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Freezing the Music and Fetishising the Subject: The Audiovisual Dramaturgy of Michel van der Aa

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Dutch composer Michel van der Aa was one of the two keynote speakers at the 2007 Totally Huge New Music Festival Conference. Van der Aa's pieces typically feature pre-recorded soundtracks or video projections which double the live performers, creating a dynamic interaction between the tragic, harried, on-stage characters, and their technologised others. This paper examines this aspect of the artist's work through the prism of operatic and theatrical dramaturgy, dealing particularly with the varied legacies of dramaturgical Modernism, playwright Samuel Beckett, Postmodernist aesthetics, and Freud's model of the fetish. Through Van der Aa's use of technological doubles of the players and other performative devices, the artist dramatises the fragmentation of the human subject at the end of Modernism in music, culture and performance, producing a fetishistic rendering of the subject and his or her technological prostheses within the composer's music and drama.

Introduction

Dutch composer Michel van der Aa was one of the two keynote speakers at the 2007 Totally Huge New Music Festival.[1] Van der Aa's presentation included audiovisual documents of his compositions, while live performances of his works were offered by WAAPA's New Music ensemble and the WA Symphony Orchestra. Van der Aa writes mostly for the traditional instruments of the orchestra and the chamber ensemble—as well as period instrumentation, such as in his 2005 commission for the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra: *Imprint*.[2] Nevertheless, like Australian composer Anthony Pateras and Pateras' sometime collaborator Robin Fox, Van der Aa is part of a growing number of artists who supplement the orchestral and chamber music palette with audiovisual materials, playback recordings, electronic processing and physical actions.[3]

Critic Frits van der Waa has described in some detail the formal, musical properties of several of Michel van der Aa's compositions.[4] The discussion of the composer's work with respect to operatic dramaturgy and theatre has however tended to be limited to generalities rather than in terms of art-historical references or in relation to the implicit meanings constructed through the performance of Van der Aa's audiovisual pieces. In what follows, I offer a transcription of a critical dialogue I conducted with Van der Aa about some of these issues in his technique and in his career, before I venture a detailed analysis of Van der Aa's oeuvre with regards to where it might be placed within the dramaturgical history of Modernism and its contemporary successors.

Throughout the essay, I base my model of the shift from Modernism to Postmodernism upon the characterisation of the work of dramatist Samuel Beckett as a critical example of "limit Modernism" by commentators such as Ihab Hassan, Frederic Jameson and others.[5] Many of the key formal features and philosophical issues raised in the work of Beckett are archetypal of Modernist literature and dramaturgy, namely: meta-linguistic play and meta-theatre; the gradual reduction of the elements which define each art form, distilling the work down to its indissoluble core or vocabulary (as in the "absolute opticality" of Hard-Edged Abstraction in US painting of the same era);[6] the Existential struggle of the self-realised yet alienated individual located within a universe devoid of any purpose outside that which man gives it; and so on. At the same time, much of Beckett's work presages the emergence of a Postmodernist sensibility after World War II in suggesting: that the human subject may at times be considered to be nothing more than a purely linguistic or performative construction (as comes to the fore in Laurie Anderson's oeuvre);[7] the radical opacity of language and representation in Beckett's dramaturgy such that it no longer refers to anything outside of itself; the death of the subject and of humanism; etcetera. If one considers Van der Aa's work in light of this aesthetic legacy as manifest within drama, opera and music, the composer's use of technological doubles of the players dramatises the fragmentation of the human subject at the end of Modernism, producing what might be considered—in Freudian terms—to be a fetishistic rendering of the subject and his or her performative, technological prostheses in the form of music, image and gesture.

Interview Transcript: Postmodernist pastiche, etheric hauntings and the use of sound and image

Jonathan W. Marshall: There's quite a bit of commentary available on your work, but how would you characterise your aesthetic?

Michel Van der Aa: Well, it's always difficult to specify the character of one's own work. It's easier to leave it to musicologists and journalists to typecast it. But there are a few "red lines" that are quite obvious in my composition. One thing is that I often work with electronics or soundtrack, combining pre-recorded samples and live music, which lets me stretch the sounds of the ensemble or the orchestra, or put them into a different context. The soundtracks are closely related to the live sound, so they act as an alter-ego for the live players. In the solo audiovisual opera *One* (2002) and the audiovisual opera *After Life* (2005), the singers who are on stage are also singing in the projections. They do duets with themselves. They finish each other's sentences and movements. It's almost an extra set or layer of musicians.

JM: So the title of *One* refers to this contradiction in the dramaturgy of the performance, which features a character who is at once "one" (the same singer) and yet "two" (projection and singer).

MA: That's right. Then in my work, there is usually a visual or theatrical component, which has been in quite a few of my pieces from the very beginning of my career. *Wake* (1997) is a percussion duet, for example, in which one of the two live players is only miming the movements over the instruments without actually touching them. I try to translate visual movements into sounds. If you see someone with a mallet heading towards a drum without actually touching it, your brain tends to fill in the blanks and give you the sound of a drum. So it's also a duet in that very strange way.

That's a very early piece. Then this visual or theatrical layer became more and more important for me in my composition. In 2002 I studied at the New York Film Academy. From that point onwards, I started to implement aspects of film and video into my pieces. The use of a visual alter-ego in the projections and an electronic alter-ego in the soundtrack—both of which I do in the *One*—is another way of stretching the personality on stage and of providing insight into the mind of the protagonist. It becomes an internal dialogue. So these are techniques to put the subject of the piece in a different light.

JM: I understand you have worked with film-maker Peter Greenaway. Was it in New York that those relationships developed?

MA: No, with Peter Greenway I worked on *Writing to Vermeer* (1999)—the opera I co-wrote with Louis Andriessen. Greenaway was the stage director and also wrote the libretto.

JM: How did working, and before that studying, with Andriessen influence your work?

MA: I only studied with him for a year and I was quite old then. I actually started composing quite late, after studying as a sound engineer, and I had already recorded quite a bit of New Music. But I did a dance piece with him. He said to me that I was already so stubborn that he wasn't able to teach me that much! But of course he did, especially in terms of form and how to look at the bigger structure of the piece and to be sparse with material.

JM: In terms of video and multimedia in opera, Greenway and Andriessen—together with Steve Reich, Robert Wilson and Philip Glass—are key figures. *Vermeer* was at the 2000 Adelaide Festival, while Reich's *Three Tales: A documentary video opera* (2001) was performed in Perth in 2003.[8] *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) came to Australia in 1992, while Australian baritone and festival director Lyndon Terracini starred in the first operatic collaboration between Andriessen and Greenaway: the production of *Rosa: A horse drama* (1994) mounted by the Netherlands Opera Company in collaboration with the Asko and Schoenberg Ensembles (as well as performing in numerous Australian music theatre productions).

MA: I was here for *Writing to Vermeer* in Adelaide. At that point Louis collaborated with Peter Greenaway and with me, and now I'm trying to do it myself. The important difference between us, though, is that my generation has a different starting point, because, although we are thinking about music and sound when we compose (obviously), we are also thinking about visuals and video at the same time. We grew up in an image culture, so that is much more a part of who we are and how we think. Personally, I tend to think of the audiovisual material as an addition and stretching of my musical and compositional vocabulary.

JM: There is also the fact that, in your case, you have acted as the director and librettist of your own audiovisual or opera compositions, rather than collaborating with another director or writer.

MA: That has been a gradual process. With *Wake*, for example, I was already "directing" the miming percussionist in a way. Nevertheless, it was very important for *One* and *After Life* that it is so integrated: the things that happen live on stage, in the video and in the music. In *One* and *After Life*, while I was writing the music and adapting the libretto, I was also thinking about what would happen in the projections and on stage. The shifting of weight to and from the music also influences the musical structure and the phrasing. By writing all three layers in one, I could decide, for each moment, which of these elements would be foregrounded. There's no way you could get that level of integration through a collaboration with an outside director, because it's all actually been conceived at the same time. The piece should be able to be played as a concert as well, but you would definitely miss out on important information without the video projections. It's one of the strengths of my style—but it's also a weakness in some ways, I would say.

JM: Mischa Spel describes your doubling of the performers with the soundtrack as being like 'freezing' sections of the music, which then "thaw out" as they are repeated or extended in the recording or performance.[9] The metaphor which I would prefer however would be to call this a kind of "blurring" or "smudging" of material, like charcoal on a page, so that it becomes not just an opposition between two things—two musical lines, or the live singer versus the filmed one—but that there is also a spreading of these opposed elements, and an exchange of sounds and rhythmic elements between the two lines. This then would make the distinction between these two elements less clear, be they live or pre-recorded. Jelena Novak, for example, claims that your compositions "raise borderland/frontier questions" regarding "Where does the performer's body stop" and what are "the edges" of the performer—and indeed whether there is any meaningful distinction between the live performer and his or her "prosthetic" double.[10]

MA: Well, that last part is true, but I'm not sure I understand quite what you mean about "smudging."

JM: Well, "freezing" would seem to suggest that the music stops, in some way or another. What I'm implying is that not only does the music continue in time, but that one of the consequences of your approach is not so much to arrest a progression of the music, as to create a sense of things bleeding across those progressions, making them move in time or in feeling—rather than simply acting to stop them and then reactivating them, as Spel would seem to be saying. Time, form and identity are thus more "smudged" than "frozen."

MA: That is something that I often do with the soundtracks, though. The ensemble stops playing and the tape echoes the last chord they played. With a dry cut between them, the reverb or the echo is cut open and the new part is then played live with that reverb in the background. In that sense time is stopped and then a new time axis is shown through that echo.

JM: So it's not so much that time stops, but that another time opens up.

MA: Yes. That's the way I use polyphony.

JM: Michiel Cleij also notes that in many of your works there exist what he calls musical or "aural images," which might be considered as blocks within a collage of elements, structured together and which then recur or are worked through over the course of the piece.[11] Would you agree?

MA: I don't see it so much as that montage-style of music. It's more like you cut open the music, and you look through and see what is happening behind it or underneath it—and then that original musical element continues again. That use of polyphony is quite different from the Postmodernist montage technique where things are cut or stopped and then a new thing simply happens as part of a series of distinct musical blocks or motifs.

JM: With respect to Modernist and Postmodernist aesthetics, Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* seems another obvious comparison, not only because of the sense of identity which Beckett develops—of tragic individuals dealing with their past and of the fragmentation of their identity—but also because Krapp records his own voice and then plays it back over the course of a dramatic scene.

MA: You are the first one who has pinpointed that Beckett work, but some people have made the Beckett comparison before. I had never heard of this piece before I wrote *Here – In circles* (2002), in which the soprano uses a tape recorder during the performance. I know Beckett of course, but I'm not that familiar with his work.

JM: The fact that in *Here – Enclosed* (2003) the soprano is meant to be locked inside this opaque box also reminds me of what mediums did for séances during the Victorian period. The mediums would often be locked inside a darkened box in order to prevent them from tampering directly with what was going on outside, and their presence would act as a magnet or conduit for ghosts and spirits to become manifest outside the box, moving around tables and so on.[12] Early theremin music was often conceptualised by lay commentators using similar Spiritist terminology, as drawing life forces out of the "ether" of space and time and manifesting them as spatially dispersed, ghostly sounds or bodily emanations separate from the live performer or medium.[13]

MA: The soprano is not actually there, though, in *Here – Enclosed*. It's a dress dummy, which the conductor reveals at the end. But theatrically, she's there and is heard in the soundtrack. The text which I wrote for the *Here* trilogy and for *One* is about a woman who is completely lost and who tries to find herself again. The box emphasises the sense of confinement which she feels and you hear this musically. The conductor walks to the box twice. At first he doesn't do anything. Then the live ensemble gets "stuck" in the soundtrack; the soundtrack encloses the ensemble. At the climax, the conductor hits a light switch on the side and you see the silhouette of woman in a dress. The ensemble then starts miming and you hear the sound coming from the box. So the music is captured and enclosed acoustically within this box.

Commentary: Postmodern prostheses and the fetishisation of the Modernist subject

Dramaturgically, Van der Aa's compositions tend to represent the individual, or his or her instrumental representative, engaging in a conflicted dialogue with a mechanised version of him or herself. The live performer is played off against audio or audiovisual recordings of him or herself. Alternatively, computer processed versions of the live materials may be featured within the score, acting to directly translate the live performer into his or her technologised other. In *Auburn* (1994), for example, the dulcet tones and Hispanic lilts of the solo classical guitar are lost, alienated and assaulted as they become embedded within an increasingly pressing, electronic wasteland of textures and clicks.

Van der Aa's work constitutes, in this sense, an outgrowth of late Modernist and Postmodernist musical practice and performance as they developed within the avant-garde, Fluxus and other related movements, in which the strictly "musical" has been extended to include the implicit musicality of the "non-musical." Here too, Van der Aa's approach may be compared with that of Beckett given that in the playwright's final pieces, Beckett became so focussed on minimalising onstage action that his performance works came to recall music more than traditional drama. Beckett's video piece *Arena Quad I + II* (1980) consists of nothing more than four unspeaking figures, shrouded in different colored robes, who metronymically pace around a tightly bounded square situated within a dark void.[14]

The additional elements from outside of the formal traditions within which Van der Aa primarily works are: the visual image (film and projection), distortion/processing (computer manipulations) and performance itself (gesture, mime and action). As Frits van der Waa notes with regard to *Auburn*, "the contrast" between the actions of "the live, visible players," versus those musical or sonic actions which are implied by the "'invisible' sound track" is a strongly *visual* contrast—much like that of Beckett's endlessly marching figures. It is hardly surprising then that Van der Aa

has recently gravitated towards the visual and theatrical possibilities allowed by operatic styles of composition, since his aesthetic in many ways signifies the latest version of Richard Wagner's ideal of a totalising musico-dramatic "Gesamtkunstwerk" in which all of the elements of the staging (the actors, as directed by Van der Aa, his authorship of the libretto and musical score, and his overseeing of the lighting and the design) come together as part of a single aesthetic vision and coherent, multi-layered meaning.[15] Van der Aa's full length opera *After Life*, mounted by the Netherlands Opera and the Asko Ensemble in 2006, is the composer's most advanced version of such an aesthetic.[16]

Van der Aa's aesthetic remains very much located within that overarching machine or teknos of the modern orchestra and its various derivatives within chamber performance. The radical performativity of say John Cage, where even the act of listening constitutes a form of musical gesture in-and-of itself, is not part of Van der Aa's oeuvre. On the contrary, Van der Aa's music depends much more upon larger structural relations and upon the tensions which they create within the often creaking machinery of the orchestra and the chamber ensemble. As Van der Aa notes above, his usage of these elements is designed to extend his musical vocabulary, rather than to displace the centrality of formal musical orchestration within his style. His work depends upon the unexpected *interjection* of the performative into a set of performance conventions and genres which typically *downplay* or minimalise such interjections. In this sense, Van der Aa's work owes relatively little to the Postmodern Minimalism of his either former mentor, Andriessen (who also taught Steve Reich),[17] nor to the tradition of Postmodernist performance art and sound-based composition which opened up in the wake of Cage and his colleagues (which includes a varied array of practices ranging from those of Pateras and Fox in Australia, to Cage's US peers Christian Wolff and Alvin Lucier, as well as sound and noise-event artists like Randy H. Yau and Toshiya Tsunoda).[18]

The dramaturgical ambience and meanings which tend to accrue around Van der Aa's work echo the composer's ambivalent relationship with musico-dramatic history and avant-garde form. Neither radically innovative in terms of meaning, nor simply derivative of early musical and theatrical works, Van der Aa's compositions stand (like those of Beckett) at the crossroads of musical and dramatic history; as curious "frozen" contradictions—in much the same way as many of the early passages within his own works recur later during the performances in a slightly different form, like etheric aural ghosts for our age of historical indeterminacy. As Novak observes, the sections of Van der Aa's music need "to be heard in relation to other music"—not only the other musical elements within each individual work itself, but also with respect to musicology and to the history of Modernism.

Van der Aa's reworking of Modernist aesthetics and its alienated or neurotic subjects is particularly visible in such

Figure 2 Roderick Williams and his technological doubles in *After Life* (2005). Photo: Hans van den Bogaard. Courtesy of the artist.
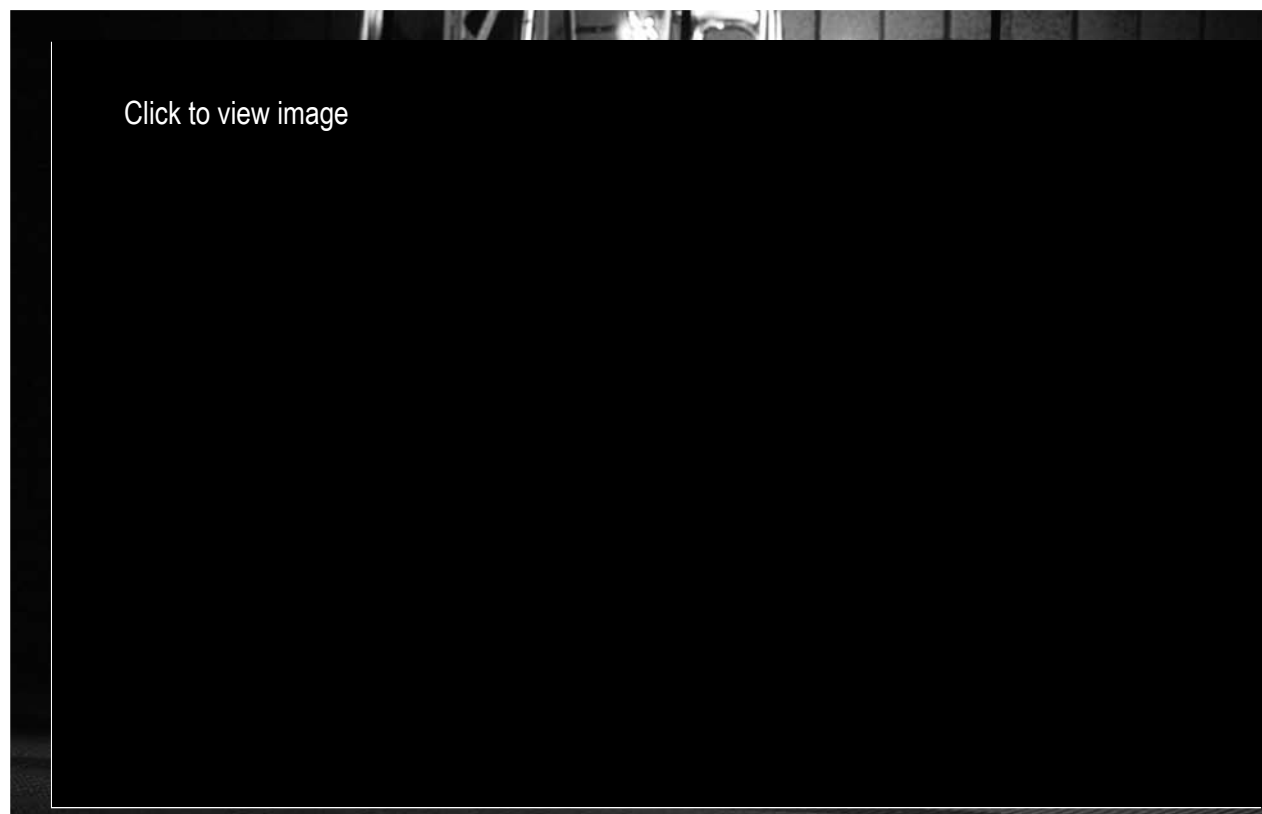
works as his short film, *Passage* (2002), which sketches a portrait of an isolated obsessive-compulsive old man, as well the composer's work for a soprano and her audiovisual double, *One*.[19] Both pieces consistently use the fracturing of tempi, of voice and of instrumental line to depict madness and neurosis, in Spel's words, exploring "loneliness verging on insanity." In terms of meaning and dramaturgical ambience, Van der Aa's work is highly Modernist in ambience, strongly evoking the early plays of Beckett as well as such classic neurotic atonal operas as Arnold Schoenberg's *Erwartung* (1909).[20] It is significant in this respect that Van der Aa has had major commissions from the Schoenberg Ensemble and the Ives Ensemble (*Above* and *Attach* respectively, both in 1999), two groups whose style and artistic direction is closely in harmony with his own Modernist-influenced aesthetic.

Van der Aa's work is not however entirely confined to such relatively familiar musico-dramatic forms. The sense of neurotic alienation which runs throughout Van der Aa's compositions is principally a product of the relationship between the vocal and instrumental lines. As a result, when these lines are presented in their most unadorned form, the focus of Van der Aa's work moves from that of the alienated psyche of the modern individual, to that of the alienated orchestra or chamber ensemble itself. Like the barely human figures in Beckett's *Quad*, Van der Aa's players are transformed into instrumental machines. In such works by Van der Aa, it is more the instruments which have become alienated from themselves and their fellows within the musical space represented on screen and upon the stage. In these instances, the performance is more akin to an intricate dance of failing automata, than one of the tortured human psyche; a fractured narrative of the non-human, rather than a potentially neo-humanist version of the Modernist dramaturgical aesthetic.

Discussing these trends in the work of Van der Aa and others, Novak notes that prostheses and cybernetic additions to the human body have principally been theorised as compensating for an "insufficiency" of the embodied human subject.[21] By contrast, in Romantic and humanist discourse, the performer is typically seen as almost organically joined to his or her acoustic orchestral instrument. The union of performer and instrument acts not so much as a compensation for a biological or psychological absence on the part of the player, but rather as a spiritual device which allows the human subject to outwardly express an already present emotional interiority. For the Romantics, the instrument did not serve as a tool to enable the subject to transcend his or her true nature, but rather as a valve which released and cultivated that which previously lay hidden within the depths of the individual.[22] Van der Aa's staging, his dramaturgy and his use of projection, however, foregrounds the status of the orchestral machine and its instrumentation as cybernetic additions to the live performer; as a non-cohesive set of fragmentary additives which are often in conflict with each other, as well as being in conflict with the human subject which rests at its core. Spel indeed observes with respect to the *Here* trilogy that the replaying of portions of the score from earlier in the cycle via the soundtrack at the same time that newer elements struggle to emerge under the hand of the live performer highlights a failure to musically progress within the piece. Van der Aa deliberately arrests the progression of the material in such a way that the future can only be imagined as an endless, flattened conflation of past and present akin to the grey, post-humanist voids and near-apocalyptic scenarios depicted in pieces by Beckett such as *Endgame* (1957), *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) and *Quad*.[23] It is this, I would contend, which constitutes the contradictory "time axis" opened up at various points within the works which Van der Aa refers to above. It is a temporality characterised by dialectic in which stasis and progression coexist, or might be seen to alternate with each other. Such a construction of the orchestral machine, and the temporal space which it generates within itself, offers relatively little room for the rich emotional intensity and potential for heroic self-realisation upon which the Modernist and Romantic subject depended.

Nevertheless, part of what causes a certain humanist ambience to hover around Van der Aa's work is the fetishistic quality of his compositions. Van der Aa's nervous, atonal aesthetic is not comfortable with the cybernetic insufficiency and temporal voids which his works uncover. Under Freudian theory, the fetish is that which conceals what one cannot bring oneself to look at (the phallus for Freud and Lacan), whilst simultaneously demanding and celebrating this act of looking at the fetishised "screen image" which has been placed in front of the *original*, feared or lacking object.[24] Fetishism is therefore bound by a logic of affirmation and denial, of looking and of not looking, and of a conflation of presence (of having the phallus or the sense of psychosexual unity which it allows one to construct) with an absence (as a phantasmic sign of unity and power, the phallus can never be truly "possessed" by any subject). This contradictory, fetishistic structure of presence and absence, fullness and fragmentation, progression and stasis, is deeply embedded within Van der Aa's oeuvre. Van der Aa's dramaturgy still clings to the centrality and importance of the psychosexual human subject for the creation of a viable culture and musical aesthetic after Schoenberg and Beckett, whilst nevertheless suggesting the potential erasure and collapse of such a subject as the source of any stable basis for knowledge, experience or aesthetic form. This is in contrast to such works as *Metastasis* (1953) by Iannis Xenakis, in which Modernist scoring and dramaturgy has been definitively rejected and for which any suggestion that a human subject or psyche might be leading or described in the piece is wholly spurious.[25]
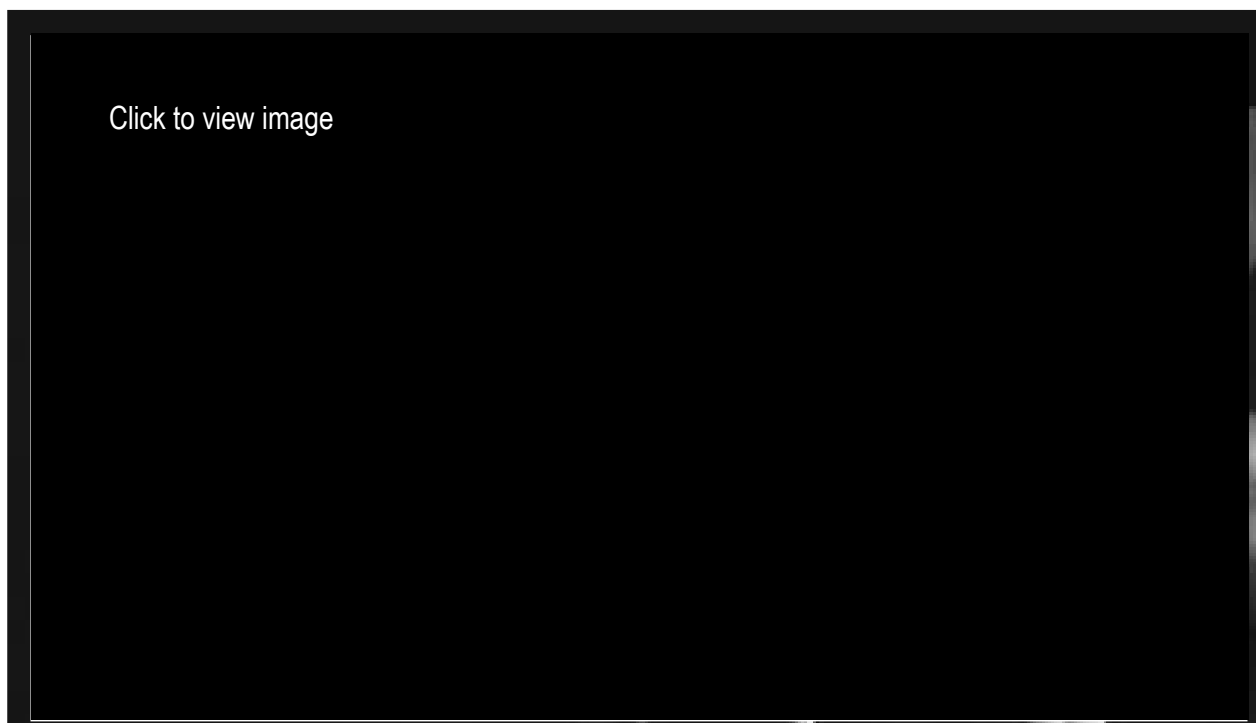
Van der Aa's scores and his stage directions direct the audience's gaze and attention towards a fetishised human subject, who is shown in compositions like *One* as struggling to realise him or herself—even as these same works suggest the impossibility of such a project of psychological and musical reclamation via any act or technological supplement (be it a sexual one or not). The foregrounding of the relationship of the instruments to their technologised others enacts a similar fetishisation of these objects, too, as the instruments struggle to realise themselves in the face of adversity. *Memo* (2003) for example is performed by solo violinist who records her own playing onto the antiquated tape-recorder which Van der Aa always takes with him on tour (and which also featured in the performance given by the WASO at the 2007 THNMF). The performer then plays along with this crackling, recently recorded material. The piece depends for its effects and for its sonic character upon the hard plastic clunks of the machine's buttons and upon the gentle hiss of the magnetic tape; a highly fetishistic rendering of the specific character of this now all but obsolete—yet nevertheless modern and electronic—technological device.

Quadrivial (1997) offers a particularly rich example of the historical and performative ambiguities with Van der Aa's practice, presenting the audience with such ornate sound worlds as the frenetic free repetition which recurs in much of Van der Aa's work, but here it is placed amidst small, angular, dissonant scenes. Despite the performers deliberately enacting or miming a number of false starts, this repeating, urgent phrasing grows into longer sequences and then into a series of unison clashes and attacks—without any sense of a central character or individual guiding or leading this musical development. The live player remains the focus against which his or her doubles are arrayed—here represented by the ensemble itself and its silent gestures, made by the performers without actually playing the instruments— whilst simultaneously becoming dispersed within the dramaturgy of the work and across its multilayered musical structures. The ensemble is absorbed in its own machinations, coming together and blowing apart in a series of tightly paired developments. This self-absorption of the orchestral machine also reflects the way that Van der Aa's use of live recordings and playback in pieces like *Memo* and *Here – To be found* (2001) can be read as suggesting that the orchestra itself is a kind of massive, dysfunctional music box.[26] In the *Here* trilogy, this lumbering symphonic machine is carried from hissy, clunky analogue accompaniment to more glitchie, slippery digital sounds, the electroacoustic elements recapitulating their own formal history from musique concrète to contemporary computerised processes like Max/MSP. Against this, the orchestra repeats and reworks grabs of material, breaking them and sharing them amongst clusters of instruments, before the whole thing collapses and empties out, ending with the players frozen, bows raised, waiting for that last note that will never come. Beyond the familiar tropes of Absurdist tragedy and Existential realisation implied here, there are many arrested sounds and motifs present that evoke much more than the 1950s cultural worlds and dramaturgical precedents otherwise suggested. Beyond simple atonalism, polyphony or

Figure 4 Opera, the orchestra and its players as an alienated machine: *After Life* (2005). Photo: Hans van den Bogaard. Courtesy of the artist.

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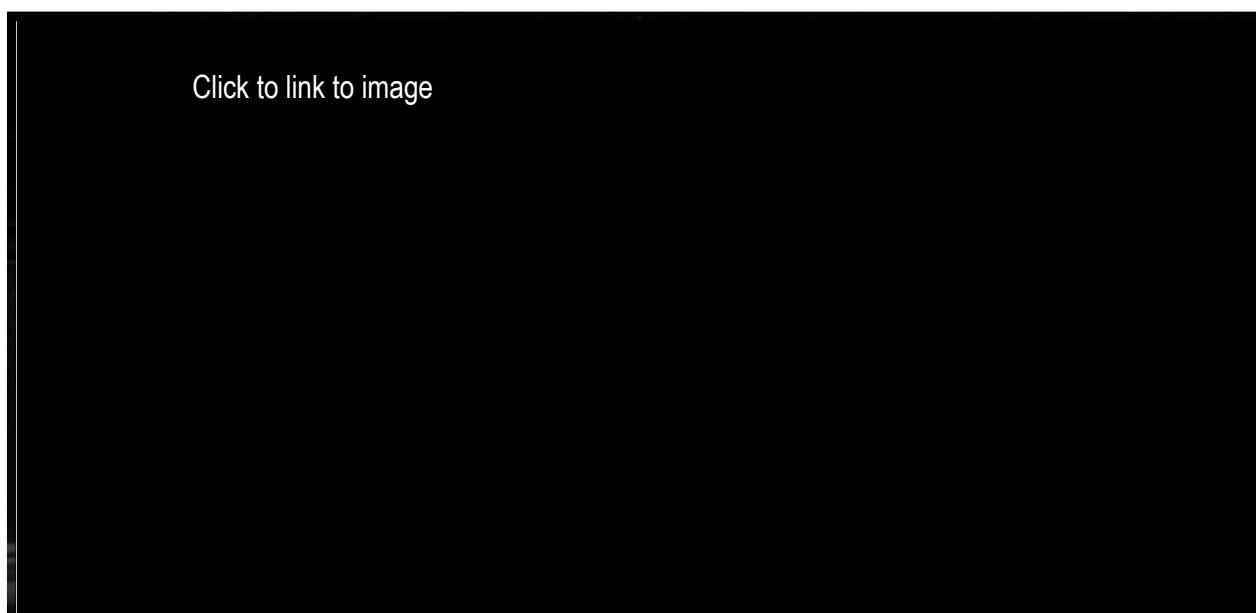
pastiche—let alone Romanticism—Van der Aa's multifaceted scores present an at times delicate, Ligeti-like assembly of materials and textures, which also hark back to those dramatic and musical signatures which defined Modernism from the nineteenth century until the post-World War II period. The composer's admixture of Baroque and classical instrumentation and some of its lines, atonalism, clusters, textures and performative execution is both intriguing and unresolved, suggesting a highly fetishised machine of etheric hauntings and divided subjects, who even today circle the dying star of Modernist interiority.

Notes

All online materials accessed Sept 2007.

1. This research and interview upon which this article is based was originally conducted as background for: Jonathan Marshall, "Media Multiplies Opera," *RealTime* 78, (April-May 2007), p. 41, reproduced on <http://www. realtimearts.net/article/78/8555>, "Vertiginous Pleasures of Disconnection," *RealTime* 79, (June-July 2007), p. 40, reproduced on <http://www.realtimearts.net/article/79/8612>. I would like to thank Cat Hope for advice on the musicological details and references employed above.

2. <http://www.doublea.net/work_info/w_imprint.html>.

3. <http://anthonypateras.com>; Anthony Pateras, *Mutant Theatre* (NY: Tzadik, 2004), *Malfunction Studies* (Melbourne: Pateras, 2002); Anthony Pateras and Robin Fox, *Flux Compendium*, (Vienna: Editions Mego: 2006); see also Robin Fox's essay in this volume.

4. Frits van der Waa, CD liner notes, trans. Ko Kooman, in Michel van der Aa, *Above, Between, Attach, Just Before, Auburn, Oog* (Olanda: Composers' Voice / Donemus, CV119), reproduced on <http://www.doublea.net/ articles/a_cdlinernotes.html>.

5. Amongst the extensive body of literature devoted to identifying Beckett and his avant-garde contemporary James Joyce as either Modernist or Postmodernist, see: Ihab Hassan, "Joyce, Beckett, and the Postmodern Imagination," *TriQuarterly* 34, (Fall 1975), pp. 179-200; Fredrick Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism," *New Left Review* 146, (1984), pp. 53-92; Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A report on knowledge*, trans Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984); David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An enquiry into the origins of cultural change*, (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1989); Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968); Leonard Cabell Pronko, *Avant-garde: The experimental theater in France*, (Berkeley: California UP, 1962).

6. Michael Fried, *Art and Objecthood: Essays and reviews* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1998).

7. See: Philip Auslander, *Presence and Resistance: Postmodernism and cultural politics in contemporary American performance* (Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1992); Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the discursive limits of "sex"* (NY: Routledge, 1993), *Excitable Speech: A politics of the performative* (NY: Routledge, 1997).

8. See: RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance: Art in action* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999); Jonathan Marshall, "Operatic Tradition and Ambivalence in Chamber Made Opera's *Recital* (Chesworth, Horton, Noonan)" and Keith Gallasch, "A Music Theatre Life: Lyndon Terracini," both in *Australasian Drama Studies* 45 (2004), pp. 72-118; Peter Greenaway et al., *The Death of a Composer: Rosa, a horse drama,* (Amsterdam: Netherlands TV, 1999).

9. Mischa Spel, "Michel Van Der Aa's *Here* Trilogy: An introduction," trans. Jonathan Reeder (2004), on <http://www.doublea.net/downloads/BooseyFlyerMvdAa.pdf>.

10. Jelena Novak, "Prosthetic Music: Michel van der Aa's case," *Music and Networking Proceedings* (2005), reproduced on <http://www.doublea.net/articles/a_novak.html>. See also Novak, "Digitality of Opera: Two cases," *E-Volucija*, 14 (2006), <http://www.bos.org.yu/cepit/evolucija/html/14/opera.htm>, and *Opera U Doba Medija* (Novi Sad: Zorana Stojanovića, 2007).

11. Michiel Cleij, "An Introduction to the Music of Michel van der Aa," trans. Jonathan Reeder (2004), on <http://www.doublea.net/downloads/BooseyFlyerMvdAa.pdf>.

12. See for example the various archival documents reproduced on <http://www.survivalafterdeath.org/>.

13. The use of the historically-anachronistic and scientifically-dubious descriptor of "ether music" to describe early Theremin performance implicitly related the technology to para-scientific, Spiritist and Theosophical ideas about spiritual forces flowing through space and time which the Theremin trapped. This is perhaps not surprising given that, after the failure of a new incarnation of the prophesised Universal Spiritual Teacher to arise from within the Theosophical movement in 1930, Russia and Eastern Europe became the last bastions of Spiritist research. See: anon, *Literary Digest* (1 Oct 1927), p. 30, and anon, "Ether-Wave Music," *Literary Digest* (29 Oct 1927), both reproduced on <http://www.thereminvox.com/article/archive/1/>; various [1929-1996], *Lydia Kavina: Music From Ether: Original works for Theremin* (NY: Mode, 1999); David Lomas, "Modest Recording Instruments: Science, surrealism and visuality," *Art History*, 27.1 (Sept 2004), pp. 627-650; Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939* (Sydney: NSW UP, 1986); Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater, *Thought Forms* (London: Theosophical Publishing, 1901); Jonathan W. Marshall, "Embodied Modernism, Visual Arts, and the Aesthetics of Roger Kemp and Rudolf Steiner," *Art Bulletin of Victoria* (Oct 2007), pp. 24-35, 70-71.

14. Anon, "Centre Pompidou Video Art 1965-2005: Exhibition details" (Melbourne: Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 2007), <http://www.acmi.net.au/pompidou_exhibition_details.htm>.

15. Richard Wagner, *Wagner on Music and Drama: A selection,* trans. Ashton Ellis (London: Gollancz, 1970); Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy,* trans. Richard Speirs (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 2006).

16. Van der Aa based his English and Dutch libretto for *After Life* on the script of Hirokazu Kore-Eda's Japanese language film, *Wandafuru Raifu,* as well as interviews conducted with Dutch citizens of different ages. See: <http://www.doublea.net/work_info/w_afterlife.html>; David Allenby, '*After Life,' Boosey and Hawkes Quarternotes* (Feb 2006), reproduced on <http://www.doublea.net/articles/a_afterlifeboosey.html>.

17. Pierre Gervasoni, "Michel van der Aa, pour voir la musique," *Le monde* (23 Sept 2003), reproduced on <http://www.doublea.net/articles/a_lemonde.html>.

18. For a survey of some of these trends, see Brandon LaBelle, *Background Noise: Perspectives on sound art* (NY: Continuum, 2006).

19. Recordings of these and other works may be found on <http://www.doublea.net/media_video.html> and <http://www.doublea.net/media_audio.html>.

20. Arnold Schoenberg, *Erwartung: Monodram in Ein Akt* (Wien: Universal, 1950), Juliane Brand and Christopher Hailey, eds, *Constructive Dissonance: Arnold Schoenberg and the transformations of twentieth-century culture* (Berkeley: California UP, 1997), reproduced on <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft52900620/>.

21. Amongst the many examples one could cite in this regard, Stelarc provides a cogent and influential instance. Stelarc, "Obsolete Body" and other essays, on <http://www.stelarc.va.com.au/stelarc1.html>.

22. Barthes' critique of Romanticism is also relevant here. See: Roland Barthes, *The Responsibility of Forms: Critical essays on music, art, and representation*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) and Marshall, "Flatness, Ornamentality and the Sonic Image: Puncturing flânerie at *Proximities* by David Chesworth and Sonia Leber," in this volume.

23. Samuel Beckett, *The Complete Dramatic Works,* (London: Faber, 1990).

24. Sigismund Freud, ("Fetishism,") in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1973), vol. 21; Emily Apter and William Pietz, eds, *Fetishism as Cultural Discourse* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993).

25. See: Peter Hoffmann, "Xenakis, Iannis," in *Grove Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Oxford: Oxford UP) <http://www.grovemusic.com>.

26. See Marshall, "Operatic," pp. 72-96.