heart of this discovery, and thanks in particular to the "diagonal method" known as "Cantor's method," the existence of uncountable sets was proven.¹ Using the same type of reasoning, Gödel's theorem (1931) brought to light the limits of rationality.² The demonstrated relativity of these totalizing systems opened up logical research to all sorts of stimulating explorations into the realm of indeterminacy or the non-formalizable intuitive.

The question of decision, of determination, originates in formal thought and is radically opposed in this sense to the indeterminacy of improvisation. Indeed, the beginning of a composition is dependent on the end; we can foresee its development. On the other hand, it is impossible to foresee the end of improvisation, just as it is impossible to foresee the end of existence, whose indeterminacy eludes models and renders its completion impossible. In improvisation, one cannot say that the first note already contains the last, that is to say, that the real contains the possible, since as it unfolds, improvisation calls forth what was not present at the outset. This creation of the new, of the unpredictable, thus imposes itself where all prediction, all decision, is impossible, just as human presence does where electronic brains remain powerless.

Improvisation, in this new order, thus underscores the relativity of codes and challenges the dream of a single subject capable of encompassing all living things and accessing "truth." Improvisation is rather similar to Cantor's diagonal method and requires the constant renewal of logical forces, thus basing itself on a completely new instability in the search for a new equilibrium. We will therefore attempt to explore these current oblique approaches.

The classical system, powerful and rigid, doesn't allow for deviations and prioritizes perfect intonation. But the novelty in improvisation, and especially in jazz, is that the musician uses these minute variations in pitch to create a different musical meaning. Take the trumpet, the flagship instrument of jazz, and in particular that of Miles Davis. The "Davis sound" developed gradually, through experimentation, searching for different attacks and textures.

¹ On this method, see Kleene (1971), as well as Martin (1964).

² On Gödel, see Bourbaki (1969).

This sound will then constitute a system in its own right against which other sounds seek to pass, and thus through crossings and wanderings, assimilations progress. Improvisation perpetually plays on this oscillation between the real and the possible, and a vibrant movement emerges from this balance. The improviser explores multiple avenues, and in their activity, the result is identical to the process.

Here, the process is reversed: what is proposed in improvisation proposes meaning, whereas in the classical system, and in non-improvised music in general, meaning precedes the facts. Improvisation constitutes a kind of model of transformation. The propositions always operate on two levels, as language and as metalanguage, and, as in logic, they simultaneously assert their existence and their possibility. This process is a perpetual game of disrupting balances where old reflexes must be forgotten, or rather overcome, in order to move forward. If the musician accepts this process, they feel very strongly what should or should not be produced. In fact, the musician must seek out nonsense in order to access another meaning. V. Jankélévitch explains this approach to improvisation very well in his work already cited:

"There is a general approach to improvisation which is halfway between reflex, an instantaneous but uniform and uninventive reaction, and 'logos', a qualitative approach by which man takes a step back, postpones, gives himself time. Improvisation is a kind of instant preparation.¹

This multifaceted process sparked the interest of several European musicians, including P. Boulez, K. Stockhausen, G. Scelsi, and many others. The concept of the open work, incorporating improvisation, emerged and marked a turning point in the aesthetic history of Western music.² However, notation and reference to the text remained the primary aspect of the musical act.

The relativity of forms has recently become a central concern for composers themselves. Modern musical experiments such as electroacoustic music and minimalist composition have led musicians to explore a more flexible approach to sonic reality. As a result, traditional notions of form, structure, and material are losing their relevance. New music is rediscovering articulations that are much more biological, animal, and even vegetal. Humanity and nature are thus seeking to reunite what was once divided.

Here again, the improvisation situation is undoubtedly the most revealing of this change. It seems important to emphasize the multiplicity of formal approaches born from improvisation and the complexity of the sonic reality revealed.

¹ V. Jankélévitch (1979), p.108.

² See on this subject U. Eco (1965).

by them. For this return to "pure sound" thus reveals the inhibitions of written discourse. Indeed, micro-intervals and subtle shifts in timbre suddenly become the foundation of the work. Pure unison (and the octave relationship) is heard "in its raw form" in the most recent music born in the United States and Europe. It is worth remembering that the octave is the very axis of our tempered space. Our civilization was founded and written upon a regularity, and we perceive so-called "primitive" music as dissonant and flat.

In reality, unison (or the octave) is a skillful heterophony, giving rise to a musical space as valid as a perfect chord. This theoretical fiction of harmony (and by extension, polyphony) has made us forget that from similar sounds, one can ascend to all dissimilar sounds, play with multiple intervals, to rediscover a larger form. Homophony is a transparent space where complex, varied, and always countless forms can spontaneously arise.

Improvisation generates spontaneous forms, and emerges from them as soon as they are formed. It traverses all forms without settling on any. As a result, it rediscovers a universality that classical form claimed to possess. When Michel Portal plays the sopranino saxophone like a Baroque, Basque, or African instrument, he is within this universal unity, without any exclusion. For a moment, several continents converge, and form merges with process.

Another area where improvisation has innovated is sound. At the beginning of the 20th century, classical sound was the benchmark for an entire musical system. All instrumentalists learned to incorporate it as the foundation of expression. The saxophone is an excellent example, since in the 20th century this instrument was systematically associated with African American music: Sidney Bechet for the soprano saxophone, Coleman Hawkins and Lester Young for the tenor saxophone. The first saxophone class at the Paris Conservatory dates back to 1942, with Marcel Mule as its head. Even today, his name remains the benchmark for sound and technique. However, this same sound was forged *in opposition to* that of jazz musicians, and today, even in the most traditional conservatory, it is very difficult to avoid mentioning the names of Charlie Parker, Sonny Rollins, and John Coltrane. The sound of the saxophone is at the crossroads of multiple directions, but it is in jazz that it has reached its full potential.

It is from this jazz, humiliated and scorned, that the opening of sound to modern *sonorities* was born. The "Mule sound" is one possibility of this sonority, but it can in no way be the only one, and versatility is therefore carried as a primary necessity by improvisation.

The *Klangfarbenmelodie* announced by Schönberg revealed another sonic transformation.¹ Indeed, timbre and rhythm as well as speed and direction become

1 Cf. in particular the *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, Op. 16, where the orchestra is treated as a large ensemble

Then there are points of research as important as pitch. An entire development can be heard, at full speed, as the simple movement from one tone to another, with a few additional colorings that constitute its identity, its interest. The dominance of structure then becomes obsolete.

The idea of sound implies those of speed, texture, and space. Tonality, seen in its modern aspect, is a flow, a spatial movement. Composers like G.

Ligeti sheds new light on harmonic relationships by having the choirs sing a *cappella* in *Lux aeterna*. Similarly, Stockhausen brings out fantastic vocal colors in *Stimmung*. Philip Glass, by making two "classified" chords resonate in an unusual time signature, reveals an unexpectedly rich texture in seemingly basic material.

This passage, this interstice, this border used by all these composers becomes a gigantic, expanding universe without any boundaries. Classical sound finds itself like a tiny island in the middle of the ocean of sonority. These examples of extreme cases characterize the upheaval of systems today, and even more so, they illustrate the new situation of the improviser: they must take into account texture, space, and meaning in motion. At any moment, the decision can change, and everything is transformed. Improvisation truly takes us on a journey through these incessant transformations of one parameter by another. This is why, between the fractures of the written system and the boundaries of improvisation, there are multitudes of passages.¹ The transformation of parameters is one such passage, and when Anthony Braxton plays Charlie Parker's *Donna Lee* on the contrabass clarinet, we no longer hear a theme, but a

mass, a formidable movement of colors. Today, many other approaches are used in improvisation. Encounters that were once impossible are now possible. Most of these breaks originated in the music of the sixties, particularly in jazz, and this relativity of parameters is, in our view, the profound reason for these discontinuities; it is constitutive of this music, which is propulsion, openness.

If we were to listen again to the theme mentioned above, the language would certainly sound dated, but the intensity would remain intact, modern. The sound conveys the drama, the playfulness. Sound is a collection of gestures, of movements, and in improvised music, more than in any other, this gesture is present, emerging from a timeless realm. The musician becomes a sonic character, engaged in a performance.

of soloists. This interest in timbre itself is clear in the third of the five pieces, made up almost exclusively of a single five-note chord transferred from one register to another and from one instrument to another.

¹ Cf. in particular, in Cott (1979), pp. 34-98 and 209-229, as well as Pousseur (1970), pp. 119-124.

The idea of performance has captivated many musicians for the past decade (the phenomenon originated, once again, in the United States). It demonstrates the failure of a certain formalist control. Indeed, one can explain the How, but certainly not the What, "what happens," and certainly not with the rules used to explain the How.

Apart from classical dogmatic improvisation and pre-1950s jazz, whose rules remain largely unchanged, the most recent improvised music transforms its structures, varies its norms, changes its codes at breakneck speed, and embraces mixtures and incongruities. This form of improvisation, viewed from a performance perspective, helps us better understand the impasse of formalism.

Because the improvising musician invents the system at the same time as the performance; everything unfolds *spontaneously*. Therefore, one cannot say that they have followed the rules or done the same thing, because the musician possesses this power of uncertainty which means that, very rarely, exceptionally, a successful performance will precisely be one in which no one can detect the slightest prior grammatical structure.

In the performance, the energy expended is considerable. When Liszt played, the strongest impression came not from what he played, but rather from the power of the event, the intensity of the exchange. Similarly, Cecil Taylor's concerts are physically demanding, and this stems from the radical nature of the musician's playing, which here has nothing to do with language. This energetic conception linked to performance—a successful performance—and which transports the audience *out of time* is not so new: many German philosophers, aestheticians, and musicologists at the beginning of this century drew parallels between music and energy. For Ernst Kurth, musical phenomena were the manifestation of an energy interplay.¹ In other words, it is the dynamics of energy that are the primary source of music.

We believe that what we still call the elements of music today—all the materials used to create and preserve music (scales, intervals, chords, rhythms, etc.)—are actually musical energetic events, or even more so, musical energetic systems. To such an extent that, ultimately, whether improvised or not, all music is first and foremost the emergence of arrangements of energetic systems. Improvisers today, consciously or unconsciously, are increasingly embracing energetics. In this case, a certain energy simply passes from a certain state of energetic reserve, capacity, or potentiality to a certain state of efficiency or actualization. This is not, of course, the only way to work with energy.

¹ Ernst Kurth's works are not available in French.

It is certainly more interesting to play on antagonistic energies that emphasize the discontinuous nature of energy. This is what Stéphane Lupasco, in a work entitled "The Tragedy of Energy," calls the dynamic logic of contradiction.¹ What is crucial for the improviser is that the experience of energy can and must impose upon them a logic more general than classical logic, a logic of antagonism. Our mental frameworks, accustomed to logic and linearity, are then severely tested, and it is only at this price that *something* will emerge.

It will happen, or it won't.

It is important to clarify here that some performers are also capable of playing with this energy. However, it must be acknowledged that they are few in number, and those who succeed often give the impression that they are improvising. For a performer to be able to actualize this energy with as much fervor as if they were improvising, the composer must first and foremost choose to incorporate plays of energy into their work and succeed in doing so. But they must also establish a deep and lasting relationship of complicity with the performer. Thus, in André Boucourechliev's *Archipelagos* series, and in particular number IV for solo piano, the composer has made a marvelous gift to the virtual imagination of every pianist, to their own archipelago (their travels, their desires, their longings). Boucourechliev writes in a text entitled "Misunderstandings":

*"In short, within an Archipelago structure, I try to write virtuality; not all possibilities, but to anticipate what the behavior of a structure delivered to a free and responsible interpreter will be."*³

If Boucourechliev manages to elicit surprising decisions from the performer, it is because nothing prevents the pianist from dramatizing their playing *against* the material and making then a surprising energy emerges. This is not the case with Pierre th *Piano Sonata* Boulez's 3.4 Indeed, the various interpreters of this work feel the weight of the composer's gaze upon them, a gaze that is at once a mentor, father, judge, censor, etc.

For Pierre Boulez, the use of improvisation (or chance) in his works amounts to the composer's abdication, and in the 3rd Sonata, the freedom left to the performer is very limited, because Boulez wants to remain the sole master of his work.

These two examples clearly show that today the opposition between matter and form is obsolete. The emphasis is placed on another pair: material and forces.

1 S. Lupasco (1970), p.45.

2 The 5 Archipelagos were developed and created between 1967 and 1972: *Archipelago I* for two pianos; *Archipelago II* for string quartet; *Archipelago III* for piano and 6 percussions; *Archipelago IV* for solo piano; *Archipelago V* or *Anarchipelago* for 6 instruments (amplified harp, amplified harpsichord, piano, organ, 2 percussions).

3 A. Boucourechliev (1978), p. 43-44.

4 L a 3 th The piano sonata was composed in 1963 by Claude Helffer. This sonata has 5 movements: *Antiphony* ; *Trope* ; *Constellation*, and its double: *Mirror-Constellation* ; *Stanza* ; *Sequence*.

What seems most important to us in music are precisely these forces, in themselves inaudible, which become audible precisely because of the musical material.

Just as the philosopher is the one who seeks to make thinkable unthinkable forces, the musician – and more specifically the improviser – is the one who makes audible forces that are in themselves imperceptible, inaudible.

This energy, this new musical power, can no longer be explained by the reign of discourse. The period of the breakdown of languages is, in our view, even more radical, in that it seeks its source far beyond language. Indeed, music has no need of discourse to make sense; on the contrary, improvisation, through its radical experiments, disrupts this classical order of language and discourse, and in particular its pretensions to musical semiotics. Jacques Chailley conducted an experiment on this subject some fifteen years ago: by analyzing speech using early synthesis devices, he discovered that vowels differed only in their arrangement of harmonics and that consonants themselves were petrified, accelerated vowels, and therefore reproducible. His conclusion was that music was speech *slowed down*. Of course, speech synthesis has advanced considerably, but the fact remains that music exists at the boundary between words and speech, and communication is something else entirely. This other language, based primarily on attack, vibration, energy exchange, and vowel color, is stimulated by modern primitivism.

Once again, improvised music emerges as the most powerful revealer of this vast territory repressed by discourse. These sounds, these vibrations, these rhythms pass through the body, and in improvisation, the body seems to break all the bonds imposed upon it by discourse. Moreover, improvisation gives the impression that this separation (gesture versus word) is null, superfluous, that it is yet another effect of discourse. This impression of profound *continuity* given by the organic is based first and foremost on the very etymology of the word: *organum* meant "musical instrument" long before it came to designate this segmentation of the body to which we are accustomed. The body is indeed the first musical instrument that instantly connects us to the world in which we live. Combarieu showed that primitive instruments organologically united the three kingdoms: animal, vegetable, and mineral. According to him, these instruments are a means of communication with the Cosmos.¹ We can then say that *the organum* is a continuum, from the body which it extends to the world which it represents.

But the body has its limits, which we have attempted to overcome through writing. Driven by a desire to amplify this resonator, the instrument took shape in this image, which then had to be written down, recorded. What was internal, hidden, became external and reproducible.

¹ Combarieu (1909), p. 32-33.

This perspective, developed by André Schaeffner, is paradoxically reinforced by the intense instrumental activity of improvisers who, from notation to instrument and from instrument to body, seem to retrace their steps, as if to return to the very origins of the notion of instrumentation. In improvisation, the musician, in their quest for sound, sometimes even violently mistreats the instrument. This violence reveals the hidden history of the taboos that weigh on all instruments: the organ struggled to gain acceptance in the liturgy, the cello had to fight to supplant the viola da gamba, and there was a curse placed upon street instruments, drums, and brass instruments. To improvise, the musician must question their physical connection to this instrument, which they only know superficially.

The example of Jimi Hendrix, who invented the modern guitar, shows that innovators are often the instrumentalists themselves. The improviser then pushes the boundaries of their knowledge and skills, taking the risk of letting the music flow. The expansion of instrumental possibilities born in improvisation, and in jazz since its beginnings, is part of this approach. The trumpet, trombone, saxophone, bass clarinet, double bass, and percussion would not be solo instruments in jazz today. But we also find a decisive break in classical (written) music: Luciano Berio's *Sequenza V* for trombone, with its vibrant exploration of the most advanced technical possibilities, represents the pinnacle of innovation.² The writing of this piece remains very close to instrumental gestures, somewhat like the preludes of L. Couperin or certain *solo* pieces from the Baroque period. However, in the world of a modern improviser, this piece is only one part of a process, one step in short.

Because the trombone, since JJ Johnson, has been literally reinvented by jazzmen. This dual articulation of instrumental innovations today (fractures in notation, the interplay of improvisers) is evidenced by the recent evolution of the double bass. The most recent improvised music invents a new instrument by combining the bowed playing of Western music with the plucked playing of jazz. These very clear advances in the expression of certain instruments previously considered secondary proceed, as with the parameters of sound, through rotation. Indeed, to improvise with someone, one must scrutinize one's own instrument down to its most secret recesses, where blends and ambiguities can arise. Improvising together requires each instrumentalist to make an effort to adapt and to have a basic understanding of the ensemble sound. Thus, the language of jazz has progressed, from improvisation to improvisation, through imitations and the merging of instruments. Free jazz has gained further ground, as each musician faces the responsibility of finding their own sound and their own style. Each instrument can thus draw its similarities from all the others:

1 Schaeffner (1936), p. 305-307.

2 *Sequenza V* dates from 1966 and was written in collaboration with Vinko Globokar.

Drum techniques, guitar techniques, cello techniques for the double bass, vocal techniques for brass instruments, brass techniques for string instruments—the possibilities are endless. Improvised music has thus given rise to tuba quintets, double bass quartets, reed instrument trios, all formations producing music that is both highly original and extremely natural.

Similarly, multiphony stems from progress in music and gives the same impression of pacification and negation of the usual direction of musical history. The German trombonist Albert Mangelsdorf was one of the very first to develop this technique, which reminds us of the *growl* of early jazz musicians, this vocalization imitating vocal blues. But we are also struck by the similarity of the resulting sound to extremely primitive forms of harmony: the bombard, *the aulos*, *the* Egyptian argul (triple clarinet) seem to foreshadow the "kirkophone," which the saxophonist Roland Kirk invented by blowing simultaneously into three of his instruments. This music reconciles the body and the voice, and the musician draws closer to their unified origin. The instrument, in the same way, rediscovers its origins and approaches forms from which notation has always tried to distance it. Improvisation abolishes boundaries and practices a kind of amnesty. When Jean-Luc Ponty plays free jazz, he rediscovers his classical technique. The great Yehudi Menuhin, to whom Bartók's sonata was dedicated, attempted the most perilous passages with Ravi Shankar, with Stéphane Grappelli, and even with Gypsies.

The instrument is a theater, each *instrumentarium* is a stage production, and Michael Praetorius's *Thaetrum Instrumentarium* (1615) is suddenly revitalized by improvisation. The instrument reconnects with its own tradition, written or unwritten, and pushes solitary expression to its limits, thus claiming the *entirety* of musical language.

The time for improvisation is a time that flows, that flees like the wind. But we are deeply influenced by a rhythmic notation system that divides time into purely chronometric intervals. Accustomed to "counting beats," we are generally almost incapable of occupying durations.

Improvisation, thanks to its *rubato tempo*, offers us the possibility of accessing our intuitive memory and the pleasure of unmeasured time. When we speak of tempo, we obviously think of the pulsed tempo of jazz, that famous *beat* which is an incessant passage from one point to another, this movement of going towards: linear time becomes rotary time, looping, infinite. John Coltrane, by opening up time, wanted to find this space of complete time. One must play for a long time to reach the "zero time" that Wolff speaks of. But to dissolve the illusory logical continuity of timelessness, the musician must truly make an effort. Organic memory exists; it just needs to be activated, forgetting learned material, written scores, and dead ends.

We must work on our amnesia and travel with the troubadours and the gypsies.

Classical discourse imprinted its models, which everyone interpreted, memorized, and transformed within accepted limits. There are no longer any limits. There is no longer a Model, of course, but with it have also disappeared the smaller models. The space is wide open; at the same time, the media have never propagated and reproduced so much.

Once again, jazz serves as a mirror. Jazz is *fragmented*. What constitutes it is precisely a work of regrouping, of reassembling. Improvisation, here, takes on a functional meaning. Duke Ellington's compositions are *models*, in the sense of travel models. They delineate a logical space, which only acquires meaning through movement. They are written by always sounding different, from the Cotton Club in 1927 to the Tin Palace in 1979, by way of Minton's Playhouse in 1945. The model here takes on a modal function; it encourages creative interpretation, it opens up play, it provokes ambition.

This dimension of travel, inherent in certain logical propositions, defines the *oral tradition quite well*. The increasing complexity of recent jazz has primarily served to push the stakes further. Each musician writes their own model, which can just as easily be a universal modality. This circulating force of transformation is, in fact, the model for improvisation today. This transformation, this circulation, itself has a kind of model in the *blues*, what Alain Gerber called *kuntu*, this primal literalness: rhythm, word, virtuality. It is no coincidence that the blues is the last bastion of improvisation; with each break in language, we found reassurance in listening to Coltrane play it, and today, to young New York musicians. The blues is a place of exchange, sharing, and gathering, without discursive construction.

Dualism, a key critique of classical thought, runs throughout these reflections: material versus form, original versus copy, science versus instinct. But improvisation, and its specific *approach*, opens up other interactions between categories. Improvisation is a space for knowledge and transformation.

We have seen that modern improvisation has generated other musical forms, and thereby cast doubt on the eternal separation between structure and intention. The alternative, the either/or, is as if eliminated from improvised music. There is no longer a choice, but a process that allows for successive transformations. This model is that of thermodynamics. Energy, the unifying principle, governs the equivalence of physical phenomena as different as gravitation, heat, and electricity. So-called "equilibrium" thermodynamics explains the general and new tendency of things to shift from order to disorder under the influence of chance. Improvisation has introduced the concept of unpredictability, of uncertainty.

1 A. Gerber (1973), p. 34.

In the two most creative branches of research today, recorded music and instrumental improvisation, Einstein's grand dream is finally being realized: discovering the profound isomorphisms of physical phenomena at very small scales (nuclear forces) and very large scales (gravitational forces). Indeed, this spectacular isomorphism is found between the microscopic data of sound and the large macroscopic curves. The Whole and the Part finally form a unity, a continuity.

Of these new relativities, of these successive transformations, improvisation is perhaps the curve, the spiral. For while it is a practice where this unity between the material and the organic is evident, it also establishes a clear awareness of the irreversibility of any process. Its logic is therefore truly triadic, blending order, disorder, and intention.

Let's take several musicians gathered to play together. A probabilistic composer will say that entropy, being natural, must be avoided and will arrive at the following conclusion: one must write. In the next chapter, we will see how a composer from an oral tradition, from a culture where this continuity between humankind and the cosmos mentioned above is taken for granted and cannot be scientifically demonstrated, would react. A culture where, paradoxically, the notion of improvisation—introduced in the 1960s by Westerners—takes a back seat. We felt that Iran, the geographical area chosen for this research, represented the best partner for this "West-East" dialogue that has been established since the beginning of this reflection on musical improvisation.

Firstly, there are obvious convergences, both historically and musically. Indeed, the history of Western music is intertwined with that of Eastern music, as both musical systems share the same sources (Greco-Byzantine and Arab-Persian). For a long period, Arabic music, drawing on either Persian or Greek music, established a coherent musical unity, and its influence reached the far reaches of Asia and extended towards the West.

extending to both Eastern and Western Europe. This unity would dissolve when each region asserted its own musical identity. This simplification of the historical context was necessary, as it was not the central focus of our research. Furthermore, it seemed important to clarify that the current opposition (West/written and East/oral) stems from the unity of the past (West and East/written and oral).

Secondly, Iranian music—like jazz—offers a mirror, a perfect symmetry to the Western conception of traditional music and the meaning of tradition. Indeed, in Europe, it was only in the 19th century that an awareness arose of the need to quickly save an entire body of popular culture that was disappearing, and it was only in 1852 that Hippolyte Fortoul, one of Napoleon III's ministers, decreed a movement to

A general collection of folk poetry and songs was undertaken throughout France. The collectors quickly realized the richness of this corpus of oral literature and encountered problems with notation. However, composers, poets, and musicians of the time saw it as an inexhaustible source of inspiration, and this essence of popular music became subsumed within the realm of classical music (Bizet, Chabrier, Saint-Saëns, Grieg, Smetana, Bartók).

The opposite process occurred in Iranian music. Until the 1960s, when Westerners began to take an interest in Eastern music, traditional music and oral tradition were the very foundation of the Iranian musician. Tradition is the vehicle ensuring the perpetuation, coherence, and intelligibility of the musical system.

It is well known that, more than any other tradition, the modal music of the Near and Middle East gives considerable importance to the art of improvisation. However, this concept needs clarification and nuance. In Eastern Arabic music, where modal improvisation (*taqsim*) constitutes a major genre, the concept of improvisation was forged relatively recently under the influence of the Western opposition between composition and improvisation. This term (*irtidjal*) is neither felicitous nor particularly appropriate, as it carries a pejorative connotation of incompleteness or neglect. In Iran, schools of Western music were established, and Iranian musicians such as Ali Naqi Vasiri created a notation for traditional music.

The shift from written to oral tradition that occurred in the West was completely reversed in the East, which moved from oral to written form. We will now examine whether these two parallel systems might, at a point of maximum entropy, converge and unite.

TRADITION AND MUSIC IN IRAN

2.1. Interview with Zia Mirabdolbaghi: Zarb, Daf, Luth.

What attracts you to improvisation?

You take risks, you put yourself out there; it's a kind of puzzle to solve, a challenge. You have a starting point, but you don't know where you're going. You've learned rules, a foundation; all of this is internalized, digested. The route is unknown. It's about pushing your limits, confronting yourself. You can do a light improvisation, with a lot planned and little left to chance, or you can do the opposite. There are no mental decisions; you work instinctively. You have an internalized, digested culture, but you give precedence to your performance instincts, your intuitions. So, you work more with a sixth sense than with knowledge you've built up.

Does reflection exist in improvisation?

Yes, it exists. When I improvise, I know if I'm repeating a situation or exploring something new. There are paradoxes in this process; it's a kind of "cooking," a back-and-forth between knowledge and know-how, between what's learned and the new musical phrases you create. When improvisation plays a significant role, you'll play the same rhythmic cycles two or three times, but never in the same way. There's a breath of fresh air in it; the audience is captivated because they sense the crucial role of instinct and intuition. You have a foundation and intuition, and with that, you have to create something new.

What is the main quality of an improviser?

The ideal improviser is someone who truly has an excellent knowledge of the entire institution and culture, possesses great technical mastery, and yet plays with detachment from all of that. For example, we have nostrils to breathe, but we don't constantly analyze our inhaling and exhaling. It becomes second nature, but of course, this is an ideal, a dream. Improvisation requires great sincerity, and that isn't always possible, because sometimes we search for ourselves and can't find what we're looking for, so we repeat things we already know.

What is the distance between you and the distancing of the system from the free speech performed?

It's a matter of personal preference. One person might deliver a thoughtful, analyzed speech. Another might use it differently, in a more animated way. Yet both employ the same rules; rules are not ends in themselves, but means to an end.

Do the reflexes of written music hinder this process?

If you started with classical music notation and consider writing as an end in itself, this system doesn't allow you to deviate. You're a prisoner of the system. If you had an oral training, then learned to write music, and use both systems as needed, then you can be free. I use both; when I need to write, I do, otherwise I don't. There's also an oral solfège, onomatopoeia, mnemonic devices for memorizing things.

What is the difference between a successful improvisation and a failed improvisation?

Improvisation is a failure just as a speech is a failure, that is to say, not Convincing. If someone who understands syntax doesn't recognize anything, it's a failure.

An improvisation is successful when the rules of the art are respected; the performance focuses on expression while adhering to the established conventions. Furthermore, in relation to the audience, if the musician manages to capture their attention and energy, the audience will support and encourage them to perform further. This indicates a musician who is not self-centered and who has successfully improvised. When you hear generous musicians, it's a real treat! A French friend asked my mentor, Majid Kiani, the following question: "When you listen to your colleagues, with your knowledge, how do you listen, with what critical ear?" He simply said that he only retained the things he appreciated, that he only listened to what amazed him. We should be able, like my mentor, to retain the good, without necessarily waiting for the moment when the other person makes a mistake, stumbles, all to assert our superiority. We must be at the service of music, not put music at our service. Music is a wonderful reflection of society (power dynamics, struggles for influence, etc.).

Do you improvise alone or collectively?

Alone, or in a duo or trio. But I only play the lute a little, solely for its melodic contribution. I think every percussionist should play a melodic instrument, and vice versa. Musicians who sing have a superior sensitivity.

Did your knowledge of both oral and written cultures help you?

Yes, it was beneficial, because one system puts the other into perspective; it's a good mirror. It allows you to correct yourself, to understand yourself better. My apprenticeship in the Zarb lasted seven years with my teacher, who, at the end of those long years, said it was time to leave and begin my musical journey. I remember workshops with JP Drouot and M. Portal, who wanted to learn the Zarb with my teacher. They wanted to write down the rhythms on the spot, and the teacher didn't want to. Rather than writing it down, the oral method is all-encompassing; it is not half and half.

Can you describe the rhythmic system or model of the Zarb?

It's practically limitless; you multiply strokes and embellishments using basic rhythms (2 beats, 3 beats, 4, 5, 6, etc.). Once you've learned these basic rhythms in a fundamental way, you start using these elements not as rhythms themselves, but as rhythmic patterns to create a larger rhythm. For example, you learn "rou ta ta toun ta," which is a basic 6/8 time signature and will serve as the subdivision. The basic rhythm you initially learned becomes a beat or a pattern. It's a bit like a Persian rug: in the bottom right corner, you have the basic rhythm, which is also a pattern or a beat, and the entire rug represents the larger rhythm, a vast ecosystem.

Compared to the melody (*gushé*), they are much more complex; there are no basic elements. Here, the melody is already a composition in itself. Each melody is an ecosystem unto itself. This ecosystem allows for modulations, variations, meter changes, and ornamentation. It's important to remember, rhythmically speaking, that we're in a cyclical game, so you have to emphasize the first beat to find your place in the cycle.

Does the Zarb have a specific symbolism?

No, there is no symbolic code. We are very far from the Indian over-coding. Iranian music plays more on the inexpressible; there is no music for day, night, or different moods like the Indians. Cosmogonic and astronomical data are somewhat insignificant compared to music itself, which is metaphysical in essence. For great thinkers like Avicenna and Al-Farabi, music is so rich and divine that there is no need to add symbols. For me, I think it's a beautiful position; it's a science to elevate music, there's no need to add anything, and I think that's a very important consideration. For the Zoroastrians, one of the four cosmic forces was a

musician!

This brings us to *Hâl*, to that state of grace which is quite inexpressible in language. I would say it's an extraordinary state. In Iranian, it means "present" or "state." Yes, it's a profound transformation, an undesired state; if you seek it, you won't find it. It happened to me; you are in a state of total grace with everything around you, it's completely delirious and exaggerated. You are in love with everything, in an intense happiness. You are fulfilled at that moment; it's not ordinary happiness.

Do you compose?

No, I'm not very good at composing. I helped, at Zarb, my students to compose quintets of Zarb.

Can improvisation be taught?

Yes, we can teach everything that needs to be avoided if you want to improvise. For example, if a student's mind wanders during the performance, I'll tell them what to do, how to let go. If another student is too focused on the sound of their voice, I'll tell them to avoid that.

2.2. Foundations and characteristics of Iranian music

2.2.1 Introduction

Iran is a country in the Middle East, the majority of whose population is of Indo-European race, Persian culture and Shiite Islamic religion, practicing a monophonic modal heptatonic music close to Arabic or Turkish music, and defined by modes (*dastgahs*), melodic patterns (*gûshés*) and specific forms.

We have no documents on the music of the Achaemenids (6th-9th centuries BC). In contrast, the music of the Sasanian period (224-642) is better known. Besides the existence of an Asian harp (*chang*) and a precursor short-necked lute (*barbat*), both now extinct, renowned musicians such as *Ramtin*, *Bamchad*, *Wakisa*, *Azad*, *Sarchach*, and *Bârbadh*, along with powerful singers honored by the court, perpetuated the *Dastans*, epic patriotic narratives. *Bârbadh* is said to have developed a symbolic musicological system defining, according to the calendar of the time, seven royal modes (*khosrovanis*), thirty derived modes (*lahns*), and 365 melodies (*dastgâhs*).

In the 8th century, in the cultural confluence that would define the Arab-Iranian-Turkish music of Islam, Iran played, alongside the Greco-Byzantine-Aramaic traditions, a fundamental role in the rise of this music, particularly during the Abbasid period of the caliphs of Iraq. Of all the scholars of this medieval Islam, who elaborated musical theories on the fingerboard of the short-necked lute (*ûd*), or the long-necked lute (*tunbûr*), the Iranians claim as Persians *Zalzâl*, *Ibrahim Mawssilî*, *Ishâq Mawssilî* (8th and 9th centuries), *Fârâbî* (10th century), *Ibn-Sinâ* known as *Avicenna* (12th century), *Safiy al-dîn al-Urmawî al-Baghdâdî* (13th century), *Qutb al-Dîn al-Chîrâzî*, *Jurjânî* (14th century) and *Abd al-Qâdir* (15th century). After the Mongol conquest of Baghdad, the Arab-Iranian-Turanian artistic cohesion of Islam crumbled in favor of a nascent notion of nationality. Iran and Central Asia lost the use of the *oud*, which precisely defined intervals and modal structures, and relied instead on oral transmission from master to student through melodic models. During the Safavid period (16th to 18th centuries), Iran institutionalized Shi'ism as the national religion and abandoned musical entertainments condemned by the priests, while religious genres commemorating the memory of the martyred Shi'ism *imams* persisted.¹ At the end of the 19th century, *Mirza Abdollah* studied the traditions that had survived musical ostracism, the loss of structural references, and empiricism, and redefined a system of twelve modes. Around 1920, *Ali Naqi Vaziri*, a musicologist,

¹ The conversion of Iran to Shiism at the beginning of the 16th century established a political and cultural divide between this country and the rest of the Muslim world then dominated by the Sunni Ottoman Turks.

adopts a theory probably influenced by 19th-century Arabic theory and virtually divides the octave into 24 quarter tones defining 24 fingering degrees, reduced to 17 in common practice.¹ From the knowledge of masters, such as *Mirza Abdollah* and *Abol-Hassan Saba*, and cultivated virtuosos like *Hassan Kassa* or *Faramarz Payvar*, the restored traditional Iranian art music was able to face Western audiences around 1960. Under the reign of the last emperor, *Shahanshah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi*, a prestigious and proud national cultural policy favored the resurgence of national traditions and the definition of an Iranian music in deliberate opposition to sister musics, Arabic and Turkish.

In fact, by the mid-19th century, Iran had defined its borders and regained its stability. Mentalities were changing, and within a few decades the country was emerging from its "Middle Ages" and opening itself to the West. Nevertheless, traditional music continued to fulfill its symbolic role as a guardian of values despite social changes. The *Radif* phenomenon crystallized and became the unifying principle of the nation, perhaps reflecting the individualism of the new society. This model also encompasses the entire structure of the evolution of Persian music: starting from a stable core, such as the *Radif* and the canons of performance, the music embarks on a path, a quest that is sometimes fruitful, sometimes fruitless, experimenting with new forms and returning to its starting point as a place of consensus. At the higher level, we saw that Persian tradition seemed marked by returns to origins: a return to Persian sources after an "international Islamic" phase, a return to folkloric foundations, a return to tradition after a period of Westernization.

In short, these returns to the past may only be a quest for creative principles, for inspiration in order to renew forms.

2.2.2 Classifications and sources

Since musical tradition in Iran is one of the central themes of this study, it is necessary to first examine how those who are its custodians define its scope. We will therefore begin by presenting an overview of the different forms of music, both traditional and non-traditional, as they are currently recognized in Iran.

Despite the complexity of the genres, we will attempt to paint a picture as close to reality as possible. Several types of traditional music can be distinguished from the outset:

1. Contemporary Iranian traditional musicians do not accept Vaziri's theory, partly because that the idea of temperate intervals is artificial for them.

1. Traditional Iranian music (*sonnati-e irâni*) (instrumental solo,
1. Vocal, ensemble);
2. "Authentic" Iranian music (*asil*) ; 3. Religious and
mystical music and song (*mazhabi va' erfâni*) ; 4. "Traditional new style" (*asil-
e novin*), i.e. orchestrated and arranged in the Western style; 5. Original "traditional Iranian"
composition; 6. Iranian patriotic and
popular song (*engelhâbi*) ; 7. Regional music (*mahalli*).

Another classification, made by a competent and learned musician, reveals notable differences:

1. Popular urban music (*amme pasand*) including traditional Iranian music, called *asil* here instead
of *sonnati* ; 2. Iranian national music (new school): a combination of
music
Persian and European-style techniques;
3. Regional music from different Iranian provinces (Kurdistan, Turkmenistan)
etc.)

Looking more closely at this classification, we see that it avoids mentioning certain genres currently viewed negatively, such as *motrebi*, an ancient urban entertainment music. Furthermore, this classification is inconsistent, as in some cases the genre is defined by its function, and in others by its style or technical characteristics. All these hesitations and differences in classifications reflect the complexity of the situation. In any case, these classifications all contrast what are commonly called the classical and popular domains, but use different terms. What is generally understood as "art music" or "classical music" is designated as "traditional" (*sonnati*). As for popular music, it is described as "regional" (*mahalli*) or "rural" (*rostâ'i*).

What is important to understand here is that in Iran, the term "traditional" is reserved for a type of music that corresponds to the term's most prominent meaning, linked to a highly specific form of teaching, and in contrast to a mode of transmission through social or familial osmosis. What appears in classifications is actually the urban and bourgeois origin, and not the deep connections between popular and classical music, nor between rural and urban settings. Urban scholars therefore reserve the term *sonnati* for their music in order to distinguish it from other forms of urban music. In rural or tribal settings, there is no such differentiation.

1 The term *rostâ'i* encompasses both nomads and sedentary people.

between genres, because society is more homogeneous and everyone unanimously listens to and appreciates the professional genre of minstrels (*bakhshi*, *âsheq*, etc.). Since the term *sonnati* is reserved for urban art music, regional professional musicians define their art as that of *maqam* (*musiqi-e maqâmi*). This term, which in the Middle East means modal structure, is used here in a more general sense of "canonical repertoire," close to the meaning attributed to the expression "traditional music."¹ Finally, the classifications do not detail the forms of religious music, some of which belong to the classical domain, others to the popular domain.

This is undoubtedly due to the fact that puritans refuse to consider Quranic recitation as "music," or at least to apply that term to it. The meticulous classifications of different types of music in Iran demonstrate a desire to create an inventory of resources inspired by ethnological conceptions of genre and function, since for those with discerning taste, the mixing of genres and the blurring of boundaries is intolerable. But these classifications are primarily intended to enlighten the public, so that they can make informed choices. They also emphasize the difference between the "great tradition," upheld by scholars, and smaller traditions, which are generally rural and linked to oral transmission. As Von Grünebaum states in his 1955 work on unity and diversity within Muslim civilization:

*"The grand tradition is regarded as eminent and authoritative; it enjoys social prestige, and it is almost exclusively represented in writings and public events for the elite, while the lesser traditions are officially denigrated."*²

The case of *motrebi*, mentioned above, is a telling example; it recently disappeared by official decree, and *sonnati* music has been elevated to the status of a national symbol, eclipsing other forms. The term *sonnati* also contrasted with the term "national" or "Iranian," which, used alone, designated a classical genre that had been acculturated, watered down, or both. But nowadays in Iran, it is the term "authentic" *asil* that designates the most prominent and least altered form. The underlying reasons and the process leading to the adoption of the terms *sonnati* and *asil* are unclear, as are the distinctions they are intended to establish. It is worth noting that the word *sonnati* appeared at a time when tradition as a whole was threatened by Western music. Its very use already indicates that the music it designates is in danger.

¹ The same meaning emerges in Azerbaijan where the term *maqâm* gave rise to the concept of *muqâm*. In Turkey, This musical form is called *makam*, and in Uzbekistan, *shashmaqom*.

² Von Grünebaum (1955), p. 28.

To conclude on this sensitive point, we can say that, in terms of audience size, classical *asil* music, *sonnati-asil* based on the *radif* and reserved for the elite, comes first.

Regional *asil* music or *maqami*, as well as religious chants, which are more accessible to the general public, come second.

Popular audiences prefer *the passand music*, such as traditional *motrebi* or light music such as *bâzâri*, *kuche bâzâr* and masquerades (*siâh bâzi*).

2.2.3. The Radif, the immobile center of tradition

In a broad sense, the *radif* is a repertoire of pieces, most often in free rhythm, classified by modal affinity (constituting the 12 modal systems), intended to be played more or less in a certain order. It is also an exemplary model through which one learns: the repertoire of typical melodies (*gushe*) and certain canonical pieces; the classification of modes and modulations, their structure, their typical features; instrumental technique, classical style, aesthetic principles, and the implicit rules of composition.

But, on another level, the traditional repertoire represents the unalterable core that comes from the most ancient times and must not undergo any transformation. It should be noted that there are in fact two quite distinct levels. Jean During describes them as follows:

"1) *matrices or molds (qâleb) also called frameworks, fundamental structures (chahâr-chub), or axes, pillars (mehvar), principles (osul, or asil, authentic.)*

2) *Productions that conform to it, namely a) the radif (or text), b) its interpretation, c) the compositions resulting from its interpretation.*¹

The stability of the matrices is generally accepted by most musicians, but when it comes to new compositions, musicians are often encouraged to draw inspiration from the model to create something new, whether through improvisation or composition. Most proponents of art music immediately associate the term "tradition" with the classical canonical repertoire (*radif*), and within this framework, the heart of tradition is indeed the *radif*. Mr. Kiâni supports our view, stating: "The *radif* is the means of ensuring the continuity of Iranian music."² The oldest known *radifs* come from two masters: *Mirzâ Abdollâh* (1843-1918), master of the *setâr*, and *Aqâ Hosein Qoli* (died in 1915), master of the *tar*. These two brothers dedicated their entire lives to teaching the *radif* with incredible rigor.

¹ During (1994), p.63.

² Kiâni (1989), p.14.

and a very strong conviction, and they formed the best musicians of the generation next. Their students had to memorize the entire repertoire (approximately 250 melodies) (Basically), for this reason it was important that the *Radif* be both comprehensive and brief. Moreover, the musicians played the melodies in different versions, the masters they chose their favorite version of the same melody from several versions to create their own *Radif*.

To understand the concept of *Radif*, one must first know that *Radif* and the Modal systems are not all the same thing. The characteristics of The melodies (*gusheh-s*) are as important as their relationship to each other. The placement of each melody is determined by its modal characteristics. In the interpretation of Persian music, one finds multi-modal structures. where in each system (*dastgâh* or *âvâz*) a certain number of *gusheh-s* come to explain the different parts of the system. In the *Radif* of *Mirza Abdullah*, one finds 250 pieces (*gusheh-s*) divided into 7 large parts (*dastgâh*) and 5 smaller ones smaller and simpler (*âvâz-s*). This organization is the same in the *Radif-s* following, but the number of *gusheh*, their rankings and their placements vary a little bit of both. For example, the very greatest singer of the 20th century *Mahmud Karimi* left us a *Radif* comprising 145 *gusheh*, which appears to be the maximum for a vocal *Radif*. The *Radif* of the tar and setar includes more than *gusheh*.

The seven main parts (*dastgâh-s*) are called:

1. *Shur*,
2. *Navâ*,
3. *Segâh*,
4. *Châhârgâh*,
5. *Homâyûn*,
6. *Mâhur*,
7. *Râstpanjgâh*.

The five derivatives (*âvâz-s*) are named:

1. *Abuatâ*,
2. *Afshâri*,
3. *Bayât-e Tork*,
4. *Dashti*,
5. *Esfehân*.

Several *avâz*-s form a *dastgâh*, and several *gusheh*-s form an *avâz*. In fact, all the *dastgâh*-s constitute the repertoire of Iranian music. These melodic sections are made up of what could be called "flexible melodies." This concept is very common in all categories of Iranian music, especially in widespread, unmeasured melodies where the rhythm depends on the meter of the poem. When Persian poetry is recited or sung, long and short syllables are articulated over flexible units of time. Nevertheless, short syllables are always sustained over a shorter beat than long syllables. The interpretation of these "flexible melodies" varies greatly because musicians have played them many times and in many circumstances. This variation cannot be considered improvisation, but rather a kind of aura that each melody possesses, representing the memory that the group or ethnic group retains of it. This collective memory encompasses not only the melody, but also each accompanying poem within its historical context. Its melodic specificities make the *Radif* a model repertoire of infinite richness. And for those detractors of this music who cite repetition and simple melodic progression as their primary argument, we will quote Jean During once again:

"The Radif's tour de force lies not in the development, amplification, orchestration, or rhythmic cycling of the original melodic material, but in its atomization, gathering, and arrangement. The accumulation of refrains ultimately negates the recurrent and obsessive character they necessarily possess in their original context. For despite the obligatory and complementary 'return' gushe to the 'starting' gushe, the Radif always strives to avoid redundancy: thus, the famous melismas (tahrir), which are so similar and all serve the same expressive function, must all be different, even if only by a small detail. Similarly, the gushe that adapt to various modal environments must contain subtle differences. All of this makes memorizing high-quality repertoires very difficult."

1

Let us now see how the *Radif* relates to the complex, highly codified musical system which still gives rise to numerous controversies today.

¹ During (1994), pp. 134-135.

2.2.3. Musical System

As we have said, Iranian classical music is essentially melodic and modal. Iranian musical art is based on perfecting the diverse possibilities of the human voice, and therefore of singing, and on exploring the scale of sounds and intervals. From these two tendencies arose the ornamentation of homophonic melody, and, as a consequence, the extreme analysis and dissection of the scale of sounds and their relationships, resulting in subtle intervals.

It is precisely at the level of these intervals that the divergences are most pronounced.

First and foremost, it's important to know that Iranian music uses the natural scale, thus linking it to certain origins of ancient Greek music, and not the tempered scale as in Western music.¹ The idea of fixed and immutable intervals is therefore simply inconsistent for most musicians, as scholars explain.

In modern Iranian music, *such* as that of Al-Kindi ² (d. 874), Al-Farabi (d. 950), Ibn Sina (d. 1037), Safi uddin al-Urmavi (d. 1293), Qotbuddin Shirazi (d. 1311), and Abd al-Qadr al-Maraghi (d. 1435), the tetrachord (called *zolarb'* in Arabic and *dang* in Persian) was the most important structural and modal element. The tetrachord also refers to the space on the neck of instruments like the oud, tar, and setar where the fingers can reach the notes without changing position. In medieval theories, the open string (called *motlaq*) and the names of the different fingerings on the oud's neck were used to designate the plucks used to create the various tetrachords. The character of the tetrachord depends on the size of the intervals of the second and third (second and third notes). Thus, each tetrachord has its own unique configuration. For *Dariush Tala'i*, all Persian music is based on only four types of *dang* (see Table 1). These four *dang* are shown by the intervals of three that separate the four notes of each *dang*. The measurements are in cents (a system where an octave is divided into 1200 cents and a semitone is equal to 100 cents), and each *dang* is surrounded by

1 The natural scale originates from the ancient Greek musical system. From the 6th century onwards, Pythagoras based music on numerical foundations (*Tetraktys* : 1,2,3,4) and more specifically on interval ratios.

He considered the perfect fifth as a simple interval and the octave as a compound interval. A Pythagorean tone was then equal to 8/9, which gave a third of 8/9 + 8/9 with a very high E (Pythagorean third). *Zarlino* (15th century) proposed distributing these "strange" intervals across the octave, and the third became 8/9 + 10/9 (equal third). He named this scale the "tempered" scale. The scale we know today in the West is derived from this "Zarlinian" scale; that is, a heptatonic scale (7 notes) dividing the octave into 5 whole tones and 2 semitones (C, D, E, F, G, A, B). In contrast, the natural scale used in Iranian music today does not divide the octave into equal intervals and is based on the perfect fourth as its principal element.

2 *Dariush Tala'i* is a master of the *setar*, trained by the greatest masters such as *Ali Akbar Shanazi* (son of *Aqa Hosein Qoli*), *Nur Ali Borumad*, *Yousef Froutan* and *Abdollah Davami*. He has taught since 1983 at the University of Washington in Seattle, as well as at the Center for Oriental Music Studies at the Sorbonne and at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Tehran.

The interval of four is equal to 500 cents. The sign p (called coron) signifies a half-flat and therefore lowers the note by a quarter tone.

Tableau n° 1 - Les 4 dâng-s de base			
140	140	220	
200	80	220	
140	240	120	
200	180	120	

Tableau n° 2 Les intervalles tempérés des dâng-s			
150	150	200	
200	180	200	
150	250	100	
200	200	100	

Table 3 shows the current frets on the neck of the *setar* from which all the *dang*-s above will be derived. The frets on the other side of the intervals are 60, 70, and 30 cents (Dp).

Tableau n° 3 - Frets actuels sur le manche du setâr									
C	Dp	D	Ep	E	F	F#	Gp	G	
140	60	80	70	30	120	90	60	60	
G	Ap	A	Bb	Bp	B	C			
140	60	80	70	30	120				

and D, for example) are never used successively in Persian music.

The ratio of the intervals above G on the C string are the same as those of the open G string in the octave below.

However, in practice, the intervals are never precise. They vary between the four basic *dangs* (see Table 1) and their tempered forms (see Table 2). The more complex the system, the more the *dangs* are transposed and interdependent, and the more the intervals must be tempered on stringed instruments with frets.

However, because the intonation resulting from interval tempering hinders even the best musicians, the frets on the *tar* and *setar* remain movable. This mobility allows musicians to "adjust" them during each performance so that the most appropriate tuning is achieved for each combination of modes.

Dariush Tala'i uses the term "coron" to refer to a quarter tone. This term was first introduced by *Ali Naqi Vaziri* (1887-1978), who brought many Western concepts to Iranian music. He coined the term "sori" for a sharp quarter tone and "coron" for a flat quarter tone. As previously mentioned, this theory is rejected by most musicians.

Iranians today have chosen to ignore it. This nonetheless causes a rift within the musical community in Iran. The first person to advocate a different theory on Iranian intervals after *Vaziri* was Dr. *Mehdi Barkeshli*, a physicist, who wrote the introduction to the *Radif* of *Mirza Abdollah* compiled by *Musa Ma'rufi*. He revisited the books of *Farabi* and *Safieddin* and followed the trail of their theoretical work. Essentially, *Barkeshli* believes that the scales used in Iranian music are not tempered, but closer to Pythagorean intonation. He conducted several experiments with a group of singers performing in different *dastgahs* (*traditional Iranian musical styles*) and concluded that the principal interval in Iranian music is the same as that of Pythagorean music, the fundamental interval being the "limma" (90 cents) and the "comma" (24 cents).

In this context, *sori* and *coron* are obtained as a result of varying combinations of limma (L) and comma (C). Dr. *Barkeshli* therefore recommends a 22-tone scale that uses the following intervals: L, L+C, L+L, and L+L+C.

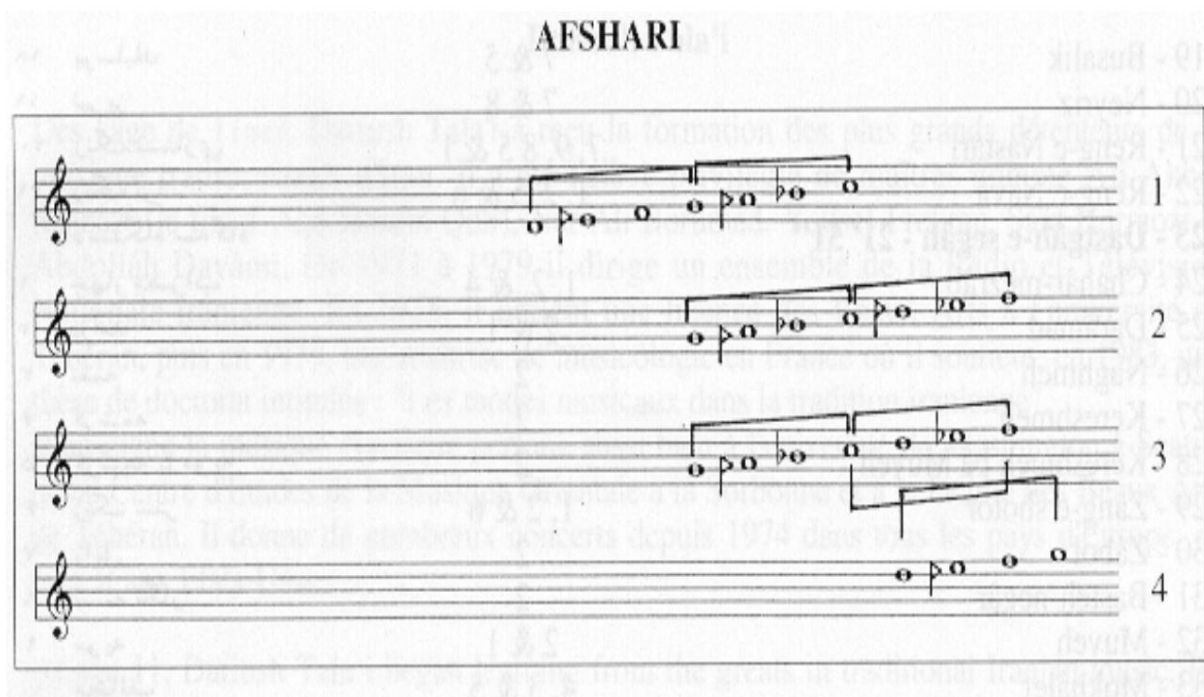
Dr. *Barkeshli*'s work is invaluable, but many critics later pointed out certain weaknesses. Nelly Caron and *Dariussh Safvat*, in their 1966 book "*Iran: Musical Traditions*," mention the unreliability of using singers to establish intervals. They themselves used Dr. *Safvat*'s tuning on his *setar* for each *dastgah* and included in their book a graph of these intervals (not the scale) for each *dastgah*. Jean During, in his 1984 book "*Iranian Music: Tradition and Evolution*," in turn criticizes Caron and *Safvat*, accusing them of a lack of thoroughness and depth. He suggests a large-scale experiment, using several masters of different instruments (*tar*, *santur*, etc.) with repeated tests to determine the rate of variability in the intervals.

Dr. *Barkeshli* and *Vaziri* made the same mistake, namely that they both started from a pre-established theory; the former with the Pythagorean scale and the latter with the Western tempered scale. In fact, the practice of Iranian music is more variable and cannot be precisely defined as the theorists would have liked. A third school of thought is represented by the work of Dr. *Hormoz Farhat* in his 1965 doctoral dissertation, which he published in 1990 under the title "*The Concept of Dastgah in Persian Music*." He argues that there are five distinct intervals (flexible intervals) in Persian music:

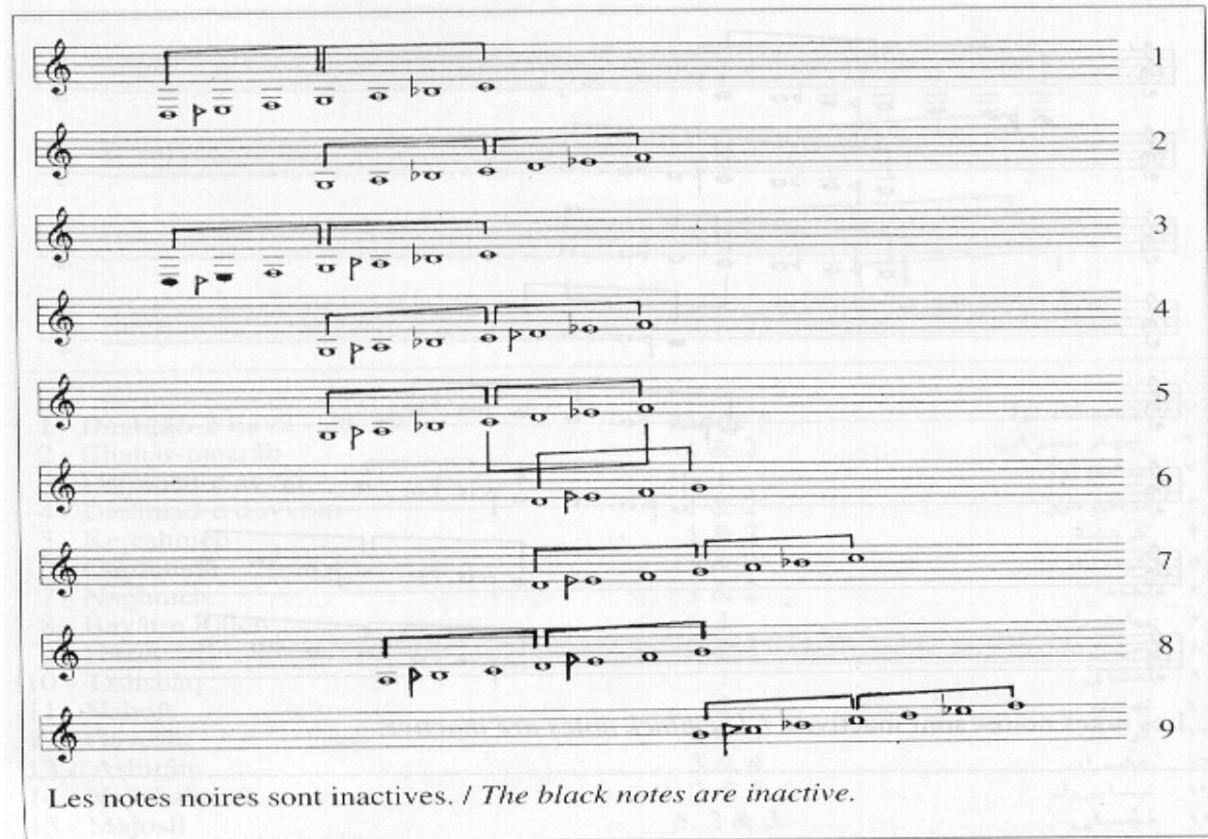
1) Semitone or minor second (90 cents); 2) small neutral second (135 cents); 3) large neutral second (160 cents); 4) whole tone or major second (204 cents); 5) extended tone (270 cents).

In view of these theories, many musicians suggest that it is unnecessary to define an octave-based scale for Persian music, and propose that the notation and theory be based on the tetrachord, which would be closest to the theory of flexible intervals proposed above.

In conclusion, we can say that theorists and practitioners of Persian music today consider *Vaziri*'s work solely from a historical perspective. His contribution in no way affects the practice of the *Radif* at present. However, the *sori* and the *coron*, which designate microtonal intervals in Iranian music, do not represent a quarter tone in common usage. Persian music employs a modal system that provides a structural framework where modes merge. Mastering the art of these combinations is one of the most important aspects of Iranian music. When two different modes surround the same tetrachord, it must be used as a bridge that allows modulation from one mode to the other. The modal structure of each *dastgâh* and *âvâz* results from the combination of several arranged and ordered modes. Although these combinations are ordered in the traditional manner, they are neither taught nor defined using modal terminology. but through their specific melodies (*gusheh-s*) which present each stage of the modal progression. Here are the scores of all the modal structures and the relationship of the *dastgâh-s* and *âvâz-s* in the *radif*.

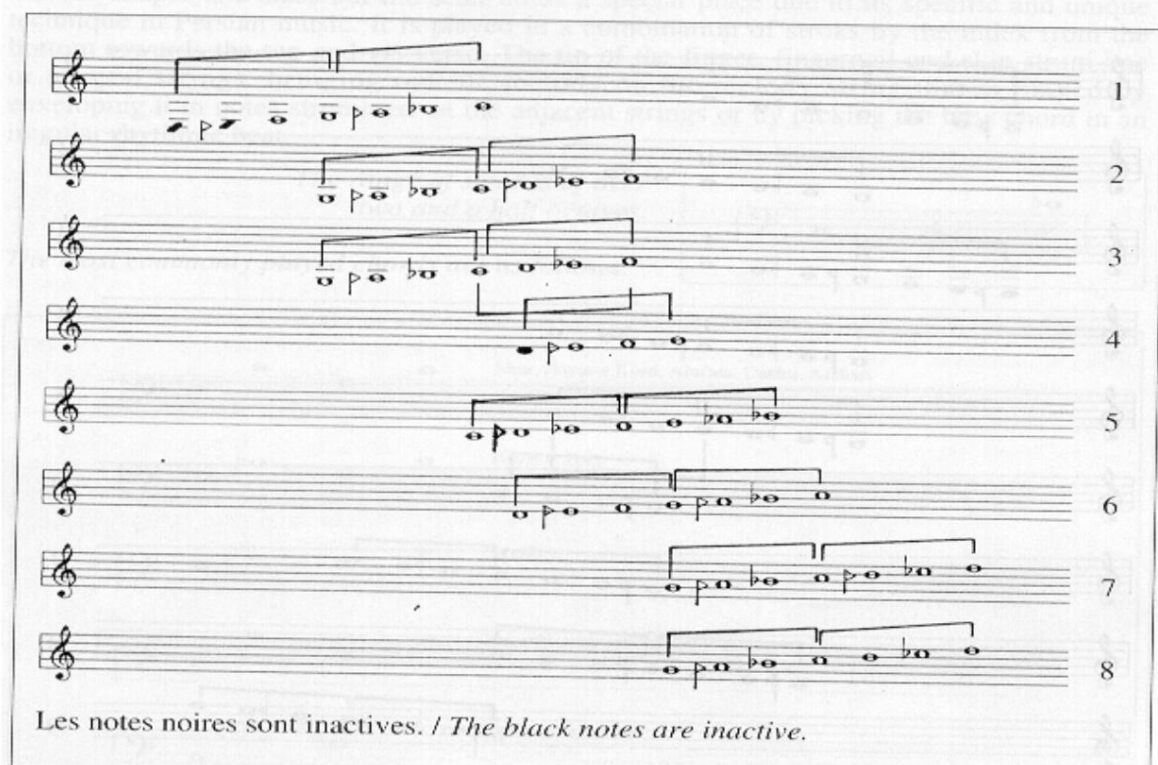


NAVA



Les notes noires sont inactives. / The black notes are inactive.

SEGAH



Les notes noires sont inactives. / The black notes are inactive.

دستگاه نوا	Mode *	1 - Dastgâh-e navâ - 28' 59"
۱ چهار مضرب	1 & 2	2 - Chahâr-mezrâb
۲ درآمد اول	1	3 - Darâmad-e avval
۳ درآمد دوم	1 & 2	4 - Darâmad-e dovvom
۴ کرشمه	1 & 2	5 - Kereshmeh
۵ گردونه	1 & 2	6 - Gardunieh
۶ نغمه	1 & 2	7 - Naghmeh
۷ بیات راجه	1	8 - Bayât-e Râjeh
۸ حزین	2 & 1	9 - Hazin
۹ عشاق	1	10 - 'Oshshâq
۱۰ نهفت	2	11 - Nahoft
۱۱ گوشت	4 & 3	12 - Gavesht
۱۲ عشیران	3 & 4	13 - 'Ashirân
۱۳ نیشابورک	3, 2, 5 & 6	14 - Neyshaburak
۱۴ مجلسی	5, 2 & 3	15 - Majosli
۱۵ خجسته	3, 5 & 6	16 - Khojasteh
۱۶ ملک حسین	6 & 5	17 - Malek Hoseyn
۱۷ حسین	6 & 5	18 - Hoseyn

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۱۸ بوسلیک	7 & 5	19 - Busalik
۱۹ تیریز	7 & 8	20 - Neyriz
۲۰ رنگ نستاری	7, 9, 8 5 & 1	21 - Reng-e Nastâri
۲۱ رنگ نوا	1, 2, 5 & 6	22 - Reng-e Navâ
دستگاه سه گاه		23 - Dastgâh-e segâh - 21' 51"
۱ چهار مضرب	1, 2, & 4	24 - Chahâr-mezrâb
۲ درآمد	2 & 1	25 - Darâmad
۳ نغمه	2	26 - Naghmeh
۴ کرشمه	2	27 - Kereshmeh
۵ کرشمه با مویه	2	28 - Kereshmeh bâ Muye
۶ رنگ شتر	1, 2 & 6	29 - Zang-e shotor
۷ زابل	2	30 - Zâbol
۸ بسته نگار	2	31 - Basteh-negâr
۹ مویه	2 & 1	32 - Muye
۱۰ مخالف	4, 3 & 5	33 - Mokhâlef
۱۱ حاجی حسنی	4 & 5	34 - Hâji Hasani
۱۲ بسته نگار	3, 4 & 5	35 - Basteh-negâr
۱۳ مغلوب	6	36 - Maghlub
۱۴ نغمه	4 & 5	37 - Naghmeh
۱۵ حزین	4 & 2	38 - Hazin
۱۶ مویه	2 & 1	39 - Muye
۱۷ رهاب	6, 7 & 8	40 - Rahâb
۱۸ مسیحی	7	41 - Masihi
۱۹ شاه خنایی	6 & 8	42 - Shâh Khatâi
۲۰ تخت طاقدیس	7, 8 & 6	43 - Takht-e Tâqdis
۲۱ رنگ دلگشا	6, 7, 4, 3, 2 & 1	44 - Reng-e Delgoshâ
آواز افشاری		45 - Âvâz-e afshâri - 7' 59"
۱ درآمد	2, 3 & 1	46 - Darâmad
۲ بسته نگار	2, 3 & 1	47 - Basteh-negâr
۳ عراق	4, 3, (2 & 1)	48 - 'Arâq"va Forud"
۴ قرایی	3 & 1	49 - Qarâi

*La partie du système modal sur laquelle le "gusheh" est basé.

*The part of modal system in which the "gusheh" is based.

Rhythms, even more so than modal structures, are among the essential structures of Iranian music. In the past especially, they gave this art, in a more formal way than the modal system, its specific and absolute character, to the point that *Ishaq al-Mawsilli* would even tolerate deviations from the principles of the *dastaghs* (rhythmic structures) but never from those of rhythm. These rhythms even appear to be of more distinctly Arabic than Iranian origin. If we take into account their derivatives and adaptations, their number can reach 300, according to the chronicles. To grasp the specific role of rhythm (*iqa*), it suffices to know that it serves as the metrical support for the melody, just as prosodic meter supports speech. Rhythms, like musical intervals, are in fact cultural markers.

If an Indian, an Arab, and a European listen, for example, to the sound of a train on the tracks, each of them organizes that sound in a different way. One's poems are regular, and he organizes the sounds according to this mental order, for example, in 2/4 time. If it's an Iranian, he will organize them in 6/8. In fact, rhythm must harmonize with the rhythm of culture, and when it does, it harmonizes with all the other rhythms of the arts, architecture, and life in general. For an Iranian, music harmonizes with poetry, but it is not regular; it cannot be reduced to 2/4 or 6/8. In other words, if an Iranian musician plays a piece with a metronome, he is completely outside the tradition.

The musical forms of traditional music include the *pishdaramad*, an opening or introduction with a fairly slow rhythm. Next is the *bâhide-Nâvâzi*, a non-rhythmic instrumental improvisation based on the *gushe-s* of the *radif*. The *Tasnif* is a song, a composition with highly varied rhythms, born from the encounter between the poet and the musicians. The *Chahar-mezrab* is a rhythmic improvisation for an instrument accompanied by percussion. The *Zarbi* is a joyful song, a musical setting of poems by the singer, accompanied by a melodic instrument and percussion. The *Avaz* is a vocal improvisation on poems, generally non-rhythmic, accompanied by an instrument in the form of call-and-response verses. Finally, the *Reng* is a work intended for dance. It is a joyful and fairly fast-paced piece performed by the musicians and sometimes by a dancer. In vocal technique, it is good to introduce the *Tahrîr technique*, a glottal tremor that can be compared to the *Yodel* of the Alps.

Here is the program for the concert evening of September 16, 1995 in Los Angeles, California, where the Iranian community is very active.

Dastgah-e Segah

Avaz (vocal): *Shahrokh Gharib*

Târ: *Morteza Yadollahi*

Tar: Behzad Abolahrar

Setar: Mohammad Reza Gharib

Tombak (Zarb) & Daf: Nasrullah Fakhar Tombak:

Shahraam Lame' Music:

Mohammad Reza Gharib Lyrics: Mohammad

Hafiz, M. Gharib

Part One : Segah. 8:00 PM

1. Improvisation at *the Tombak* (8:15 pm)
2. *Tasnif & Pishdaramad : Ala Ya Ayoha Saghee* (8:21 p.m.)
3. *Chahar-Mezrab Segah* : Rhythmic instrumental piece (8:30 pm)
4. *Dara'amad Segah* : improvised, non-rhythmic opening (8:35 PM)
5. *Avaz-e Segah* : non-rhythmic vocal part (8:40 PM)
6. *Avaz-e Zabol* : non-rhythmic vocal part in *Zabol* (20:43)
7. *Tasnif: Agar Ahn Tork*, song at the end of the first part (8:47 p.m.)
8. *Reng* : rhythmic instrumental ending. (8:52 PM)

Intermission: 9pm

Second part : Mokhalif-e Segah

9. *Chahar-mezrab: Mokhalif-e Segah*, rhythmic instrumental piece in *Mokhalif* (9:15 PM)
10. *Dara'amad-e Mokhalif* : (9:20 p.m.)
11. *Avaz-e Mokhalif & Chahar-mezrab* : non-rhythmic vocal piece accompanied by a fast rhythmic instrumental piece (9:35 PM)
12. *Masnavi Mokhalif* : (9:32 PM)
13. *Chahar-mezrab Mokhalif* : (9:37 p.m.)
14. *Tasnif-e Farda* : song (9:41 p.m.)
15. *Tasnif-e Ba'azgoo* : song (9:45 p.m.)
16. *Reng Mokhalif* : ends at 9:52 p.m.

Mohammad Hafiz (1335-1390) is the most respected Iranian poet among those who speak *Farsi* (*Fars*, or *Farsistan*, is an ancient province of Iran, bordering the Persian Gulf. It is the ancestral homeland of the Persians). A child prodigy, he memorized all 6,666 verses of the Quran. His work remains the subject of much debate to this day. *Hafiz* wrote some of the most beautiful verses ever written in *Farsi*. His collection of poetry, approximately 300 poems, can be compared to those of other great poets.

Iranian poets like *Rumi*, *Ferdowsi*, and *Nezami*, with tens of thousands of lines of poetry, possess a remarkable talent, yet the perfection in his relatively small body of work makes him the greatest of them all. A vast corpus of classical poetry, spanning from the 9th century to the present day, is available to singers. It is through the great literature of this world and the enduring intensity of the Iranian singer that these poems come alive. Most of these poems are rhythmically free and are typically performed within the context of a suite of *gushes* from the *Radif*. Although classical poetry has been in use for less than a thousand years and the codification of the *Radif* is modern (19th century), the musical forms appear to date back to classical Persia.

2.2.5. Instruments

The instruments used in traditional classical music are long-necked lutes with 4 rows of strings (*tar* and *setar*), a spike fiddle (*kamancheh*), an oblique flute (*ney*) and traditional Islamic instruments such as the *Kanoun*, a psaltery-like zither, a chalice drum called *Zarb* and the *Sintour*, a type of zither with struck strings.

In folk music, in addition to a number of instruments mentioned above, there are many regional or occasional instruments, such as the long-necked lute of the Kurds, Azerbaijanis and Turkmens (*tanbur*, *sar*, *dotar*), the bass drum (*dohol*) and the oboes of festivals and weddings (*sorna*), a double clarinet (*duzele* or *zimare*), a bagpipe (*ney-anbur*), a trumpet (*karna*) and crotals (*zeng*).

But the *tar* remains the prince of instruments in Iranian music. The *tar* is a plucked string instrument, belonging to the lute family (*ud*), symbolizing both ancient and modern classical music. Literally meaning "stick" or "flexible staff," the *ud* dates back to antiquity and is believed to have originated from the musical bow. *Ibrahim al-Mawsilli* (743-806) was himself a marvelous *ud* player. The most widely used *radif*, that of *Mirza Abdollah*, was written for the *setar*. The *setar* consists of a small, pear-shaped soundbox and a long neck. This neck has 25 gut strings and is pierced at its end by four small pegs. Although its shape varies, the soundbox of the *setar* must be small enough to be held in one hand, and the length of the neck is such that the resonating string never exceeds 67 centimeters. The body and soundboard are made of mulberry wood, the neck of walnut, and the pegs of walnut or boxwood. Due to its light weight (approximately 350 grams), its rich and delicate tone, and its very intimate size, the *setar* is the instrument and preferred companion of scholars and music lovers who play it more for themselves than for the public. The word *setar* means "three strings," but today the

The setar has four strings. A fourth string was added between the second and third strings of the older *setar*; it acts as a kind of sympathetic string, doubling the third string at the higher octave. Its role is to enrich the sound of the other strings, and it is not played alone. This innovation is attributed to *Moshtaq Ali Shah* at the end of the previous century. The long-necked lute is highly valued and widespread in Central Asia in various forms and sizes, but what gives the *setar* a special place is its specific and unique playing technique within Persian classical music. It is played by various combinations of up and down index finger movements, a sort of rolling of the tip of the index finger: the nail and the skin touching one or more strings, highlighting the string on which the melody is played, wrapping it with the other strings, sometimes brushing the string next to it and sometimes plucking the bass string (drone) like the beat of an irregular rhythm.

The range of the *setar* is more than two and a half octaves.

The *tar* has six strings and is played with a brass plectrum. Its double-bodied, heart-shaped body is covered with a very thin skin. The strings are tuned in fourths, and the frets on the neck are movable. The range of the neck is about two and a half octaves, like the *setar*, which is roughly the range of the human voice.

2.3. Musical and Cultural Aesthetics 2.3.1.

Thought and Culture

Playing an instrument in Persian music develops the musician's inner expression; the instrument becomes the vehicle for their emotions. The *tar* is not simply a vibrating soundbox; it reveals the cultural, natural, and transcendent environment in which the musician lives. It is not enough to know how to play the instrument; one must find the sounds, the timbre that will become one with Nature.

Just as touch and style are a guarantee of tradition, intervals must be rediscovered and shaped for each melody. The sounds must also move in a certain way; generally, the melody follows an upward movement, symbolizing human transcendence. In music considered non-traditional, the movements are downward.

Ornamentation is also a key element of Persian aesthetics, reflecting a paradoxical way of thinking where detail is more important than the whole. Music, therefore, is an initiated science, precisely the object of traditional oral transmission. This beauty, sought through ornamentation, is an integral part of the structure, just like the rosettes and *rosalia* on mosque columns; the column is beautiful and, at the same time, it supports the building.

Music thus refers to all other arts and to the whole of culture.

We could even say that music is considered culture here, and not merely a part of it. The performer must therefore possess a proper education and a proper teacher. If he memorizes all the ornaments and the model repertoire within the correct milieu, he has already accomplished a large part of his work. But if he relies solely on technique, a sense of rhythm, or virtuosity, his music will be weak and considered vulgar (*mobtaza*). There must be sound thought and culture, in the sense of authentic (*asil*). Imitation and repetition are not permitted, and the traditional musician must innovate, create, and invent to be recognized. We wholeheartedly agree when Jean During writes:

"Having encompassed culture and symbolism, the traditional approach defines itself as a movement towards a transcendence that is revealed in personal experience and that is the guarantee of authenticity. The faculty of creation is one of its fruits, inseparable from certain privileged states. But these states themselves are authenticated by ethical criteria."

1

2.3.2. Internal criteria, ethics, music as a way of thinking

The artist must reveal a personal expression, an emotion, and at the same time, their music must soothe the mind and create balance. To achieve this, the musician must possess complete mastery of their emotional states. The musician's goal is to communicate an emotion, to share a state (*hal*) by finding the foundations of that emotion within themselves. But this personal experience must be sublimated in order to communicate during the performance and reach as many people as possible, without exceeding the boundaries established by custom. The artist must be a kind of "channel" through which the best of their essence flows; they must efface themselves to be recognized by the audience: the "one" (the musician) merges with the "whole" (the audience).

Expressiveness, or *tarz-e ejrâ* (manner of playing), is linked to moral and metaphysical values. The ancient masters did not teach just any student. They first tested the student's moral character and deep motivation; this was the only important criterion in their eyes for the music to be good for them and for others. Therefore, anyone who wished to study *radîf* embarked on a long and arduous path. As their mind developed, as they acquired knowledge of other arts, and as they discovered aesthetic principles and intellectual systems, the student followed a kind of asceticism that led them toward Knowledge (*'erfan*, mysticism, gnosis). The study of music thus became a true spiritual and mystical commitment, which some may use solely for other purposes.

¹ During (1994), pp. 92-93.

personal matters. Only a truly skilled master can distinguish a liar from a corrupt individual. These people must be denounced, because traditional music is serious and a certain rigor must prevail in order to maintain authenticity.

This music possesses profound thoughts and reflections, and if one wishes to grasp even the smallest detail, one must not dwell on musical forms, nor on feelings, much less on the interpretation of the *radif*, but rather one must know, or rather recognize, this very particular language. Some intellectuals or theorists studying the great Iranian poets pride themselves on knowing and understanding traditional music. But they listen with their feelings and are incapable of establishing communication. It would seem to us, therefore, that the essence of the tradition lies more in complex domains such as sensitivity, intuition, taste, experience, and of course, ethics and metaphysics. All of this leads us back to a single thing, to a unity that tends toward the "higher" and is connected to the sacred. Master *Majid Kiani* adheres to this view, saying:

*"If you have grasped the truth in a particular field, you then possess a touchstone that applies to everything else: there is no difference. If you have understood music, if you have accessed its essence (jowhar), you understand all the music in the world. Of course, you cannot know in which particular mode a given performer is playing, but if they are a charlatan, you can easily tell. This is possible provided you have reached a certain point in your own musical understanding; otherwise, no. Moreover, if I understand music, I should be able to understand architecture, literature, and painting. This applies to everything else, because these are also intellectual forms of knowledge acquired by the same path."*¹

2.3.3. Musical tradition as oral culture: the shift from oral to written form

The essential question here is whether orality is synonymous with tradition, since the use of notation divides those who favor a certain modernity and those who uphold tradition. The Persians had very little interest in notation. The few fragments that have been found served only as examples.

Regarding Western solfège, which appeared at the beginning of the century, current musicians hardly use it; they prefer to learn by heart rather than "note by note".

Traditional music is generally more oral than written. But in Iran, this idea goes further, as the entire society is linked to orality (except in the religious sphere where written texts are revered). Indeed, it is not only music that has an oral tradition; the art of carpet weaving is generally oral, as is traditional architecture. This type of thinking and

¹ Kiâni (1989), pp.54-55.

This mode of expression is also found among Asian musicians, as orality generates a very specific cognitive process; oral thought is unifying, participatory, synthetic, and aural, whereas written thought or expression is distancing, reflective, analytical, and visual. In fact, the quintessential Iranian mode of intellectual expression is the narration of a concrete story, with a specific setting and context.

It should be noted, however, that orality is not the exclusive domain of oral societies, and that in our modern societies, we are all born into an oral environment, and that writing is acquired only through education. In Iran, orality is in fact embedded within a cultural context of writing, and the two often overlap. The characteristics of musical discourse and literary or poetic texts clearly demonstrate the limitations of this fusion. Music produced in an oral environment is redundant and repetitive, which is impossible in a poem or text. Furthermore, music of the oral tradition creates a specific context by uniting subject and object. Music exists only through performance, which unites the audience and the musician in an immediate present that becomes a unique and unrepeatable moment.

In Iranian music, each performance is a new situation where anything can happen. You then have an intuitive knowledge, in the truest sense of the word, namely an immediate perception of the truth without the aid of reasoning.

Among the other distinctive features of orality, we must mention its concrete meaning combined with the unifying aspect mentioned above. Oral thought encompasses the present, the past, and the future in a single, cyclical time. It focuses on the situation, on the human element. This is why Persian art music, despite its sophistication and complexity, despite the existence of ancient, highly abstract musical treatises, does not concern itself with theory and prefers to prioritize practice, instrumental and vocal technique, and the exploration of expressive effects. Despite all these observations, a shift has occurred from oral to written form. Poetry is no longer memorized as it was by folk storytellers or bards. The *radif* has materialized into a precise and concise text and is transmitted in the same way as written memory. The change has certainly taken place, but despite everything, Iran has managed to preserve the oral nature of its transmission, and thus the ancient character of its tradition.

The transition from oral to written form was slow, with several phases (text, typography, magnetic recording, and video) that leave some doubt as to the future of musical traditions. Nevertheless, religion and the sacred, as individual or collective experiences, are always linked to tradition, particularly in Islam where religious and mystical practices are very often accompanied by music.

2.4. Foundations of Tradition 2.4.1.

Mystical dimension of tradition.

2.4.1.1 The *Hal* and tradition.

The primary function of Iranian music, and of Islamic arts in general, is to communicate a movement that transports the individual from one state to another. To achieve this, it is essential to influence emotions and perceptions, to alter the nature of things, and to attain a symbolic transmutation that allows passage from one plane to another. This process is expressed by the concept of *hâl* in Iranian music, and by the concept of *tarab* in the Arab world more broadly. While it is difficult to provide a general definition of *hâl*, it could be, at a basic level, a momentary alteration of consciousness, a shift from a normal state to another. It is important to emphasize that this change is empowering and positive. Even if there are differing definitions, all would agree that the most significant aspect of this experience is the simultaneous coexistence of the individual's essence and the universal dimension of the experience. According to Jean During, the very structure of the *hal* :

*"[...] is an articulation between presence and absence, otherness and identity, fullness and lack, attainment and loss. The Hâl is a modality of the instant; one cannot remain in it or grasp it, it comes and goes without apparent cause."*¹

It is in this state that a "world" is revealed for a moment: due to the concordance between cosmology and anthropology, the term "world" (*âlam*) is also used, in conjunction with that of *hâl*. In the theosophical and Sufi system, this world and the experience in which it manifests are truer and more real, the senses or faculties that apprehend it being more acute. *hâl*, therefore, by virtue of its fleeting and uncontrollable nature, cannot be reduced to a technique nor expressed by ordinary words. *hâl* is thus opposed to the word (*qâl*), to any determination of its content, to any appropriation, and would correspond, in Taoist philosophy, to the concept of emptiness, that is to say, in the definition of Deleuze and Guattari:

*"A perfect individuality that lacks nothing, although it is not to be confused with that of a thing or a subject. [...] Everything in it is a relationship of movement and rest between molecules or particles, the power to affect or be affected."*³

¹ During (1994), p.162.

² In Islamic gnosis, the world is made up of hierarchical levels whose access is inseparable from a specific cognitive experience; anthropological levels correspond to the levels of the world.

³ Deleuze and Guattari (1991), p.318.

All these characteristics make *hâl* a "pure" aesthetic experience, sought after and anticipated by all Iranian musicians. In fact, in insider jargon, it's said that the artist "has *hâl*" or "plays with *hâl*." But we don't really know what this means, and we observe that the question of *hâl* is generally presented in a schematic and idealized way, with little connection to reality. It seems important to say that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to speak about or describe a state that one has never lived and experienced. However, we can attempt to outline the main benefits of *hâl*. First, *hâl* allows for the fusion between the musician and the music they are performing, thus opening the path to creation. The musician is at their best, and musical thought can be easily realized. Some use various aids to enhance receptivity, but it must be said that nowadays this practice is practically obsolete. It would seem that the concept of *hâl* has its origins elsewhere. The roots of this concept are to be found in Sufism and Gnosticism. It was fundamentally about reaching higher states of consciousness connected to other levels of the world. According to H. Nasr, who studied the influence of Sufism on traditional Persian music:

*"Failing to achieve spiritual transformation and the abandonment of their ordinary state through asceticism or discipline, some have turned to artificial means in order to forget themselves for a moment."*¹

Whether the *hâl* is natural or artificial, it nonetheless retains the contours of a sacred experience. And to better grasp its scope and function, it seems useful to go back to its source, to the archaic context of its origins. We can consider the urban traditional musician to be the descendant of the singer-poet in popular or tribal circles, and that the latter is the custodian of the shaman in archaic cultures. There still exist cultures in Asia where the singer-poet is both shaman and priest.² Certain analogies emerge between the traditional musician and the shaman.

An "authentic" musician is supposed to connect with a transcendence of either a cultural or mystical nature, and this is achieved through the *hâl*. If inspired, the musician gives tangible form to what they feel and communicates it to the audience. The effects of the communication established by the musician are not unlike the actions of a shaman: they unify the group by establishing a shared emotional state that will define the

¹ Nasr (1972), p.230. H. Nasr here draws a direct link between musical practice and mystical practices.

Later, we will see that we can trace its origins back further than Sufism, to shamanistic practices. However, Sufism exerted a significant influence on art music, particularly in the 19th century when mysticism regained favor with influential figures.

² For example, we can cite the Turkmen *bakhshi*, certain Baloch exorcists, and in general Sufi singers.

The group itself. It therefore acts on horizontal links (gathering, conviviality, communication) and on vertical links, allowing the group to access a transcendence of a cultural, emotional, or metaphysical nature. The other social function of the artist and the shaman is to foresee or prepare for the future; the musician through their inspiration, which can either follow the group's changes or anticipate them. The shaman operates in the same way.

In Persian civilization, the other, the non-Muslim, is considered impure, and the goal is to preserve the "purity" of the culture (*asil*). As for the musician, he must conform to the requirements of purity and be authentic in his *hal*; his morality must be irreproachable to remain within the tradition. The musician, like the mystic or the Sufi, is often rejected by those who claim to adhere to a certain form of Islam, and consequently, he finds himself marginalized. Shamanism, in turn, is relegated to the same status.

The example of the Darda people of the Karakoram (Northern Pakistan) clearly demonstrates this. This animistic culture communicated with the spirit world through the *pari* (fairies), supernatural beings who lived in nature. The shaman, a pure being par excellence, makes contact with the fairies and transmits messages to the group.

Islamization erased animist cultures, and now, the *spirits* communicate through melodic messages whispered in the shaman's ear. In the shift from an archaic religious sphere to a more modern one, shamanism is said to have gained an ethical and more distinctly spiritual dimension. This vertical axis, the unchanging center of change, is also claimed by the custodians of the musical tradition.

This vertical axis, this direct connection with the Divine, is symbolized by musical intervals. We have seen how the classification and use of intervals and modal scales is a very personal approach. But, even more so, if the musician has a good *understanding*, they will have a different "vision" of the sequence of intervals.

In other words, the musician will find the corresponding intervals based on their own *hâlat*. Each mode possesses a particular *ethos*, expressed by the term *hâlat*. The *hâlat* of *Shur* is defined primarily by its intervals.¹ In other words, it is first and foremost by its intervals that it is called *Shur*. Only then does the melodic contour come into play, and the musician must find the correct intonation, the *hâlat* of the mode.

Under these conditions, intervals and modal scales appear both imbued with symbolic value as vehicles of emotion and inner states, and as the unalterable elements of an immanent and consensual code. Their enduring nature undoubtedly stems from their position at the intersection of two lines: one vertical (transcendent) and the other horizontal (communication).

¹ From bottom to top: 37, 37, 51, 37, 37 savarts, or approximately, 4/4, 4/4, 3/4, 4/4, 4/4 of a tone.

2.4.1.2 Mother's music and father's music.

While there are obvious analogies between music and language, there is one language that has no equivalent: the mother tongue. The same is true for religion; even though all religions are founded on transcendence, each religion is distinguished by the unique experience of each individual. The case of music falls under both language and religion; language as communication and religion as an affective experience.

In traditional societies, "maternal" music holds a special status. It is transmitted, first and foremost, through lullabies. This transmission occurs orally, naturally. And then, by biologically linking the individual to their mother, music connects them to society as an ethnic group. Maternal music is that which one has "in the blood," according to an expression often used in Iran and elsewhere, as if it were transmitted in the womb or through breast milk.¹

This "music of the mother" is contrasted, in a complementary way, with what could be called the "music of the father"; this music relies more on technique, reflection, rationalization, and verbalization. This music belongs to the realm of art music.

Yet many in the Middle East believe that their music, in general, as a (mother tongue), fundamentally cannot be learned. An Iranian musician might admit that a Westerner plays their music, but it will always be a pale imitation. This seemingly contradictory viewpoint is perhaps acceptable if one understands that for an Iranian, "mother tongue" music is equivalent to "traditional" music. And in any case, the Iranian musician will ultimately say that the most authentic (*asil*) music in the world is Iranian. Here, faith merges with the authenticity of practice. The artist fully embraces their native music; they have faith in their school and their masters. For, while religions may originate from the same source, the one that is the object of the believer's devotion becomes the best. The same is true for music, because if the musician is convinced that the music they play is the best, their practice will only be enhanced. Once again, as is often the case in Iran, we return to mysticism: only faith can ensure the permanence and renewal of the spiritual tradition.

1 The relationship between religion and the mother, which is also found in music, is perhaps based on the ancient Zoroastrian concept that woman embodied the innate principle of pure religion. One of the basic rhythms of Persian music is called "mother's milk," *shir-e mâdar*.

2.4.2 Religious dimension of tradition

2.4.2.1. The model of Islam: the text and its interpretations.

The authoritative repertoire today is the work of *Mirza Abdollah*, who established the authoritative text in the "new" tradition. This text, the *radif*, was adapted and rewritten for the time and now serves as a reference among all repertoires. Even though it represents the perfect model, each artist's own interpretation is encouraged. It may even offer other versions because, for experts, the vulgate has not been definitively settled: like the Gospels, it is one version, but others exist that are just as authentic. Experts chose this *particular radif* because they possessed an intact version that many had learned and transmitted.¹ The status of the *radif* as a reference text thus coincides only to a certain extent with that of the Book in the Islamic tradition.

Another important point is that since *Mirza Abdullah*, no one has been authorized to create a new *radif* or even add a *gushe*, as if the revelation were closed once and for all; musicians have since devoted themselves to its hermeneutics and interpretation. The strictest interpretation is called *ijtihad*, the spiritual interpretation of the Quran that ensures continuity within renewal. There is, of course, a debate between the *Osuli*, who advocate analogical reasoning in interpretation, and the *Akhbari*, who give primacy to tradition over interpretation. But this divergence is only possible because there is no longer a true spiritual authority, no Imam. In short, only two possibilities remain: either to adhere to a fixed tradition, or to continue the tradition at a lower level, that is to say, that of interpretation or hermeneutics.

For H. Corbin, three levels of interpretation are distinguished: literal interpretation (*tafsir*), philosophical interpretation (*ta'wîl*) and gnostic interpretation (*tafhim*).² Through spiritual intuition, tradition always appears as a structure enabling communication with the sacred and a return to origins and meaning, in order to renew creative possibilities.

The artist's originality therefore comes from his ability to go back to the principles (*osul*) and to make the text speak.

Conformity to the Text will therefore be achieved either by religious authority or by the people themselves. On another level, tradition can thus be developed at three different hierarchical levels: by the people, by qualified representatives, or by a single expert in religious studies, recognized by all his peers. We obviously find in musical culture the two categories of the religious community: the

¹ See Nettl (1986), p. 159. An important reason for the canonization of this *radif* rather than another was the fact that *N.A. Borumand* recorded this *radif* in the 1950s, played by *E. Qahramâni*, a *khalifa* of *Mirza Abdollah*, and learned it by heart from him. This recording circulated only within professional circles, which contributed to its success.

² Corbin (1964), p.23.

General consensus and the consensus of connoisseurs. A musician can be validated either by the master or by a group of masters. In other cases, it is the public itself that consecrates the master and their music. Music masters are, in fact, creative individuals who reinterpret the legacy of tradition according to their own inclinations and personal taste.

Despite its flexibility, the system of source interpretation does not address the core tenets of faith and religious practices. The Book, the pillars (*arkân*) , and the dogmas remain untouchable. It is, in fact, a framework with very precise boundaries that cannot be crossed without risking exclusion. H. Corbin explains this pluralism within dogma:

*"Innovation breaks with tradition. Conversely, there is no tradition without perpetual renewal, and the idea of renewal, of rebirth, is concomitant with the idea of tradition. Spiritual hermeneutics is the source of perpetual renewal, but the idea of renewal differs from that of innovation, which implies [...] a rupture or a forceful act."*¹

The musical community is also divided on the possibility of creating a new text: some refer solely to the traditional repertoire, others preserve it alongside new forms; still others do not hesitate to change it or even abandon it altogether. But the most serious current problem, according to several musicians, is the absence of any authority, that is to say, of master(s) recognized by the public and considered perfect by all connoisseurs, and superior to others in every respect. Consequently, the transmission from master to student, a fundamental element of the tradition, tends to disappear in favor of self-teaching or superficial book learning.

2.4.2.2. Transmission from master to pupil: phenomenology

Having approached the concept of tradition from various angles, let us now consider that of the individual. There is no Tradition without a conscious and deliberate act of transmission and reception. The individual receives a gift and must assume it; that is to say, a bond is formed between the giver and the receiver. The one who receives or is called the master; the one who receives is called the disciple. This gift cannot be returned, for the master already possesses it. The disciple can therefore only offer gratitude, demonstrated by the complete realization and recognition of the gift bestowed upon them. The bond between master and disciple is thus always a moral bond, a person-to-person relationship. The term "master" is used here in a relative sense. Because if the function exists

¹ Corbin (1971), p.262.

Well, what the master gives does not belong to him, since everyone has been trained by someone else. In other words, the content of Tradition is always transcendent to its custodian, and ultimately, masters are also students. Similarly, for the object of transmission (the *radif*), it is not a matter of preserving the repertoire or the text, but of keeping the music alive through new witnesses. According to Jean During: “*The truth of Tradition is not that the master passes the torch to the disciple, but that he lights the disciple’s torch.*”¹ In the strongest

sense, Tradition is indeed transmission (*traditio*) within a relationship between two people, between a master and a student. This master-student relationship is fundamental, because, as a *hadith* says : “He who has no master has Satan as his master.” Therefore, a master is *necessary* . The other aspect of this relationship is to develop the student’s potential, and thus divine, qualities. Of course, traditions can be perpetuated through the influence of the environment and family. But, according to Sufis and Gnostics, conformity to religious law (*shar*) is only the elementary level of knowledge, beyond which lie the Path (*tariqa*) and Knowledge (*ma'rifa*), and ultimately Truth (*haqiqa*), while the first level only grants access to salvation. In other words, the hidden meaning, the subtleties, and the methods of applying the Laws and written teachings are solely the domain of initiatory transmission. This Gnostic vision is shared by the great masters of music and by all custodians of artistic traditions. This initiation preserves a meaning, a truth, a value that sometimes appears simplistic (an image, a song...). To be traditional is to adhere to a teaching, and therefore to follow a master for a certain period of

time. It is not merely a matter of imitation; it is also about choosing one's teacher (and vice versa) based on inner qualities that resonate with those of the student. But oral learning from a teacher is also about obedience and humility; one must possess great virtues to feel free while silently obeying. Respect for the teacher is therefore a prerequisite *for* preserving the heritage. A very ancient trait among the Persians is that gratitude was considered the highest virtue, and impudence the most detestable. This quality is one of the essential elements in the regular transmission of tradition. Conversely, once the teacher deems the student ready, they dismiss them, thus freeing them from their guidance so that they can become self-reliant and develop their own potential.

This something that is transmitted thus appears to us to be of the order of *being* and not of *having*. The absence of an object of transmission (writings or musical scores) implies a profound person-to-person relationship. “What is perpetuated in Tradition is not an object of knowledge, but a *knowing subject*.”²

¹ During (1994), p.345.

² During (1994), p.352.

But when the master-disciple relationship is confronted with different realities, we see the emergence of behaviors and attitudes that jeopardize Tradition. The first of the modernists in Iran was *A.N. Vaziri* (1887-1978), who was one of the agents of the break with tradition. First of all, he had no teacher, having spent his youth in Europe at French and German conservatories. Supported by the modern and anti-traditional regime, he was given the directorship of a conservatory that replicated the Western model. Apart from a portion of the national cultural heritage, he received nothing and transmitted nothing, and it is undoubtedly in this that he departed from tradition. Half a century later, some still say that he caused irreparable damage to traditional music. But, it seems to us, the clash with the West could not be avoided; what is most regrettable is the way *Vaziri used it*. Yet he was a pioneer, because much later, other musicians would adopt an approach that was similar in many respects.

To conclude on this point, we felt it would be interesting to see how one of the most traditional figures in Iran today, *Majid Kiani* (born in 1941), reacts. This musician, *Zia Mirabdolbaghi* 's teacher , with whom we interviewed, adopts a middle ground. He reflects on Western culture in order to mirror his own and better define his position. He advocates for ethical training and non-verbal transmission. He explains that it is unnecessary to speak to explain musical teaching, whereas in the West, everything is explained. However, he deplores the insolent attitude of today's students who ask unfounded questions and, above all, lack what he considers most important: the quest, the faith, and the passion.

DYNAMICS OF IMPROVISATION IN THE Iranian and Jazz Music

3.1. The Concept of Improvisation and Sociocultural

Context 3.1.1 *Improvisation as a Social Phenomenon*

The power of discourse implies a hierarchy of functions. Today, musicians are engaged in a social situation where achieving a product is absolutely essential: the quintessential non-productive thing, creation, can hardly be shared. It is quite difficult these days to find musical partners without the ultimate goal of production. By shattering hierarchies and shifting roles, improvisation appears utopian in the truest sense, always in flux. Even if we believe that the rise of improvisation remains linked to our era, its social impact is nonetheless explosive and constitutes a kind of collective guarantee against the stasis of academies of all kinds. From a personal point of view, improvisation is a kind of clandestine activity, a form of resistance and revolt against the established order. But this proposition applies to European music, and we must situate improvisation within Iranian society to see if it plays the same role.

First and foremost, improvisation presents itself as the manifestation of individuality within a collective context, raising the question of the relationship between the individual and the group. In traditional Iranian music, and more generally in traditional circles, each system reflects the identity of a group, a culture, and acquires emblematic value. Thus, during an improvised performance, the performer can go beyond the accepted limits of fluctuation, to the point that the audience no longer recognizes the signs of their own cultural identity. Improvisation is the privileged domain of this process, because only there can the musician modify their approach in response to the audience's reactions. In the case of composition (oral or written), this is not possible, as the process is deferred and the performance can take place without the composer's presence. Beyond the coherence of the system, improvisation must be considered from the perspective of the receptivity of the information it contains. We have seen that improvisation, the foundation of the Iranian musical system, follows very strict rules and codifications, and too great a deviation would disrupt the process of identification. Moreover, in the traditional repertoire, the master's authority is the primary condition for the introduction of new material, subject to the approval of other masters, transmission to students, and personal originality. Only the master is authorized to validate a new element and then disseminate it through his audience and his students.

It seems that improvisation, by its very nature, thrives in less restrictive conditions and adapts poorly to settings where music has a functional or conventional character. The reason is that ritual, official, or academic codifications have their own systems.

Musical practices that leave little room for improvisation. However, there are cases where the socio-cultural system and musical freedom are closely linked, as in trance or possession rituals.¹ Generally speaking, external constraints do not favor improvisation; that is to say, the relaxation of social and psychological constraints promotes the improvisation process. This can be seen in many cathartic practices, in jazz, and in Sufi music.

In jazz, largely based on improvisation, the social aspect has played a very important role. Indeed, jazz has always been a "social" way of playing, an opportunity to be together, to let loose, to express oneself fully. Until the bebop revolution, jazz was confined to a narrow musical framework; harmonically, rhythmically, and formally, it didn't go very far. From the spontaneous polyphony of the first *gospel*-singing gatherings, the entertainments of the *swing era* remain, almost all written down, where improvisation is relegated to choruses, which gradually became more coherent. Of course, in African American music, the blues always resurfaces where it is least expected. We hear it in Duke Ellington's "*Koko*" (1940) and in the playing of some soloists in the big bands, not all of whom sound like Benny Goodman: Lester Young and Billie Holiday with Count Basie, or Charlie Parker with Jay McShann. From the music of the ghetto, however, only a "perfect" art form of entertainment remained, recognized as such by the whole of American society, and which would constitute the first sign of true recognition of jazz by Western culture: *mainstream* or *middle jazz*. At the end of the 1930s, a whole generation of young musicians decided to shatter the traditional frameworks of improvisation: Charlie Christian, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Kenny Clarke, and Max Roach became both masters and often unsurpassed role models. It was from 1943 onward, at the Minton's Playhouse cabaret in New York, that bebop, which innovated on three levels, began to take shape. First, rhythmically: the drummer and bassist gained greater autonomy. Second, harmonically: themes were frequently renewed through the constant use of passing chords and the use of unusual chords. Finally, it becomes melodic: the phrase conforms to systematic chromaticism or uses wider intervals. This increasing complexity of the language primarily signifies that improvisation with *bebop musicians* becomes assertive: an assertion of identity in the sense that they transform the standards so drastically that they are taken for their own themes.

A claim for freedom conveyed through the expressiveness of the soloists. A claim, ultimately, for a society marked by an accepted marginalization.

1 In Balochistan, trance rites combine improvisation and the unfolding of the ceremony: the nature of the music allows for innovations or improvised adaptations which generally correspond to an increase in expressive impact.

But this revolution, migrating from east to west, from New York to Los Angeles, will quickly be diluted by the sweetness of the new style aptly named *cool*.

Gerry Mulligan and Chet Baker marked the end of improvisational energy. There was indeed a reconquest of lost sound in the mid-1950s. Art Blakey, Max Roach, and Horace Silver attempted to rediscover the cries, the vocalizations, the extreme expressiveness, the raw sonority that the extreme sophistication of the post-bop language had erased. This raw energy marked the point of no return, necessitating the leap into *free jazz*. By the mid-1960s, the exceptional freedom of movement that music acquired with *free jazz* transcended its strictly African American origins. By striving for freedom, jazz opened itself up to all musical genres. This desire for freedom is, of course, understandable in reference to bebop, but beyond that, this movement, as much political as musical, can be interpreted as a rejection of the principles and conventions of the established order. The call for improvisation, formulated by Albert Ayler who declared he wanted to rediscover the musical style of the early New Orleans jazzmen, was more about libertarian aspirations than a new style, or even a new language. The essential message of *free jazz* is, in fact, the necessity of playing one's own music.

We are therefore entitled to question the status or position of the musicians who assume this responsibility, because it is a particular position that cannot be that of just any participant.

3.1.2 Status of the improviser: shame or prestige.

3.1.2.1 Society's perspective

The status of an improviser can be assessed in relation to a professional or social hierarchy. It seems likely that improvising is a sign of musical skill or a certain authority, and enhances an individual's position within society. However, in the West, where the degree of unpredictability and chance is very low and poorly accepted, the improviser has often been considered marginal and therefore excluded from society.

As proof, all the key figures of the bebop revolution (Charlie Christian, Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Kenny Clarke, Max Roach) were ostracized and considered mad at the time. Rejecting the function of official (entertaining) jazz music and playing for themselves, they were no longer "useful" in a social sense. It took some time for this radical and necessary change to be accepted and for these musicians to be recognized as masters of jazz. In contrast, John Coltrane and Ornette Coleman, the two principal creators of *free jazz*, were accepted and very quickly considered by the public and their peers as undisputed masters. Moreover, this new way of playing soon...

reach Europe; Ornette Coleman's first recording, *Free Jazz*, dates from 1960 and the first recording of "free jazz" in France dates from 1966: *Free Jazz* with Francois Tusques, Bernard Vitet, Michel Portal, Charles Saudrais and Beb Guerin. Generally speaking, improvisers in the West are undervalued, or, as we have seen, they belong to the realm of classical music, where improvisation is considered a stroke of genius. Acts of improvisation must be considered in relation to the hierarchy of musical and social roles. These roles may coincide; "speaking out" can enhance a person's standing in society. On the other hand, in some cases, such as certain percussion ensembles in the Tibesti region, the accompanists are just as essential as the soloist, who could not do without them. In many alternating dervish chants (*sama*, *dhikr*, *qawali*), the leadership role may be assigned to someone possessing moral authority rather than superior musical skill. In Iran, where moral authority is as essential as musical authority, the status of the solo improviser is higher than that of orchestral musicians. But it's important to remember that the concept of improvisation isn't inherent to Persian art music. Instead, the focus is on how the instrumentalist adapts to the singer, accompanies them, precedes them, and "responds" to them—a practice that demands creative abilities and is perhaps one of the primary forms of improvisation. In Iran, a musician who can "respond" to the singer's call is considered to have reached maturity; before that point, they are merely an interpreter, someone who speaks for another, who says nothing of their own. As in jazz, a good improviser is one who, drawing on a model, demonstrates extraordinary creativity and personal invention. Like in jazz, the Iranian musician is simultaneously a composer, performer, and improviser, which grants them a very particular social status.

But beyond these generalities, the status of the Iranian artist seems to have followed a parallel evolution to the deconstruction of the cosmic order that mirrors classical Islamic art. Initially, the artist was merely the "medium" of this order, a skilled craftsman and a great scholar. In ancient music, musical expression drew its essence from the order of the spheres and numbers (through intervals), thus from the Intelligible.¹ From the 18th century onward, symbolic correspondences no longer interested scholars, and following contact with the West, the world order was called into question. In the 19th century, the suite or cycle of composed pieces was replaced by a more chaotic and unpredictable musical form.²

1 Under the Sassanids, *Bârbad* had organized the melodies according to the divisions of time: 360 days of the year, 30 days of the month, and 7 days of the week. From the 12th century onwards, the modes were arranged in 12 main types, in accordance with the zodiac, or in 7, in accordance with the seven planets.

2 This form does not have a precise term in Iran, but it is similar to the *maqam*, a term used in the Arab world. However, the performance of the *radif* is more structured.

Music is now an individual and indeterminate expression, relying on improvisation. From the Abbasid era onward, therefore, the profession of musician was devalued, and the artist was subject to a monarch who patronized him. It was only from the 19th century onward that this status was re-evaluated, probably in imitation of the West and with the advance of secularization.

Today in Iran, it seems that mentalities have changed, and the attitude of artists already heralds modern times. The artist is no longer in the service of the prince; he now belongs to the entire nation. The artist is emancipating himself from his social function, and classical music is in the hands of talented amateurs and refined dilettantes.

The analogy with the history of jazz is striking. This music of Black slaves, which from its origins appears as a vast undertaking to appropriate Western musical culture with another—the counterculture of the descendants of slaves and, following them, of all those considered "second-class" citizens of America, particularly Creoles of color—is today universally recognized as a major art form. Jazz is now taught at the Conservatory, and many classical musicians try to rediscover, through this music, the creativity and spontaneity they had lost. The *jazz musician* fascinates, attracting musicians from all backgrounds as well as an ever-growing audience.

3.1.2.2 Public viewpoint

Improvising is, first and foremost, about adapting to the audience and the circumstances. It is also a way of speaking to the public, of reflecting their state and sending it back to them. It is also a way of corroborating the music produced with one's own state of mind. The relationship changes fundamentally when playing classical music, that is to say, a composition (oral or written). The audience is almost entirely familiar with the work being performed, and a phenomenon of recognition comes into play.

In improvisation, the unknown is a source of tension and anxiety; the audience expects a personalized, individual interpretation, and the musician, in turn, expects validation of their playing. The questioning is therefore more radical because what the musician does is irreversible.

Regarding traditional music, audience reactions vary considerably depending on the situation. Similarly, the performance and type of improvisation will differ greatly depending on the audience. Many Eastern musicians adapt to Western audiences, sometimes making concessions that would be unacceptable in their own cultures. In the Middle East, rules of audience conduct were addressed in chapters of ancient treatises. It's important to understand that even very similar traditions can have very different rules of conduct.

If an artist imposes new rules of conduct on their audience without their approval, there's a good chance their performance will fail. In composition, consensus is delayed and gradual, meaning that the new element has time to take hold. In improvisation, consensus is instantaneous and synchronous with the work itself. In Western classical music, the musician-society relationship is different because the work endures, exists independently, and imposes itself on the audience. It stands between the musician and the public. On the other hand, as Jean During says:

*"[...]In a traditional setting, the ideal model that shapes listening and creation results from the memorization of the sum of performances heard and performed. It is this model that determines the acceptability of a performance."*¹

In Iran, it is therefore important for the public to be able to recognize the structure and the degree of improvisation and personal creativity involved. They must also be able to judge whether the performance is tasteful and authentic (*asil*). This is why the best improvisations are often performed in small groups, among connoisseurs, because why risk improvising before an uninformed audience when they cannot even discern whether it is improvisation or not? The ability to improvise in Iran is thus valued more highly by the public than that of the composer, because this direct connection with the listeners requires performance skills that are not necessary for the composer.

Similarly, jazz was initially a music for connoisseurs, and bebop players found greater emotional and intellectual stimulation in a more intimate setting. Having freed themselves from the role of "court jester" in the 1930s, jazz musicians validated their individual freedom through the public and the *free jazz* concerts of the 1970s. This music of an oppressed people first passed through the hands of the oppressor, only to return to the people, thus responding to the universal demand for freedom. We can see, therefore, that the value of improvisation is not the same for the public as it is for musicians or connoisseurs; in Iran, it is overvalued by the public but not by experts. It is true that in the public's mind, there is no formal model but rather an expressive one, and for the musician, a model of performance as opposed to a model of skill.

¹ During (1987), p.21.

3.1.2.3 Musician's point of view.

How do musicians who improvise perceive their performances and what value does it have for them?

In Iran, where improvisation is neither learned nor taught, performance is based on the standard repertoire (*radif*) and the specific way of linking fixed melodies (*gushe-s*). These ordered melodies are used as the compositional structure for both impromptu (improvisational) and conventional pieces. The masters of the past did not consider this distinction relevant, and when *H. Qoli* (who died in 1915) was asked why he didn't compose fixed pieces like his students, he replied, "What I compose is what I play." The quality of improvisation is therefore linked to the absorption of the standard (*radif*) and to musical culture, but also to culture in general, which shapes taste and style. When we tell an Iranian musician who has just improvised twice on the same *dastgah* that there are differences, he will agree, while emphasizing that the essence is the same.

What's important for the musician is to reveal the true essence of a given *dastgah*, not to excessively embellish it. What we mean is that it's virtually impossible for an untrained ear to discern whether an improvisation is valid or not. Sometimes, even the musician himself doubts the quality of his performance. Opinions vary widely within the Iranian musical community: some say one should repeat the improvisations of others, others say one should imitate the nightingale, which never repeats itself, and still others maintain that a good improvisation is one that most closely resembles the *radif*.

However, we can recognize that the musician is aware of the difference between improvised and composed material when playing, and that the synthesis they create will be their own. In other words, the process of improvisation and the process of composition are two aspects of the same creative activity.

The same is true for jazz musicians who are simultaneously composers, improvisers, and performers. Charlie Parker considered himself a musician in the same way as Beethoven. When we listen to the improvised versions recorded just minutes apart, we are forced to acknowledge that composition and improvisation are concentrated in a single musical entity. On September 18, 1948, Parker recorded four tracks for the Savoy label. Among them was "*Parker's Mood*," a blues in *B-flat*, without a theme but with a very traditional progression. Two complete versions survive from this session, two false starts, and a magnificent half-version. These two versions were released separately, and no one would suspect that they were recorded consecutively, so different and independent are they, yet so identical.

Charlie Parker managed to concentrate the traditional functions and imagine their transcendence through his creative force and his power of play.

John Coltrane, initially captivated by Parker's speed of playing, wanted to go even faster, and the effect was, paradoxically, the opposite; Coltrane suspended time in an extreme slowness.¹ Coltrane opened up time and affirmed the necessity of playing for a long time. From this perspective, he aligns with the "Eastern" tradition of playing for a complete, full, cyclical duration. All these musicians, Iranian or Western, have become models today thanks to their creative and innovative abilities, and are imitated and cited as references.

We have seen that it is very difficult to distinguish the improvisational approach from the compositional approach. But what is so special about improvisation that it is the object of so much suspicion or fascination?

3.2. The Improvisation Process 3.2.1.

Subjective Aspects of Improvisation 3.2.1.1. Musical Attitude

What does an improviser actually do? Some will immediately say it sounds like Ravel, Chopin, or Bartók, and if none of these references apply, the same person will then say that the musician is playing jazz. But it would seem that the process of improvisation is more complex than a pale imitation of this or that composer. This becomes evident when an experienced pianist finds themselves unable to improvise, because the approach of an improviser is quite specific, as Vladimir Jankélévitch so aptly put it:

*"It requires a mixture of vigilance and acrobatic flexibility, decisiveness but also a certain surrender. This gift is the very opposite of carelessness. Here are five situations in which the improviser must strike like lightning upon the blatant circumstances without arriving too early or too late: the spirit of discussion or repartee; the gift of the polyglot who speaks a foreign language; sight-reading or deciphering, which is impromptu understanding; the intuition of the strategist who devises a solution in a few seconds; the clinician's eye who, through an immediate assessment of the situation, quickly makes a decision without getting lost in the details."*²

¹ Technological change also plays an important role here: Parker occupied the time of one side of 78 records. Coltrane was the first to occupy an entire side of a 33 rpm record.

² Jankélévitch (1998), p.110.

This very particular musical attitude is one of the cornerstones of improvisation. This double game, this paradox, leaves room for creation and invention. But what is even more fascinating is that this moment is the materialization in space and time of a birth. Later in the same work, Jankélévitch writes:

*"Like creation, invention, or inspiration, improvisation is a beginning, music is nascent: the improviser finds their themes little by little by searching for them. The 'theme' matures mysteriously in the 'thesis,' the ready-made gives way to the becoming."*¹

But from the point of view of the observer, that is to say the musicologist, improvisation can then be reduced to a simple process of variation in relation to a given model.

But if the model is repeated in variations and the intention remains that of a faithful reproduction, it cannot be improvisation; at most, the variation will serve as a starting point, like a sonic realization of the dialectic between reproducing and renewing (in Latin, between *tradere* and *tradire*), and may have as its extreme consequence the creation and stabilization of new statements, models, and forms. In this sense, improvisation always implies a dynamic intention. This creative energy, in motion, which has nothing to do with the theme and its variations, is described by Jankélévitch as follows:

"Not only does the improvisational experience work on vibrant matter and awaken inspiration through contact with the instrument, but it also experiments with memories. This experimentation is not limited to a varied theme, nor to a series of variations on a given theme; the theme and variations are initially proposed as a theorem, that is to say, found as such, laid down once and for all, then diluted, multiplied and embellished by successive overlays, whereas the improvising theme is a dynamic scheme that evolves from the implicit to the explicit."

*The improviser does not vary a given theme, but rather attempts or solicits a melodic suggestion in order to explore all the possibilities of the music it contains, to evoke its inspiring properties.*²

This journey, this realization, this intersection between the real and the possible is the very essence of improvisation. The musician proceeds through suggestions, through successive trials. In Iranian music, this art of linking, of interweaving, of crafting a melodic-rhythmic path is accessible only to the best improvisers. For it is not enough to name a tune or memorize the fingerings,

¹ *Ibid.* p. 121.

² Jankélévitch (1998), p.131.

But it's necessary to create motifs within a modal climate, an atmosphere, which involves a very complex cognitive process. Moreover, it sometimes happens that the musician is unable to recapture the form and atmosphere of a mode. Jean During tells us tell :

"One day, I asked Master S. Hormozi to play the Navâ mode; he began with Homâyûn, then, realizing his mistake, stopped and started again. The difference between the two is clear and precise, marked by two different notes out of seven; it was therefore enough to change the fingering to find the Navâ scale, and from there to reconstruct its structure. Yet the master did not use these reference points; he searched for a melody in his head, but couldn't find it, being absorbed by the atmosphere of Homâyûn. After a while, he gave up, and postponed the performance of Navâ until the following week."

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This happens often in Iran and makes the art of improvisation very perilous. Of course, this attitude is intellectually very honorable, but sometimes musicians say nothing and simply simulate improvisation. This leads us directly to the mental mechanisms at play under these conditions.

improvisation.

3.2.1.2 Mental Mechanisms

3.2.1.2.1 Psychological factors, the *Hâl*

What role does the mind, the conscious mind, play in this improvisational process?

Can an improvisation be intentional and spontaneous at the same time?

To what extent does the musician control their performance? How can we tell if one improvisation is successful and another a failure?

Psychological factors therefore play a significant role in this musical activity. According to G. Dalmasso, improvisation is "the spontaneous expression of oneself, one's feelings, and one's history."² During the performance, the musician asserts their individual freedom, the inherent risk, and the performance, both to themselves and, of course, to others, of their musical knowledge, creativity, and inner state at that moment. Furthermore, if the improviser plays only for themselves, they run the risk that this creation will be heard only by them and cannot be repeated in the same way. In composition, this risk is virtually nonexistent, since the score or a written record remains. In fact, the musician's state of inspiration and psychological state are just as important as

¹ During (1994), p.145.

² Dalmasso (1977), p.35.

The concrete result. Is it something new or a repetition? In fact, we believe that a good improviser is quite aware of this; they know perfectly well whether they are innovating or repeating themselves. Of course, an uninformed or unreceptive audience can hardly judge this. However, Zia Mirabdolbaghi speaks from experience and argues that the audience can sense whether the musician is creative or not.¹ Therefore, we can consider that the evaluation of the degree of improvisation or creativity must take into account the emotions of the audience or listener as well as the performer, and not just the degree of variation from the model.

In short, each culture has its own criteria for appreciation. In Iran, audience approval is essential; it is through the immediate positive or negative feedback that the musician will "adjust" their improvisation. We quote Zia Mirabdolbaghi again, who explains that a successful improvisation is one that captures the audience's attention and energy, which will then carry the musician further; this will make them a generous, not egocentric, musician. Conversely, improvisation is a failure if the musician does not respect the syntax, if their musical discourse is incomprehensible to the audience. It is in this way that the "ideal" image is transformed and that the music and style evolve.

Ultimately, every good musician—especially an improviser—must sense whether communication is established between themselves and the audience, or between themselves and the other musicians. Seventeenth-century Persian treatises recommended the use of certain modes appropriate to the listeners' status: the *Segâh* mode for soldiers, *Chahargâh* for people with dark skin, *Râst* for scholars, and so on. But today, an Iranian artist must above all achieve harmony between their own state of mind and the music. This particular state, or *Hâl*, is not sought by the musician, because the more they search for it, the less they find it. *Hâl* is certainly one of the constituent elements of the Persian tradition, but even more so, on a subjective level, it represents a paradox because it is only possible through the human vehicle while being virtually uncontrollable. It is not enough to be a connoisseur or a virtuoso to produce or receive the *hal*, but we can only approach it in fact, that is to say in the process of musical play.

The relationship between the *hal* and the intervals clearly illustrates this problem. Indeed, on the one hand, intervals are the musical markers guaranteeing the authenticity of musical forms and therefore belong to common sense, to consensus; on the other hand, the musician's *hal*, which validates the authenticity of their music, is a completely personal experience, primarily aesthetic and uniquely incommunicable.³

¹ See interview p.42.

² *Ibid*, p.43.

³ To escape this contradiction, some musicians systematically reject the use of frets and instruments with fixed pitches, advocating instead the permanent variability of intervals. This is, of course, an extreme position that cannot be accepted.

Although difficult to express and explain, the *hâl* is an essential reference point for an Iranian musician who wants to produce authentic music (*asil*). It would seem to us that the *hâl* constitutes the axis through which meaning flows at every moment of the performance; the mode and its specific *ethos* or *hâlat* being the two tangents of this axis.

The absence of a sense of *calm* can be one of the situations that make spontaneity and improvisation impossible. But beyond this specific case, anxiety stifles improvisation by depriving the future of its novelty and alienating the individual's spontaneity. Indeed, the anxious person will plan everything in advance, attempting to ward off the threat of the unbearable. These individuals are incapable of starting anything and condemn themselves to repeating the same thing. These obstacles that make improvisation impossible are found in the attitudes that constitute *mental rigidity*, within a closed system that protects the individual. Improvisation, on the contrary, presupposes a dissatisfaction with² Anxiety is confining reality, whose inadequacy it exposes.

3.2.1.2.2 The relationship to the model.

In all cases, improvisational techniques refer to a model that is more or less restrictive depending on the culture. In Iran, as we have seen, the model (*radif*) is strictly defined, and the frameworks cannot be altered. The melodies (*gushes*) are already compositions, and together they form a vast ecosystem within which the musician operates. This densely structured model provides a reliable basis for evaluation. Moreover, one of the principles of improvisation is to state the model verbatim and then gradually deviate from it by inserting unpredictable elements to surprise the audience. The same applies to rhythms: in *zarb improvisation*, the musician always begins with a clear and unadorned statement, which they then develop progressively in such a way as to disorient the listener. The density of this model ensures its unique materiality while allowing the performer considerable creative freedom.

In jazz, musicians also follow a certain model. Jazz progressions, largely composed of a series of chords, are in fact only a foundation, a guideline that can be deviated from at any time. André Hodeir described this process when discussing Thelonious Monk in his work on jazz:

"A dramatic turn of events. Monk didn't play the chord. Another combination came to him. His fingers and he himself, in a single impulse. A combination so beautiful, and which corresponds so perfectly to the accentuation of the phrase, that one certainty is inescapable."

² See on this subject Milton Rockeach (1960) who studied this rigidity more specifically from the perspective of a closed mind which betrays a weakness in the capacity for innovation.

*immediately: the other agreement, the one Monk wanted to find again, was only a preparatory state, a sketch of the one he had just discovered in its overwhelming truth.*¹

Jazz is a nomadic music, and the model of a nomad can only be symbolic. Monk playing a Duke Ellington *standard* transforms it into another standard or model that will inspire someone else. Jazz models or standards have more of a modal than a cultural function. By opening itself to play, the model provokes ambition, and by gradually transforming, another model is born. Jazz is made of discontinuities, breaks, and spirals. For a model to be alive, it must constantly transform. From this, each musician can create their own model, which can become a universal modality. This circulation, which runs from the sources of the blues to bebop and breaks down in free jazz, where the model is the absence of a model, is the model of improvisation. Even more, improvisation *is* the model of jazz.

3.2.2 *The musical object improvisation*

3.2.2.1 The back-and-forth interplay in jazz: writing/improvisation

As much as a behavior or an attitude, improvisation is a "musical object," a piece of music that didn't exist a few seconds before. This sonic realization, this constituted musical discourse, can be considered either as a stabilization of new patterns or, conversely, as the final form of a musical statement.

already composed at the time of its performance. These opposing viewpoints demonstrate the difficulty of characterizing improvised statements. It is therefore necessary to situate oneself within a given culture to attempt to understand the forms of these statements.

Jazz has always oscillated between written and oral traditions. But it would seem that there is a Western tendency *to write* about jazz, in order to better understand and analyze it.

The writer André Hodeir pushed this writing compulsion to the extreme, culminating in a veritable strategy of simulation. This attempt to analyze jazz through writing was one of the systematic attempts made from the 1960s onward to bridge these two sides of a divided culture. But André Hodeir's attempt failed because, as we have said, jazz had already moved beyond this category, and Hodeir's writing crystallized a moment in jazz, a specific time, and not the essence of jazz.

In other words, the writing of jazz will always be one step behind and will be far removed from the real object, the living texture, the statement of improvisation.

¹ Hodeir (1970), p.26.

Duke Ellington is the very embodiment of a jazz musician for whom written composition is also spontaneous composition, or, so to speak, composed improvisation. Duke wrote for large orchestras, often on commission, much like a Western composer. But he struggled to gain recognition as such. It's true that Ellington's writing is functional, and that composition is, in fact, more than just writing; it's made up of social relationships, and therefore contradictions. When, on July 7, 1956, in Newport, tenor saxophonist Paul Gonsalves played Duke Ellington's *"Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue"* with Ellington's orchestra, the delighted audience was treated to twenty-seven choruses. The strength of this composition lies precisely in its ability to do without written notation, in its refusal to use it to mask discontinuities. Finally, it should be remembered that Duke Ellington, at the end of his life, financed the existence of the orchestra with his royalties.

Charlie Mingus felt that writing carried within it enormous social violence, and this issue recurs frequently in his autobiography. This assertive awareness of the Black composer is expressed in the liner notes of the album *Let My Children Hear Music* :

"When a jazz musician picks up their instrument, when a soloist begins to improvise on a given composition and creates a new melody, that person is acting as the composer. [...] If you like Beethoven, Bach, or Brahms, that's fine. They were composer-writers. I, on the other hand, have always wanted to be a spontaneous composer. [...] If we, who are called jazz musicians and who are composers, spontaneous composers, were to start including these instruments (the bassoon, the oboe, the horn, etc.) in our music, it would be a complete opening, the disappearance of a prejudice, because our musical qualification would be such that the symphonic world could not reject us."

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Ornette Coleman always said, and repeated, that his goal was to dedicate himself to composition, but that the economic situation prevented him from doing so. His writing is entirely imbued with this intensity, constantly tempered by improvisation, and his focus on composition remains entirely compositional. Besides setting himself apart from American jazz with regard to European musicians, the historical legacy of composition in jazz, from Jelly Roll Morton to Gil Evans, is nonetheless incredibly rich. In jazz, the composer, the performer, and the improviser have never been separate, and therein lies the difficulty—for a Western classical musician—of defining the musical object at play. For in the West, the separation between the composer and the performer-improviser has given rise to...

¹ Mingus, CBS 64 715.

These are purely technical categories, thus straying from the original musical meaning: *making music*. The name given to it doesn't matter if the resulting sound is amazing.

3.2.2.2 Improvisation/composition in Iranian music

In Iranian music, this dialectic of improvisation and composition is also present, updated, as we have noted, by the Western written tradition. In Iran, the concept of improvisation is a unique process that uses specific materials, resulting in a constant interplay between improvisation and composition. It is important to remember that, initially, the musician must memorize the model repertoire (*radif*), which forms the basis for both improvisation and composition; the former is not taught.

The development of a *dastagh* is always determined by two primary factors: space (mode) and time (rhythm). The structure of the *dastagh* depends on the extension of these two elements into a fixed or free organization. The spatial element is shaped, organized, and accentuated, this phase being the essential factor of a *dastagh*; whereas the temporal aspect is not subject to any defined form of organization. This is the essential characteristic of this process. Each musician uses their own rhythm, depending on their habits and technique, but it is never the hallmark of a specific *dastagh*. The absence of a fixed rhythmic organization has posed problems for many musicologists who have reduced the *dastagh* to "motivic groups" or to "determinate variations" (Idelsohn, 1913).

Sachs, for his part, speaks of a "melodic pattern"¹ Iranian musicians distinguish two categories of melodies which represent two different musical genres: 1) Fixed rhythm and free modal organization (*beste*, *bashraf*, *samai*, *tasnif*). 2) Free rhythm and fixed modal organization (*taqsim*, *gusheh*, *mugam*, *layali*). The first category requires very little technique and musicality, while the second demands a high degree of invention and advanced technique. The modal structure of each *dastagh* and *avaz* results from the combination of several arranged and ordered modes. Although these combinations are ordered in the traditional manner, they are neither taught nor defined by modal terminology; but rather by their specific melodies (*gushes*) which present each stage of the modal progression.² We can say that the process of improvisation is a form represented by a fixed spatial organization (mode) specific to a given mode. The characteristic of this form is that it is not necessary to build upon motifs, their elaborations, variations, or developments, but rather through a

¹ Sachs (1943), p.290.

² See chapter 2, pp. 61, 62, 63 on this subject. These tables show a modal progression, that of Dariush Tala'i. In fact, there are about 228 ways to construct a mode in Iranian music as well as infinite possibilities for moving from one tetrachord to another.

number of melodic passages of different lengths which embody one or more modal degrees and thus establish the different phases in the development of a *dastagh*.

The order and number of phases must differ in each performance, while still serving the same function. We can see, therefore, that the two musical practices (improvisation and composition) are constantly intertwined and form part of the same creative process. Today, composition, as we understand it, still operates at the level of the model, but more from the perspective of change (as opposed to tradition) than from that of the compositional act itself. For a European, it is difficult to conceive of this practice as composition, but if we consider Schubert and his spontaneous, rapid, and unedited method of composition, we can almost speak of improvisation. The only difference is that Schubert had the possibility of revisiting his work, of revising it. Beethoven represents, in this context, the other extreme, constantly reworking the musical material. Both started with improvisation and arrived at composition through writing, more or less rapidly.

Among Iranian musicians, we can observe the same differences: those who consistently reproduce the same improvisations, working them like compositions, and those who innovate each time, creating and advancing the tradition. If an opposition exists, it is not between composition and improvisation, but rather between interpretation and improvisation. Ultimately, the creation of a truly original and compelling *dastagh* requires a creative faculty that many European composers lack. The compositional aspect is thus utilized in the organization of the modal structure, while the improvisational aspect is revealed in the rhythmic organization. When we speak of rhythm, we are addressing a crucial concept in this exploration: the timing of the improvisation.

3.2.3. *The Time for Improvisation* 3.2.3.1.

The Freedom of the Beginning

Temporal and timeless, improvisation operates at the intersection of extemporaneity, its vertical dimension or transcendence, and contemporaneity with oneself, with the other, or with Being, which always begins since it ceases at birth. This axis designates the very ambiguity of our situation where we must both consent to time and simultaneously master it. The indeterminacy of improvisation opens up the maximum number of possibilities by specifying as little as possible the future, which can save everything as well as compromise everything. As Jankélévitch put it another way regarding the time of improvisation:

*"Depending on whether it is antecedent or consequent, a tension towards the next moment or a readjustment to the previous moment, improvisation would be an anticipation of the future in an instant or minimal retrospection. A practice of presence, improvisation is almost contemporaneous with a present in the making, which it captures as it unfolds, without, however, becoming one with it."*¹

Improvisation reveals each person's way of being, and the divine model of this multifaceted practice represents what we sometimes try to imitate in a time that refers us back to its origin. Indeed, improvisation is synonymous with act or action. This initial act, this first impulse, like a child's first word, creates effective energy.

As Marcel Jousse said: *"In the beginning, the all-powerful Word of the creator caused all things to spring forth from nothing. He 'memrâisa' and things held together."*² THE

"Memrâ" means to gesture, to speak creatively, this speech giving form to the thing itself. There is something divine, something fascinating, in improvisation because the listener witnesses the creative process and might almost overhear the revelatory message of genius. The improviser creates by doing, by speaking, in the same way that God created the world by saying (Let there be light, and there was light!).

Improvisation thus presupposes temporality, to which its subversions—predestination and necessity—deny any right to exist. Those who believe in destiny reduce improvisation to an illusion by considering becoming as already determined. Those who subscribe to Lévi-Strauss's view that improvisation is "a necessity immanent to the illusions of freedom" are fanatical proponents of structuralism, which merely establishes facts. Improvisation is entirely beginning and action in motion; how then can Lévi-Strauss understand this activity? We therefore prefer to quote Epictetus, who wrote: *"Let us leave all that is past behind, let us always begin again."*

Improvisation affirms the vocation of being in an ontogenetic movement in the face of the threat of death; the unfinished gives rise to improvisation. Jean François de Raymond explains that: *"improvisation is the vigorous and trembling breakthrough of what one is toward what one would like to be, and which makes being thus."*⁴ Improvisation does not respond to a precise expectation but invents a relationship as the philosopher invents a problem and is not content to simply answer problems already posed. Improvisation invents in the moment and will not continue, for it is, like love, always nascent. Setting the example with the first gesture, the first movement, it thus creates a lineage.

¹ Jankélévitch (1983), p.109.

² Jousse (1969), p.126.

³ Lévi-Strauss (1964), p.18.

⁴ From Raymond (1980), p.119.

We rightly say that the most difficult thing is to begin; the beginning is the remedy for the vertigo caused by the fear of beginning, it reassures the improviser by filling the void that precedes it. But improvisation is not novelty, it is a beginning and therefore an announcement turned towards the future and not towards the past, the reference point of the new. But every beginning presupposes a subject, every beginning remains personal, each person taking the leap that leads from nothingness to being, demonstrating that the possible only asks to be realized through improvisation.

Improvisation ultimately presupposes the freedom to begin, and not merely to continue the infernal cycle of the same. Of course, the freedom experienced through improvisation cannot be reduced to a demonstration: the heart of improvisation is freedom. Without freedom, improvisation degenerates into a repetition of the past; without improvisation, freedom is limited to rational decision-making. To merit these moments of grace, one must sometimes forget the securities of science and its predictions. Jankélévitch writes on this subject:

"Improvisation seems to be called for by this dizzying renewal of fleeting impressions that is one of the characteristics of modernity. The improviser places himself within the truth of the provisional. Everything absurd, outlandish, dangerous inspires in man an ambivalent complex of horror and envy. In improvisation, the overly cautious man seeks to rediscover the innocence of a day-to-day life. He renounces the advantages of the planning logic. The vocation of science has always been to organize human life in a world where the element of the unforeseen would be minimized."

Improvisation loosens the grip of confrontation with destiny, restoring to consciousness the breathing room of moratorium and freedom.¹

The freedom of beginning is the beginning of freedom. Improvisation allows us to experience the quality of fleeting time. To welcome time is to welcome oneself, to accept one's limitations.

3.2.3.2. Intersection between system and time

Time is for improvisation, the space of its relationship to culture: there can be no place for improvisation in any context that does not allow for *ex tempore creation*. The scope for improvisation will be proportional to how a culture accepts the unexpected in its music. It operates within socially defined temporal frameworks.

While time is a factor, its impact differs depending on whether the music is metered or not. Unmetered music allows the musician to preserve

¹ Jankélévitch (1983), p.111.

From beginning to end, the musician possesses complete temporal mastery of a sonic space that he explores at will, taking precisely the time to emphasize the contours he desires. This is the case of the Iranian musician, who is free to extend or shorten any phase of the *dastgah performance*, and where the duration of his performance is irrelevant. This is perhaps due to the fact that music in Iran is considered to be of divine and metaphysical essence. The goal of a good Iranian musician is to elevate the music, not to use it as a means or an end in itself. This absence of structuring periodicity allows him to reach his own temporal rhythm in order to arrive at what Gilles Deleuze calls "the empty box," the *hâl* as a circular point. Here, vertical time meets horizontal time, and sacred time merges with profane time. The notion of tradition establishes a particular type of temporality, and the master/student relationship is thereby affected. Indeed, time always wraps itself around the past, but the past looks far into the future. There are connections, no longer successions of discontinuous moments. In Indian music, *the alap*, a kind of long introduction where musicians must find their "fundamental notes" (the *sa*), leads into the *raga*, a piece strictly speaking without any meter whatsoever.

When we talk about time in jazz, we immediately think of the *beat*, that pulsed tempo of jazz, that way of letting go of the mental stopwatch. This pulsed time, often reduced to a marked central beat, is interesting because of its inherent mobility, this movement toward something. But this pulse has never been uniform, and with the explosion of bebop, the idea of a center disappeared, giving way to a more circular perception of vibrations, a kind of "rotatory time," as Charles Mingus put it. When the bebop musicians started playing, nobody understood them because they played *too fast*. They sped up the tempos, but they added chords everywhere. Parker improvised very quickly because the sound he was looking for required this speed. Within the jazz norms of the time, his sound didn't exist because they were too slow and too simple. Similarly, John Coltrane could not exist within this Parkerian framework, as it was too short, too tightly structured, too tightly woven. What is important in bebop is not so much harmonic complexity or chromaticism, but rather speed. The logical flow of time, based on the tonal significance of the cadences, is disrupted by an unusual rapidity. Tonal functions cease to operate. The pinnacle of the bebop style in Coltrane's music is, by pushing speed to the maximum, to express something else from the very beginning, to immediately reveal the hidden meaning, the potential of the music. Bill Evans found an opposite solution by suspending tonal functions, letting each passage flow as if it were the sole essence of the piece. With Ornette Coleman, this saturated system shifts towards something else entirely.

1 Cf. Deleuze (1969), p.87.

This work will be done in the same *open* time frame as Coltrane's, but by acting on both the vertical and horizontal planes. Charlie Parker's articulation, freed from its rhythmic context, introduces a completely new conception of time. By concentrating rhythmic energy into very short durations, he opens up time. Parker breaks the cadential structure, and the initial beat is constantly changing. Speed acts on bebop and transforms it into a great, shifting, and renewed shock.

All these examples show that the openings of free jazz were necessary and that contemporary improvisation is the privileged space today for experiencing the relativity of parameters. This fluidity and these openings in time will nourish Western music and provoke an unprecedented upheaval.

MOBILITY AND OPENNESS IN THE WESTERN WRITTEN TRADITION

4.1. The Byways

4.1.1 Self-Maieutics and Experimentation 4.1.1.1

“Doing” instead of “thinking”

Doing has become more important than *thinking*, because the improviser doesn't know what they're going to do when they begin, but they discover it by doing it , and because they are doing the action, it becomes their midwife. Isn't it said that there's no better way to clarify one's thoughts than to share them with someone else, even someone unfamiliar with the subject? Improvisation would then be the way of knowing what we don't know if we don't talk about it. If the person improvising has no idea what they're going to do, a rhythm, a word, can be enough to spark creative imagination. This is how improvisation, as a means of making music, transcends all social classes and skill levels, allowing for sometimes surprising exchanges of expertise. Clearly, one must enjoy risk and experimentation, and when we ask Vinko Globokar who is improvising today, he replies:

“Generally, these are musicians who have more or less played jazz in their lives, or at least popular music. [...] But there are also people who have passed through the entire contemporary music scene as instrumentalists and, at the end of their journey, felt the need to dedicate themselves to a type of music in which they can better flourish and of which they are co-owners. There is also the one who has the desire to create but lacks the gift of organizing their creation through composition. [...] But conversely, there is the composer who surrounds themselves with a few people in order to make music by getting their hands dirty [...]. And then there is all those people, surely even more numerous, whose marginality makes the phenomenon rather elusive: the amateur who can barely play an instrument but is nevertheless so inventive [...] ; the musician who can't read music but plays very well; the poet who becomes an active singer within a group [...].” An endless list of different cases, precisely because it's a field where everyone has access, at all levels, professional or amateur, with or without musical knowledge.

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Thus, improvisation does not seek an adequate expression to clothe it: thought trains itself in its own pursuit because, inseparably, the words in which it is thought call to and reinforce one another. Beyond the superficial rote memorization of repetition, improvisation reveals the being who speaks and acts according to the demands of the situation, discoveries modifying the paths taken, much like an orator starting from the spoken word.

1 Globokar (1978).

In the temporal sequence of acts that construct the unity of the whole, at each moment this simultaneity of conception and execution is established, ensured by the speed which allows spontaneity to bypass methodological reflections. Barre Phillips' experience perfectly illustrates this new state of affairs:

*"[...] A composer friend with whom I had worked a lot asked me to record for him, freely, whatever I wanted. [...] So I recorded more than three hours; and he didn't want to touch it anymore: he even wanted to release a record of my music! [...] I had to think about it for six months before accepting this image [of myself], without judgment, and telling myself that my music was there."*¹

The artist *works* from their techniques and expertise, without needing to stop performing to refer back to their knowledge, which is immediately applied, thus blurring the lines between theory and practice. The act of improvisation expands the musician, enriching *their* new way of being.

4.1.1.2 Collective intuition

This new way of being is crystallized in contemporary music through new, different, and utterly vibrant experiments. We will not list them all, of course, but only those most revealing of this era of change.

The key word in these new attempts is *mobility* : mobility of the playing, mobility of categories, and mobility of functions and practices. The *Nuova Consonanza group*, based in Rome and formed in 1964 by Franco Evangelisti (1926-1980), brought together exclusively composers all from the post-serial tradition (ranging from Webern to Nono), who also had multiple professional activities, notably in film; the best known of them, Ennio Morricone, has been a member of the group since its inception. In this group activity, which represents a significant commitment for these composers, the primary focus is the production of sound, even before any stylistic references. The working sessions are improvisation exercises (based on a sound, a timbre) that gradually build up the repertoire, which is not notated but memorized. A new *oral* writing style is thus developed and constantly renewed.

1 Interview with Denis Levaillant (1996), p.229. Barre Phillips, double bassist, was part of one of the best improvised music groups of the seventies, The Trio with John Surnam on saxophone and Stu Martius (died in 1980) on drums.

2 The group then consisted of Egisto Macchi (in the group since 1968), banjo and percussion; Ennio Morricone, since the foundation, trumpet and lyre; Giovanni Piazza (since 1971), horn and violin; Antonello Neri (1975), piano; Alessandro Sbordonni (1975), saxophone and banjo; Giancarlo Schiaffini (1975), trombone.

New *Phonic Art* and the work of its musicians¹ exemplified the transformations of the 1970s. These four highly accomplished instrumentalists, composers and performers of contemporary music, were destined to provide a unique experience of the newfound freedom of those years. The group evolved significantly, for in its early days (1968-1969), no quotations were tolerated, and forays into jazz were forbidden. Then, a certain maturity brought about a more active, more theatrical style of playing, and control became less and less pronounced. The group's activity expanded steadily, and its openness grew ever greater², leading to new structures and forms. All the contradictions of the era are found here: form and material, prepared and spontaneous, individual and collective, research and pleasure. All these contradictions were only possible thanks to the initial choice: improvisation.

4.1.2. *Personalization Process and Lifestyle*

4.1.2.1 "It's our Music" (Ornette Coleman)

This profusion of differences is accompanied by a very strong assertion of identity, new in its depth and scope. The need to *make one's own music* becomes a process of personalization. The question of creation refers to the very nature of improvisation. What autonomy can a European musician practicing exclusively improvisation have? When Ornette Coleman played "*It's Our Music*" in 1960, it meant: this is our music, ours, young New York musicians, but also: this is our music, ours, those of us in the tradition of African American music. In Europe, the situation is more difficult because this tradition exists only in negative terms. Anything that doesn't fit within the framework of traditional academic music will be disregarded; at worst, it will be considered jazz! As proof, official funding goes to music, not entertainment, with a few exceptions: regular support for the creation of Dutch or Swedish improvisers is a completely isolated phenomenon in Europe. The case of Italy is surprising in this otherwise closed landscape. In the seventies, *the Umbria Jazz Festival*, a free event, opened up African American music to a wide audience; Anthony Braxton, in 1974, played a solo performance in front of fifteen thousand people!

This quest for identity is revealed in the demand for equality with other creators. The situation, we admit, is quite paradoxical. On the one hand, improvisation represents instability par excellence, and on the other, the improviser.

1 The New Phonic Art brought together Jean-Pierre Drouet (percussion), Vonko Globokar (trombone), Michel Portal (clarinets, saxophones), Carlos Roqué Alsina (piano, organ).

2 We could hear the innovative work of Jean-Pierre Drouet, versatile par excellence, who was the interpreter of most contemporary composers, from Boulez to Kagel, and who became passionate about oriental percussion, tablas and the zarb, under the influence of Djamchid Chemirani.

seeks a stable social status. But at that time, musical projects were themselves unstable, so this paradox should not be surprising.

Improvisation permeates both improvised and contemporary music; in the former, its role is more apparent than in the latter. But the latter holds absolute power because the very notion of creator is inextricably linked to composition. Recordings of improvised music are therefore legion. In this regard, we quote a text by Derek Bailey, edited by L. Goddet in *Jazz Hot* :

"In all areas of improvisation, certain reservations have been expressed concerning the phenomenon of recording; and, in particular, the recording of free improvisations elicits the most pronounced reservations. [...] It must also be noted that the technical mystifications employed in each recording act to the detriment of the constantly shifting balance and interaction that characterize most free improvisations. [...] Even more important than the technical limitations imposed by technology is the very loss [...] of the atmosphere of musical activity, the creative environment generated by the music, the place, and the occasion—a convergence that constitutes one of the principal strengths of improvisation."

1

For the free improviser who desires "fame and fortune," concerts remain the only option where he can express *his* music. The improviser stakes his life on the gamble of undertaking it personally, the time of his act coinciding with his lived experience, without any gap between doing *and* intention.

4.1.2.2 Total Art

This way of life means that true improvisations are rare because our spontaneity is seldom fully unleashed. Jean-François de Raymond describes this desire for harmony in his life and in his art as follows:

"To make existence a harmonious, joyful, and stimulating activity is the art of living. Improvisation then lies at the intersection of art and life; the most artistic life would be the improvised life."

2

For a very long time in the West, we tried to separate art from life, reducing art to the masterpiece and thereby excluding improvisation. New experiences in contemporary music have reintegrated the "total spectacle" of life.

1 L. Godet, (1979), no. 360.

2 From Raymond (1980), p.212.

(Happening, Musical Theatre, etc.), improvisation unifying the expressive functions of the human being.

4.1.3. New open-ended teaching methods 4.1.3.1

Holistic methods

The new openness of jazz, along with the increasing complexity of contemporary improvisation, raises the question of the limits of possible transmission. There are undoubtedly several answers. First, there is the holistic method, such as that taught by trumpeter Bill Dixon at the *Black Music Department* in Bennington, Vermont, USA, since 1968. The seminar he leads combines several functions, but what seems most important is oral sensitivity, that is, each participant's *readiness* to respond to an unexpected musical situation.

Bill Dixon draws inspiration from all kinds of music, from Stravinsky to Kenny Burrell, as well as some jazz greats like Thelonious Monk, Lester Young, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane, and Miles Davis.

Pianist Ran Blake's teaching at the *New England Conservatory of Music* in Boston is also based on a holistic method. Over four years, students have the opportunity to develop their own style by deeply assimilating a wide range of ethnic music. The core methods of this teaching are ear training, vocal imitation, and the memorization of African American melodies. During the final two years, the musician is encouraged to play in groups and perform. We can hear the results of this training, where improvisation plays the role of a cultural exchange: gospel, blues, *free music*, Charles Ives, and Greek folk songs public. On the album titled *Third Stream Today*,² coexist in perfect harmony.

4.1.3.2 Music for all.

The Lyon-based musicians of ARFI³ have developed an educational program on improvised music to introduce it to people with no prior musical experience. The method is adapted for this age group and consists of rhythmic and vocal exercises to train the ear. This work is done both individually and in groups, and the workshops seem to meet a need: that of people with no musical knowledge (who cannot read music) but who want to work on the foundation of all music: sound.

¹ He was one of the driving forces of New York free jazz in the sixties.

² *Third Stream Today*, (1976).

³ ARFI, the Association for the Search for an Imaginary Folklore, was founded by about twenty musicians from Lyon who wanted to promote improvised expression. Louis Sclavis was in fact one of them.

The term improvisation is gaining traction in conservatories, which are being drawn to this approach, with jazz teaching facilitating its introduction. The examples we have cited¹ all share the characteristic of emphasizing the very essence of improvisation: personalization, the musician's identification through the discovery of their own creativity.

Within these movements in contemporary pedagogy lies the question of the possible generalization of a "grammar of improvisation." Contemporary improvisation as a pedagogical tool allows us to imagine a generalization of transitions, a more open interplay between all categories. Taken as a comprehensive method, its requirements become those of all music: change and repetition.

Indeed, change and repetition are at the heart of all music making.

By opting for personal creativity, it relativizes the universal claims of classical knowledge. It opens the musician up to intervals, tempered and untempered, to colors, textures, the training of durational memory, and rapid reaction time—all qualities required in improvisation, which are fundamental elements of musical training. And finally, its profound ambiguity: for while advocating *personalization*, it also aspires to *generalization*.

4.2. The Great Break 4.2.1

"Chance and Necessity" (Jacques Monod)

4.2.1.1 Dissolution of writing

Improvisation has permeated all musical practices since the 1960s, and any attempt at classification would inevitably fail. However, by exploring the movements that have shaped it, we can better situate it within the new contemporary landscape. It is essential to remember that today's improvisation emerged from recent ruptures in so-called classical music as well as from the new developments in jazz. This new journey will lead us to the frontiers of recent compositional resources born from improvisation.

From the end of the Second World War onwards, there was a proliferation of individual compositional proposals. Even the twelve-tone method and the neoclassical style represented only a common basis for a few years; indeed, in the 1950s, there were no homogeneous poetics or techniques, but each composer sought their own path, their own language. References to any regulations governing composition had disappeared; there was no longer a grammar, a common vocabulary, a linguistic codification, a predetermined style; the composer was searching for new mental processes.

¹ There are others: the IACP (Paris), led by Alan Silva, and the Creative Studio, created in Woodstock by Karl Berger (who also teaches in Liège). But these new experiments of the seventies are very few in number.

poetic, aesthetic, technical, expressive, a constantly renewed and flexible search, in relation to history which is changing very rapidly and which offers the musician ever new views, different elements.

The serial technique, which became widespread in the early 1950s, focused on the permanent variability of all microscopic details, which ultimately led to an indistinct invariability.¹ These investigations

focused on new structures; how to play with them?

How to maintain the flexibility of the work under a strictly calculated bias?

How can the relativity of events be rendered at the structural level? It was to answer these questions that composers from the European serial school embarked on a movement which, from the use of the notion of chance to verbal indication, was to manifest several different degrees of *dissolution of writing*. These abstract questions went hand in hand with very concrete research such as tape music and the encounter with the American school.

By working with magnetic tape and concrete forms, the composer, with his scissors, became a manipulator. Complete serialism arose from the open perspectives of Anton Webern, as well as from the teaching of Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), who popularized the latter's works. Thus, serial composers, with the aid of machines, were able to master the finest timbre, the most microscopic color, and with them all the transient phenomena that resulted from them.

The American school, while sharing the same compositional concerns, did not employ the same methods. John Cage, a former student of Schoenberg, created systematic methods of non-repetition and new materials: the famous "prepared piano" dates from 1938, and *Imaginary Landscape No. 1*, in 1939, was the first piece to use sinusoidal tones. John Cage developed the first experiments in composition using chance, seeking to distance himself from the individual composer. *Music of Changes* for piano was the result of nine months of calculated chance and was premiered in 1951 by David Tudor. These new ideas would have a very significant influence on the younger generation of European composers.

1. Strict integral serialism was short-lived (1950-1955) and constituted a necessary step in rigor, constructivist and radical in relation to cultural heritage.

2 The names that will come up most often are: Pierre Boulez (born in 1925), Bruno Maderna (1920-1973), Luciano Berio (born in 1925), Karlheinz Stockhausen (born in 1928), Luigi Nono (1924-1990) and Henri Pousseur (born in 1929).

Of the three Viennese composers, Anton Webern (1883-1945) was the one who promoted the most objective music, a pure interplay of values and proportions. From the serial twelve-tone technique, beginning with Opus 17, Webern sought to draw the most radical consequences and to make its use simple and clear. Thus, he favored the use of series of twelve tones derived from micro-series of three or four tones (*Concerto for Nine Instruments*, Op. 24). He was also the one who pushed the exploration of "timbre melody" furthest (Beginning of the *Symphony*, Op. 21, the *Ricercare* from Bach's *Musical Offering*).

4 At the beginning, chance meant almost unambiguously the possibility of not choosing, with diagram notations, and their extension through the *I-Ching*, to drawing lots by throwing dice.

For Cage, it is impossible to play with the structure; therefore, it must be broken.

Unlike Pierre Boulez, who sought to control indeterminacy and chance, Cage played on "non-control," on "non-will," and simply presented and made audible networks of random operations, necessarily unequal and therefore unquantifiable. This radical way of thinking about music was criticized in both American and European society, but it nonetheless allowed for highlighting the blockages and limitations of Western compositional thought.

Iannis Xenakis formulated equally radical theses. His reference point, like Cage's, was Arnold Schoenberg, but this time in a completely negative light. He criticized Schoenberg for not having fully explored the implications of dodecaphony. Thus, drawing on new discoveries in quantum mechanics, recent developments in information theory, and older propositions from classical probability theory, Xenakis exhaustively developed a form of composition that accounted for this new physical and sonic reality: "stochastic composition." In an interview with Mario Bois on March 4, 1966, Xenakis explained his vehement opposition to the terms "random," "indeterminacy," or even "open work."

speaking about his musical research:

"It is necessary to be able to produce the edifice, to produce an abstract structure of formulas and reasoning which, dressed in music by sounds, is interesting to the very end.

[...] I provide the machine with a very precise, very tight network of formulas and reasoning, [...] then the input data is set, which you feed into a kind of black box. [...] No, "random," in fact, "improvised music" means that the choice is left to the instrumentalist. For me, this attitude is a misuse of language and an abdication of the composer.

1

This research, in its operation, seems to be the exact opposite of Cage's; yet it bears a striking resemblance to it. Xenakis does not use chance but calculates, which amounts to much the same thing, probability functions. Using the computer to provoke a "free musical form," in 1962 he created a program on the IBM 7090 computer, which gave rise to *ST/10.1,080262* for ten instrumentalists, then to *Atrées* for the same ensemble and *ST/48* for orchestra. This roll of the dice ultimately leads to a stable and ordered result, and the instrumentalists are in fact reduced to highly mechanized operators.

1 Excerpt from *Boosey and Hawkes* on March 4, 1966 with Mario Bois.

4.2.1.2 The interpreter and the open form

In these new works, the performer believes they are playing freely, but in fact, the predetermination of order is the primary objective. Cage and Xenakis converge where one might have thought them diametrically opposed: in wanting to return to reality, to nature, both encounter reality, nature, in the form of the instrumentalist. Pierre Boulez would speak of *randomness* or *inadvertent chance* in works such as

The Hammer Without a Master (1953-55), or the th *Piano Sonata* from 1957. The performer *third*, will be rendered partly free, but free to choose its sequence, within a network of circulation that remains, itself, entirely predetermined. This mobility of the interpreter amounts to a kind of additional *stratagem* of a writing weakened by the inconstancy of reality.

Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI* (1956) comprises 19 groups of notes distributed across the score, which the musician must approach without preconceived intentions.² While *chance* is a compositional device here, the work is not entirely open; it is "semi-open and semi-closed." What is variable is the order of succession, the speed of progression, the articulation, and the sonic relief of the different sequences, but the sonic space remains entirely predetermined. This work is, in fact, a unique piece, allowing for varied interpretations. In L. Bério's *Sequenza* for flute (1958), the performer is free to take their time, as the durations are not fixed. This highly flexible work, however, remains quite closed.

Freeing time, capturing real time, allowing different temporalities to coexist; composers of this generation made progress in this area thanks to working with tape, which liberated them from metrical constraints. It was in this spirit that the more systematic exploration of *open*, or *mobile*, forms took shape, addressing not only strictly compositional questions but also philosophical ones.

4.2.2. The Time of Opening and The Open Work

4.2.2.1 Ambiguity as a value

Chance, indeterminacy, and randomness lead to ambiguity, which presupposes a reference to a limited number of meanings, according to frameworks whose specific interpretation is not disclosed. Ambiguity multiplies the meanings of the world by reading it as a plurality of simultaneous possibilities. In Umberto Eco's book, **The Open Work**, published in French in 1965, the author observes that: "*this ambiguity becomes an explicit end of the work, a value to be realized in preference to any other.*"

1 Boulez (1957), p.41.

2 Cott (1979), p.73.

3 Eco (1965), p.9.

It is therefore by comparing all the arts, including music, that Eco defines the poetics of the open work as "the *project of a message endowed with a wide range of interpretive possibilities*."¹ And further on, regarding the interpreter, he states: "[...]

The performer no longer simply has, as in traditional music, the ability to interpret the composer's instructions according to their own sensibility. They must act upon the very structure of the work [...] in an act of creative improvisation."² Indeed, the performer participates in the creation by first carrying it out, then by completing it through collaboration with its original author. By creating and actualizing the possible, the performer becomes a co-creator; no longer content with merely interpreting a situation developed by another, they bear the responsibility for the work's future.

An open work of art also implies openness in relation to the viewer, who interprets it as they receive it. The viewer can contemplate the work from a multitude of angles, which testify to its infinite richness, linked to its essential ambiguity; if the message is univocal, the work will be closed. The author's responsibility is deeply engaged in an open work, because it is by its very nature a non-individual creation. Openness here corresponds to the ever-changing aspect of the work within its transmission and to its very transmissibility. Between the absence of form and a closed form, the open form receives the creativity of the practitioner and demands the control of the artist, as noted by Alexander Calder, whose famous mobiles influenced the proponents and researchers of the "open form" around 1950.

The open-ended work was bound to slide into non-work. The composer prioritizes the present moment, the here and now, as a sign of its own duration. The composer *offers* games, pretexts: John Cage's *Cartridge Music* (1960) and *Variations VI* (1966) become symbols of this non-commitment and this disaffection for the notion of a work in the classical sense. The verbal score ultimately describes *what would happen if...* improvisation existed.

But the verbal propositions of *Aus den sieben Tagen* in Stockhausen's production date from 1968. Let us go back a few years in order to better understand the poetics of the open work.

¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

² *Ibid.*, p.15.

³ "Disparity in form, color, size, weight, movement, that is what makes a composition, and if this is accepted, then the number of elements can be restricted. Symmetry and order do not make a composition. It is through the accident manifested in regularity that the artist truly controls, that he makes or spoils a work." (1965), p. 35.

4.2.2.2 The poetics of the open work

By poetics we mean: *"the operational program that the artist proposes to themselves each time; the work to be made, as the artist, explicitly or implicitly, conceives it."*¹ We focused our research on works in which

project and result seemed to coincide. One of the necessities of the concept of openness in the work of composers at the end of the 1950s was the emancipation from periodicity, the desire to liberate meter and to give the feeling of multiple temporalities. To this end, Karl Stockhausen wrote *Klavierstück XI* in 1956, premiered in 1957 by the pianist David Tudor. This work appears from the outset much more flexible in its overall articulation and much less rigid in its use of processes. Pierre Boulez's *Piano Sonata*, also dating from 1957, is another example.

The randomth nature of *Klavierstück XI, number 3*, comprises nineteen different sequences that the pianist may play in any order. Stockhausen himself called this work a "multivalent form composed according to directed probability laws."² But the formal mobility of this work lies in the multiplicity of performance possibilities allowed by changes in path, tempi, modes of attack, and intensity levels. In short, the composer offers the performer a work *to be completed*, and we agree with U. Eco that this work should be considered *"as effective realizations of a formative power strongly individualized by the data originally proposed by the composer."*³ On the other hand, the mobility of the work does not operate on the level of rhythm, because the sonic space is entirely determined by pitch. Even though the composer states that *Klavierstück XI* is the prime example of a work for which *"one cannot speak of a duration of the work independent of a certain duration of performance: the work has no duration, only the performance does,"*⁴ we would be tempted to say that the composer has failed, because the fact that this work is composed of nineteen independent sequences reveals a space fragmented by discontinuous dissection, and not a fragmented space with multiple temporal dimensions. It would seem to us that this contradiction has actually moved things forward, and that developing a very broad field of basic rhythmic phenomena allows us to anticipate continuity, connection, and diversification between the written and the improvised.

With the Polish composer Witold Lutoslawski, we are faced with another type of opening project.

¹ Eco (1965), p.10.

² Stockhausen (1963), p.155.

³ Eco (1965), p.34.

⁴ Stockhausen (1963-1971), volume 1, p.198.

It was in 1960, following a radio broadcast of John Cage's *Piano Concerto*, that Lutoslawski turned to a new method of musical composition which he called "controlled aleatory." *Jeux Vénitiens* (1961) was the first score to use this method; a coexistence of metrical and free notation. While respecting John Cage's approach, he rejected such a literal understanding of the compositional problem.

"I myself am opposed to this attitude of elevating chance to the role of a decisive factor in the process of creating a work of art. [...] Music entirely determined by chance does not interest me. I want my work to be something I have created myself and to be an expression of what I have to communicate to others."

1

This technique of controlled randomness essentially involves introducing a degree of indeterminacy into the temporal unfolding of the different instrumental parts within the same ensemble, for example, by removing the common bar line and introducing *ad libitum* with regard to rhythm and tempo.²

While freeing the performer from the traditional constraints of ensemble playing, the composer uses chance as an expressive means to achieve certain specific sonic effects. Thus, in terms of rhythm, the use of this technique is sufficient to "imprint on the rhythmic character of such music an aspect entirely different from any other music."³ Indeed, the rhythmic structure that results from collective *ad libitum* is a far more complex phenomenon than any polyrhythmic structure in traditional music.

It is interesting to note that Lutoslawski's aim was not to create an "timeless" open form, as Stockhausen wished, but moreover he succeeded in doing so while Stockhausen (at least in the early open works) failed.

Perhaps abandoning the goal is necessary to achieve it?

1 Lutoslawski (1968), p.48.

2 Cf. in particular: *The Venetian Games* (1961), the *Three Poems of Henri Michaux* (1963), the *Quartet at ropes* (1964) and the th *Symphony* (1967).

³ 2 Op. cit., p.50.

4.2.3. The ultimate opening: Silence

4.2.3.1 The "silence-sound" in Luigi Nono

Alongside the "Total Art" movement,¹ characterized by collective action, transversality, and globality, which the open work engenders, a reverse movement of withdrawal into oneself and internalization is emerging. In music, the unfulfilled, the fragmentary, the unspoken—the silence—increasingly plays a role. It is Webern who, in the first part of this century, completes this movement of internalization: in Webern, Adorno writes, the few sounds in his last chamber music works are "*in a way, the memorials of music that becomes mute in indifference.*"² The impossibility of self-expression, the powerlessness of the subject manifested by the use of silence in the first half of the century, took on the appearance, in its second half, of the opening of a world. This is why we have decided to conclude this study with two composers for whom silence is a "journey toward oneself" in order to reach the other, others.

Attempting to discuss the role of silence in Luigi Nono's String Quartet immediately leads to a paradox. On the one hand, silence is omnipresent in the work, even in the title, *Frammente-Stille an Diotima* (*Fragments-Stillness to Diotima*); on the other hand, its use, its role, its very nature, no longer correspond to what we have been accustomed to observing in other composers. Luigi Nono has suddenly made us understand that within a musical discourse, sound can also be silent and that, conversely, silence can become sound, which reinforces the aforementioned paradox.

Beyond functional silence (fragmentation of discourse) and structural silence (text spoken internally), the silence of sound seems to us the most revealing aspect of this work. Indeed, for Nono, there is no opposition between sound and silence. It is also worth noting that in the preface to the score, the scale of durations applies to the fermata in the same way as to what we commonly call silence and the pause. It follows that "naturalistic" silence, as an interruption of sound, as an absence of sound, does not exist either. In this sense, he reaffirms with Scriabin that "silence is also sound and that there are musical works that are founded on silence."³

1 The first "multimedia" experiment took place in 1952 at Black Mountain College: John Cage organized a *Happening* with the painter Rauschenberg, the dancer Merce Cunningham, the pianist David Tudor, and the poets M.C. Richards and Charles Olsen. The chairs were divided into four groups arranged in a triangle. There were ladders, and Cage used one to give a lecture. There were films projected onto the ceiling, white canvases by Rauschenberg, who played old records on a phonograph, and Merce Cunningham improvised among and around all of this. Mauricio Kagel is the best-known illustrator of what has come to be called *Musical Theatre*; for example, the piece *Prima Vista* was based on the audience's immediate reactions to the projection of slides.

2 Adorno (1962), p.64.

3 Nono (1993), p.44.

Luigi Nono's work could therefore be seen as a witness to an art of "sound negative" whose primary material would be silence and no longer sound, this dense silence of other sounds pierced in rare places by the familiar sonority of the string quartet suddenly revealed.

When Nono himself defines silence within sound, it inevitably leads to a profound shift in the conditions necessary for listening to the work. He composes for a 20th- century listener whose listening skills are, in his view, "worn out." It is therefore necessary to "awaken listening," and one of the first ways to do this is to restore silence to its full value. Furthermore, the composer's recommendations demonstrate his desire to warn the listener against self-absorption. These recommendations are invitations to listen to others, to listen to other thoughts, other noises, other sounds, other ideas, in order to counteract this tendency to want, through listening, to find oneself again in others. The "silent sound" of Luigi Nono's Quartet thus becomes, by definition, harmony, since it unites these two commonly opposed elements. No longer a harmony of memory this time, but a new, promising harmony, whose beginnings both the musician and the poet glimpse; the musician abolishes the boundaries between silence and sound.

4.2.3.2 The "original silence" in John Cage

John Cage's musical and conceptual work is groundbreaking, not only for its originality and importance but also because it participates in the research that, in the 1960s and 70s, profoundly influenced the fields of aesthetics and literary, pictorial, and musical creation. Indeed, the new concepts and musical practices that John Cage attempted to formulate coincided with several types of transformations that characterized the 1960s and 70s: a transformation of ideas and *mental habits* ; a transformation of creative behaviors; and a transformation of traditional musical principles.

His original and revolutionary approach allowed for a reconsideration of the very definition of silence in Western music. Cage's new conception of silence challenges the majority of received and definitive ideas of our Western culture, rooted in its myths and traditions. He musically develops an ontological act, a raw material for creation. Cage embarks on a journey back to the origin, to the primal, primitive, original meaning, restoring to artistic creation all the power, the multiplicity of means and meanings it had lost through various aesthetic concepts and techniques.

In our mythical thinking, silence is identified with chaos: it is pre-historical.

Mythical creation dictates that life is created, the world is represented, through noise, by negating silence. When John Cage published his book *Silence* in 1961, it was primarily to reconsider all these notions of silence and to redefine the

silence as a musical sign in its own right. In this book, Cage believes that silence is not "beyond" music, but *within it*, because it is the sign that can represent the totality of the sounds of life, freed from all ties and all places.

Thus, for our composer, music encompasses all noises and sounds. The idea that "everything is possible" becomes, in fact, the operational logic of Cage's conception of silence, rendering obsolete the barriers between sound, noise, and silence. Still within Cage's thinking, silence is an illusion because of its pretense of imposing silence on ambient noises, without ever succeeding. By reconsidering noise as sovereign (silence is, in fact, an incessant rustling), he posits that true silence does not exist in its usual definition. In *4'33"*, *Silent Piece for Any Instrument(s)* (1952), his most indeterminate and silent work, no sound is to be produced. Through this determination, Cage wants to show that, in any case, it does exist. Another of Cage's "silent" works consists of several people playing a board game in an amplified setting (bridge, chess). This work allows the silence of a chess game to appear for what it is: a silence full of noise. This piece becomes a musical work insofar as it reveals the auditory complexity of silence. In short, for Cage, silence is not synonymous with the "presence of an absence," but rather the *very name of reality*.

Finally, for Cage, the notion of silence participates in this great postmodern value that revalues the present—the ancient *Carpe Diem*— seizing what is presented. Silence is that moment that marks the present, the instant, definitively negating its classical function as a musical pause, a momentary halt to linearity. This new concept establishes a different compositional relationship and therefore a different relationship to the world. Cage no longer composes in the usual sense of the term; he "lets the world be." As a general rule, music "bends sounds to what the composers wanted. But for sounds to obey, there must first be sounds. They are there. I am interested in the fact that they are there, rather than in the will of the composers."¹ Cage's revaluation of silence is accompanied by his aestheticization of the world: a celebration of the fundamental identity between humankind, sound, and the cosmos. Finally, silence, in Cage's work, refers us to another silence: that of poetry and music, originally merged into a total, infinite and mute music; this music of origins which, like Cage's work, reminds us of its supreme purpose: silence.

¹ Cage (1976), p.149.

CONCLUSION

In the beginning was the Act, the inaugural improvisation created Being in the instant of its emergence where to exist is to act.

The first gesture, the initiating gesture, is always difficult to produce. To improvise, one must play, play again and again, taking the risk of discovering that one has nothing to say; this is the first, and greatest, the only risk of improvisation. The others follow, in great numbers: haste, redundancy, imitation, and excessive rhetoric. One must be an adventurer to throw oneself into the unknown in this way, a being enamored of freedom, but freedom is dangerous. Vladimir Jankélévitch writes on this subject:

*"The improviser knows neither the path, nor the goal, nor the means, nor the end, and this double ignorance constitutes the whole exciting adventure of improvisation. He knows and he doesn't know at the same time, which is to say that he intuits, through a kind of 'glimpse' or chiaroscuro premonition that is intuition itself."*¹

Improvisers, as Georges Roditi says, have *"the spirit of perfection."* Indeed, they disregard the goal, the end result; they do not accumulate titles or accomplishments, but rather prefer to multiply encounters, faces, sensations, and moments.

"The spirit of perfection resides in success without advancement," writes Roditi, and it is these blends, these exchanges, that give improvisers their existence. For the Iranian musician who reaches the *Hal*, this point of no return, and for the audience that ignites upon feeling this energy, for the jazz musician who finds the *feeling* with their partners, this experience is unique and indefinable. This is why improvisers play for so long: to allow themselves to transcend the physical, to seek this pure energy, to reach another state. The Iranian musician seeks the color, the essence of the mode, while the jazz musician strikes their instrument until exhaustion, until saturation, until the limit that will push them to the other side. Two different methods, certainly, but the motivations are the same, as is the result.

Improvisation is this passage, this bridge between the learned and the intuitive, between knowledge and instinct, between the mind and the emotions. Even more so, improvisation is the link between the imaginary and the symbolic in creation.

The imaginary pervades all areas of reality, imbuing it with polysemous meaning. Reality resists this confrontation and remains what it is: a great unknown in its ultimate nature. But from this confrontation arises the symbolic as a complex universe of meanings referring to multiple referents, both imaginary and rational-real. Due to the very inexhaustible specificity of reality and the imaginary desire to know everything, to understand everything, the confrontation between the imaginary and the real...

¹ Jankélévitch (1998), p.148.

² Roditi (1984), p.14.

The experience of lack will always be tragic, and the resulting symbolic order will always be in a state of creation. The imaginary, therefore, is the elaboration of a project to transcend instinctive or habitual behaviors when they prove powerless to resolve the new problems that present themselves to the individual. In this extreme state, the individual will invent, create a new object or a new form that could not be deduced from the previous situation. This creation, this production, summoned here by improvisation, seems to us to be a composition in its own right. We saw this with the Iranian musician who, seeking access to the "imaginal" world, creates a new musical composition. The Iranian worldview is based on a mystical-religious system that apprehends reality through a tri- or multidimensional lens: the sensible, the intelligible, and the in-between, or the "imaginal" world. This system is characterized by a hierarchy of reality in which the levels interpenetrate, tracing pathways. This realm thus lends itself to imaginative or visionary perception, which is the very organ of active or creative imagination. For the jazz musician, this unleashed creativity during improvisation is more a symbol of freedom, of travel, of change. The defining characteristic of jazz improvisation is this lived impetus, which drives musical creation—that is to say, creative spontaneity. The emphasis that, 30 years ago, was on the expression of feelings shifted in the 1970s toward impulse and action, where the interaction between the individual and the group elicits the participation of all involved. Each action carries a particular image, forming a veritable *puzzle*. Aided by rhythm, this general effervescence introduces a collective reality that participates in the sacred, inspiring symbolic actions.

This fundamental ability to evoke an image (a first image) from conventional formulas or an established model is part of the improvisation process. This process, as we have seen, is highly complex and overcomes the limitations of Aristotelian thought. Improvisation touches upon the non-rationalizable aspects of the psyche, which does not preclude knowledge. From this perspective, the masters of improvisation are certainly the philosophers of the Buddhist *koan*. *Koans* are statements of paradoxical truth that cannot be grasped by the intellect. They force thought into silence after arousing great tension, and this inner silence allows for the manifestation of a higher level of consciousness. Everything happens in the moment. This can only be achieved, as Master Sung Yuan stated at the end of the 12th century, through spontaneity and improvisation.

John Cage understood the importance of the present, of the perfect momentary nature conveyed by this philosophy, and by letting the work (and non-work) *be*, he leads us into another understanding of the world.

The *carpe diem* of improvised music encompasses the past, which contains the future, which in turn contains the past. The time of improvisation is an "open time" where we can rediscover our own individual time, our inner rhythm. It is not the periodic and measured time of the Western system of notation, where time became abstract and *timeless* ; it is not the smooth or striated time of Boulez or Stockhausen, who sought a multiple and continuous time, but rather the *pulsed* time of jazz or the *circular* time of Iranian music. Indeed, when Coltrane plays, for a long, long time, he seeks an inner, deep pulse, which corresponds more to an internal tempo, fluctuating according to the moment.

When a player of *the tar* or *zarb* seeks the *hâlat* of this mode, they draw inspiration from ambient rhythms, birdsong, or even the rhythm of poems. The musician attunes themselves to the rhythm of their culture, and when they do, they attune themselves to all the other rhythms of the arts, architecture, and life.

The improviser fascinates us because they exemplify what we would have liked to say or do but were unable to, and our admiration is commensurate with our regret. They encourage us if they leave us the opportunity to imitate them; then fascination becomes activation. They discourage us, that is to say, relegate us to the role of spectator, if they increase the distance between their genius and our efforts, the gap between the brilliance of their feat and the infinite time we will need. They invite us to action, to creative and inventive endeavor. This superiority of improvisation demands qualities of heart, in the sense of courage, the virtue of beginning, and sensitivity.

However, the improviser must be wary and practice restraint; inviting an art of time that allows for maturation. The improviser does not seek to kill time, and while stimulated by the audience, they are wary of the temptation of abundant words. It is a matter of constantly diversifying by distinguishing, in order to achieve a precision that banal language could not provide. This effort invites us to bring together what is separate, and in this sense, improvisation is philosophical because it suddenly discovers these bridges between fragments; just as the philosopher finds while walking, the improviser meditates while playing.

Similarly, improvised music is the detail that is part of the whole; it is both microcosm and macrocosm. What matters to the Iranian musician is the interval, the color and the touch, that note that shines brighter than the others. Like a Persian carpet, the details are nothing without the whole, but the whole is nothing without the detail, which in itself is a whole. If we hear Miles Davis's trumpet, we can never mistake it for Louis Armstrong's; the sound, the texture, the personal expressiveness take precedence over the work itself. Each parameter becomes the pretext for a new creation.

In this unique movement, improvisation guarantees the unity of what is said, what is thought, and what is done.

The time of improvisation unfolds according to a temporality of urgency; this extreme state conditions the individual, who must grasp or rectify the situation in that very instant, otherwise all is lost. The immediate decision makes the execution, which mobilizes all our abilities, coincide with a lightning-fast conception. Urgency compels us to invent on the spot the solution that no one had imagined; emergency improvisation consists of mastering time when it gives us no time. In this time of urgency, the improviser senses the imminence of the event and reaches out to receive it; conversely, imminence calls for premonition and perfect action in one go, without attempts or revisions.

This act of dazzling improvisation demands a different reading, and therefore a different kind of writing—a *hyper-writing*, as the philosopher Jacques Derrida calls it.¹ This writing is fluid and insinuates itself even into classical writing in the form of its gaps and temptations; it is the link between the written and the unwritten. In jazz, improvisation doesn't exist; there is even a compulsion to write: the increasing complexity of the stakes, the shifting boundaries, partly explain the integration of scholarly elements into this folklore. It is improvisation, this force of exchange, that occupies the written territory in order to better establish itself. It is interesting to note that in Iranian music, with its oral tradition, this inner, intuitive, mystical writing has slowly shifted toward a *graphic writing*, in the Western sense of the term. This historical fact has profoundly marked the evolution of the tradition, despite the desire to preserve the orality of its transmission. In the West, it was at the beginning of the 20th century that musical composition began to embrace relativity. The phenomenon of improvisation had to develop considerably and truly break with tradition for questions about fluidity and movement to once again become more important than traditional musicological values of fixed classification. The notion of open composition is no longer sufficient, and there is a desire to rediscover an *intuitive*, virtual form of composition, even extending to *stimulus-based* writing (as seen in the scores of John Cage, *Atlas Eclipticalis*, or *Ea*). The 20th century moved towards a quest for essences (pure *poetry*, *pure* novel , pure sound) ; on the one hand, thought relinquished all pretense of dominating reality; on the other, listening opened itself to the real world, defusing all conceptual construction. The 1950s and 60s were years of exploration; rationalist in the 1950s, vitalist in the 1960s. Musical approaches more in touch with social reality emerged: the open work, *the happening*, musical theatre.

¹ In a course given at the École Normale Supérieure in 1965-1966, Jacques Derrida denounced "ethnocentric oneirism," abusing the vulgar, that is to say ethnocentric, concept of writing, and declared: "If we cease to understand writing in its narrow sense of linear and phonetic notation, we must be able to say that every society capable of producing practices writing in general; the expression 'society without writing' would therefore correspond to neither reality nor concept." (Cf. [1966], p.45.)

In the 1970s, and especially in the 1980s, there was a return to tradition and a more classical concept of form. Certainly, all the experiments of the 1950s and 60s allowed young composers to utilize a sophisticated technical and linguistic environment, open to personal interpretations. However, a superficial and neutral view of all this remains, and composers of recent years have rediscovered confidence in the work itself, in the craft; the work recreates a world, telling a story; thus, from the so-called "open work," so dear to the avant-garde, we return to closed forms: from *solve* to *coagula*.

Today, the wildest desire to play and the most advanced mathematization strangely coincide; a machine capable of everything, universal and infallible. Music has always faced a similar horizon: to perfect its functioning, to eliminate all energy-dissipating relays, to eliminate imprecision. With the synthesizer, one could have hoped to produce something new. No, this tool of differentiation began to copy; it reproduces other instruments. All of today's musical culture is a parody of the copy, and the original, the authentic, the true—which was the central idea of classical thought—has been completely transformed.

Today, few musicians dare to take risks, embrace surprise, and explore the randomness of pleasure. However, improvisation is revealing in the fluid juncture it allows, where subject, language, space, and time intertwine; therein lies its usefulness, and also its fragility. Our era needs this intuition, these fluctuations of presence.

So-called scholarly writing has the same desires. We believe that this coincidence is entirely temporary, but it remains nonetheless that this exchange is necessary and vital for the years to come.

Improvisation is something impossible. This modern exchange, this hyper-writing, this transformative force running throughout history, this explosive social charge could also be Fulfillment in the sense that Roditi understands it:

"To erase the traces of work through effort—this recipe given by Degas is certainly valuable, but he went further in his answer to those who asked him how long one of his drawings had taken: 'I spent twenty years doing that in five minutes.' This prior work is the first secret of art. [...] It is therefore a matter for the artist to raise their level of improvisation. But just as there is a limit to the progress that can be made to a given work through sheer effort, the progress made by the hand also has its limit: for a creator to continue to rise, the creator themselves must also grow."

1

1 Roditi (1984), p.126.

Much work, long patience, an infinite capacity for effort, a relentless pursuit of freedom won through discipline and rigor—these are the hallmarks of musical improvisation. The absence of any predetermined path constitutes neither a spontaneous nor a free being: no one is entirely free from all constraints, but freedom is attained through one's constraints. Improvisation is a journey toward oneself; it is by losing oneself, by plunging into the unknown, that one has the greatest chance of finding oneself.

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