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Complex Transmission in a Literate Music Tradition: A Case Study

How is it possible to arrive at musical sound from a written document? Is it possible by reading only? Usually a clear distinction is made between oral and written traditions in music. However, written music traditions cannot work by transmission through writing alone. Oral transmission is always part of it. In this article the complexity of transmission in a written music tradition is sounded out, using a case from late twentieth-century 'new music' as a starting point. Apart from written and oral transmission, the role of energetic transmission is assessed, and discrepancies between various forms of transmission are discussed.

Introduction

In 2006 Andreas Hamelberg and Minou de Leeuw released a film about the step-by-step discovery of a written score by a performer. It is called *Apparences, A music documentary*, subtitled in Dutch as 'naar een compositie van Ton de Leeuw'. The Dutch preposition 'naar' may be read as 'towards' or 'according to'. It could be understood as referring to the genesis of a musical work or to the use of that work as a model for the film.¹ In this instance I take the preposition to imply the former option, though in the particular sense of: the performative realization of a score into sound. The present text will follow the path towards sound realization shown in the film, while assessing, and elaborating on, its implications for the understanding of music transmission. After reading the film as an audiovisual essay about music transmission within a literate tradition in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, I will look into the question what this documentary is documenting: how does it relate to the actual process of preparing a performance from a score in this particular instance?

The film features the composition *Apparences* for cello solo by Ton de Leeuw (1926-1996), dating from 1986/87.² The piece was commissioned by violoncellist Monique Bartels, who is also the dedicatee. More precisely, the title is *Apparences I*; De Leeuw wrote also *Apparences II* for clarinet quartet (1987). Apart from the documentary, the film includes the complete performance of the cello composition by Larissa Groeneveld.³ The film presents various actors, whom I will introduce later in the order of appearance while discussing their role in the represented process of the music transmission.⁴

Structure of the Film

The film is structured according to the process of exploring a new score (that is, new to the performer). It starts with showing a cellist, whom we will call the protagonist, reading the notation and giving a first try at playing the opening of the piece. The film proceeds

1 An instance of a film modeled after a musical composition is *The Final Chorale on Stravinsky's Symphonies of Wind Instruments* by Frank Scheffer (Allegri Film, 1991).

2 Amsterdam: Donemus.

3 The cover states: 'about an unknown cello-solo'. This is not to be taken literally. *Apparences* was first performed by Monique Bartels on 14 June 1987 in Breda, in a concert entitled 'Teachers-pupils: Music by Toebosch, De Leeuw and Manneke'. After this occasion the piece has been performed several times, and it has been broadcast on Dutch radio.

4 I express my gratitude to Larissa Groeneveld for giving extensive information about the making of the film, and to Maddie Starreveld-Bartels for historical data about the performance history of *Apparences I*.

by presenting several witnesses of the composition's and its performance's history, of its composer and his background, and of his demands on performers (the composer had passed away at the time of the film recording). This is alternated with the protagonist's further explorations of actually playing the piece.

Witness I is another cellist, the one who has played the premiere and who has had intensive contact with the composer. She is consulted by the protagonist in order to find out how to render the character of the composition's opening in accordance with the composer's view. Then the two cellists view a video of the piece's performance by witness I, dating from the time of the premiere.

After this, two other witnesses appear repeatedly, who have known the composer well, speaking on his work and life. It is not clear whether they have also been consulted by the protagonist, but the film does not exclude this possibility. Witness II is a conductor, conservatory teacher, one of the composer's students and editor of a book on him. He provides a biographical, cultural, historical and aesthetic background. Witness III is a fellow musician. He discusses features of the score, and relates these to other works by the composer; he gives insight into the composer's mentality as well.

The film then returns to the contact between the protagonist and witness I. The former asks about the genesis of the score, and about matters of tempo. They discover a discrepancy between the manuscript and the published print.

The last 'witness' to appear is the composer. The two cellists are shown looking at a video in which he illustrates by imagery the music intended by him. Finally the complete composition is played by the protagonist.

In short, the film demonstrates that the process between the first reading of a score and its integral performance necessitates the consultation of a considerable variety of other sources than written ones, in the form of witnesses, in order to raise and solve issues proceeding from dealing with script.

The Opening Shot of the Film

The protagonist is cellist Larissa Groeneveld.⁵ In the opening shot of the film she is studying the score of *Apparences*, placed on a music stand, a text which is apparently new to her. Sitting behind her instrument, she is engaged in reading. As yet, she is not playing anything.

The viewer becomes aware of the fact that the piece is a specimen within a written music tradition. Indeed, *Apparences* is part of the Western 'literacy' tradition of music, 'literate music' being defined by Taruskin as 'genres that have been disseminated primarily through

5 Larissa Groeneveld studied violoncello with Dmitri Ferschtman at the Sweelinck Conservatorium in Amsterdam, where she graduated in 1990 with honours. She continued her studies with Natalia Gutman at the Hochschule für Musik in Stuttgart, Germany. She followed master courses with Mstislav Rostropovich, Yo Yo Ma and others. In 1984 she won the first prize of the International Competition 'Luis Coleman' in Spain. Since then she has received various honours in the field of chamber music. In 1991 she won the Grand Prix for cello in Bourg-Madame, France, and in 1992 she ended as the finalist at the ARD Duo-Concours in Munich, together with pianist Frank van de Laar. In April of that year she received the Press Prize at the Zilina Festival in Slovakia. In 1988 Larissa Groeneveld made her debut in the Big Hall of the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, with Beethoven's Triple Concert. Since then she makes concert tours through Europe, and has performed as a soloist with many first-ranking orchestras. Together with pianist Ellen Corver and violinist Peter Brunt she forms the Osiris Trio. In 1996 this trio played in the series 'Rising Stars', organised by the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, and it presented itself subsequently in the most important European centres of chamber music and in Carnegie Hall, New York. The repertory of Larissa Groeneveld includes all great works for cello, from those by J.S. Bach up to contemporary compositions, some of which have been written especially for her (information according to www.theagenda.nl/p2260_larissa-groeneveld.html).

the medium of writing.⁶ As we have pointed out above, such dissemination does not proceed by writing alone.

After some time the protagonist does the first *audible* thing: she establishes the tempo by means of an electronic metronome. Again, this tempo itself is not transmitted audibly, but is read from a written figure in the score.

Tempo definition is an important first step in translating a written document into sound performance. From establishing the tempo a host of further actions depends. A major aspect relying on tempo is the imagined or perceived character of the piece. E.g., research by Honing e.a. has shown that listeners are highly sensitive to the 'rightness' of the tempo in which a recorded composition is reproduced in relation to what is taken as the piece's original tempo.⁷

In the case of *Apparences* we are dealing with a relatively unknown composition, which means that it has hardly had the chance of making a performance history, nor, by consequence, a *tempo history*. Therefore it is especially vital here to start the discovery of the piece with the assessment of the tempo. Later on we will meet an instance of discrepancy between the written tempo indication and the tempo as handed down orally.

Aspects of Music Transmission

The continuation of the film soon shows that, in order to interpret a written musical document, help is sought in other means than notation. Scores are always embedded in oral transmissions, as well as in energetic transmissions, notably those of gestures (kinetic transmission).⁸ Kinetic transmission includes movements involved in performance, both the ones which are seen and those which are not but are inferred (like movements of the larynx in singing), as well as gestures by composers, tutors or commentators who try to convey the character of a piece in explanations. Apart from these, there is the contribution of written transmissions other than music notation, like titles, analytical and historical interpretations, etc.

Oral transmissions do not only involve prescriptions of how to play or sing, but also include imagery and ideology deemed suitable to the particular piece by the participants. Of course the latter information can also be conveyed in writing, but not in such a compelling manner, involving several senses, and, most importantly, presented in a live interpersonal way. Kinetic patterns are connected with the *way* compositions are performed, which manifest as body movements, of hand, feet, face, trunk, etc. Such kinetic patterns may stem from the composer or (at a later stage) music teachers and (generations of) performers, thus building what we may call a performance genealogy. Also these tutors quite often resort to portraying, or referring to movements of people, animals, phenomena in nature or human artifacts, in order to convey some quality of a piece.⁹

It is striking that energy patterns may differ considerably from what one would expect from the writing. An example in case is the mazurka performance practice, in which the

6 Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, Vol. 1, pp. xxii-xxiii. Taruskin acknowledges the interaction between literacy and orality.

7 Henkjan Honing & Olivia Ladinig, 'The effect of exposure and expertise on timing judgments: Preliminary results', in: *Proceedings of the International Conference on Music Perception and Cognition*, Bologna (2006), pp. 80-5; H. Honing, 'Is expressive timing relational invariant under tempo transformation?', in: *Psychology of Music* 35/2 (2007), pp. 276-85.

8 Evidently, oral transmission has also energetic components, such as acoustic ones.

9 Speaking of, or mimicking movement is a very common aspect of music transmission, indeed. I well remember how a colleague at the University of Amsterdam, Dr Robbert van der Lek, once qualified the energy of the dominant seventh chord in its third inversion, opening the second half of the Sarabande of J.S. Bach's *English Suite* no. 1, as: 'When playing that chord it is as if one holds between one's thumb and index finger the wing of a buzzing blowfly, madly trying to escape.'

durations of the consecutive beats in the 3/4 metre deviate in an important way from an 'egalitarian' interpretation strictly based upon the notation.¹⁰

There are other energetic forms of transmission, apart from kinetic ones. Since the development of the relevant technology, sound recordings are occupying a significant place among them for more than a century now.

It is impossible – nor is it desirable – for a composer to notate everything s/he envisages; the score would become unreadable. Composers and the chain of consecutive performers, relating to, and at the same time shaping the music traditions of their day, therefore all contribute to initiate and perpetuate genealogies of performance, by employing the forms of written, oral and kinetic transmission discussed. Through the handing down of energy patterns, pieces keep attracting belief by listeners and performers – necessary for their continuation in transmission, and, when newly composed, for getting a chance to enter processes of transmission, maturation and transformation at all.

Ton de Leeuw played an important role in this initiating process by closely tutoring rehearsals of his works. Though not as controlling as Stockhausen, who created and maintained a personal tradition as a complex of oral, kinetic, spiritual and written directions, De Leeuw did make his intentions clear by playing parts himself during rehearsals, mimicking movements, and providing illustrations by means of imagery.

In spite of all these 'measures' by composers towards sonic determination, performers are always confronted with daunting questions of interpretation. This is of course evident in cases in which hardly more is extant than written documents, but it certainly also holds in more recent practices of *thick transmission*, that is, when several forms of transmission are available in relation to a particular piece or style. In a literate tradition, writing has a certain dominance over other ways of transmission. Writing leaves a varying, but always considerable scope to the performer for his/her own decision-making in the field of energy patterns, and this gives opportunity to the continuous renewal of the interpretation of written traditions, such as Western classical and new music.¹¹

The importance of this complex of complementary forms of transmission in literate music tradition becomes evident when mainly the script is handed down. Energy patterns have to be 'invented' by performers and musicologists: however meticulously they may peruse historical sources, the latter will always need interpretation. Moreover, in as far as these historical sources are written ones, they can never replace the energy patterns involved in music transmission.¹² The complexity of issues, choices, questions, and challenges in developing practical and aesthetic perspectives of performance has been discussed recently by Ton Koopman (2008).¹³ Interestingly, as Taruskin has argued, energy patterns contemporary to the interpreter may substitute the lacking historical ones. He has argued that the historically informed Baroque music practice of the 1950s and 1960s

10 See the research program CHARM (Royal Holloway, University of London, in collaboration with King's College, London and the University of Sheffield).

11 During a seminar on 'The interaction between Indian and Western classical music traditions' at the University of Bombay, Department of Musicology, January 1995, Indian colleagues (composers, performers, musicologists) expressed their wonder about the fact that Western music is performed time and again by various orchestras and ensembles in spite of its precise notation, thus, as they conceived it in Indian perspective, reducing a performance to mere repetition and by consequence rendering it superfluous. My reply was that innovation in notated music is continuous, precisely because it is notated: notation is partial, always necessitating (temporary) completion by the performers.

12 In a lecture at the Royal Tropical Institute, May 1976, John Blacking, in an effort to remediate this lack, suggested an exercise in historical embodiment: according to him, by physically copying historical instructions about body postures and fingering, one would come close to the relevant performance practice.

13 Ton Koopman, *Authenticiteit in de historische uitvoeringspraktijk van de oude muziek*, Leiden: Faculteit der Kunsten, Universiteit Leiden, 2008.

bore a markedly Stravinskian ring.¹⁴

Also in the case of *Apparences* composer Ton de Leeuw did not only leave a score but issued many more traces of transmission of different kinds, as becomes clear as the film progresses.

The Film's Exploration of Performance History: Decision Making in Conflicting Situations

After the issue of tempo, the film shows a further step in Groeneveld's discovery of *Apparences*. It brings in a second important actor, cellist Monique Bartels (witness I).¹⁵ She played the premiere of the piece in 1987. Her role goes even further back, since she has given the commission for the composition, and was actively engaged in its genesis through verbal and musical dialogues with the composer.

Monique Bartels is introduced in the film in a double way: in 'live' interaction with Larissa Groeneveld, and in recorded form by means of a video registration of her performance of *Apparences* dating from the late 1980s, which both cellists are witnessing. The video brings in visual and historical depth, image within image. In this way the performance-in-the-making by the protagonist seems to be opened up to the formative factor of the piece's performance history.

Tempo is again an important issue in the interaction between the two cellists. At some point a difference of tempo interpretation arises between them. Monique Bartels takes a particular passage markedly slower than Larissa Groeneveld does (p. 6 of the printed score, third staff from the bottom, at the indication 'tremolo on one string, where possible'). Witness I states that the composer wanted it like this, though she preferred herself to play the passage faster.

For corroboration, she refers to the composer's manuscript from a copy of which she has been playing. When the two cellists compare the passage with the printed score published later, it becomes apparent that the relevant tempo indications differ. The new edition has 150 to the quarter note, while the manuscript edition gives the same figure to the eighth note.

The discussion between the two cellists makes it clear that different versions of the same piece may appear in a written transmission. The performers have to decide how to deal with this. In this instance it amounts to the question: What is decisive, the original manuscript plus an oral transmission – a *transmission of consent* – between the first performer and the composer, who seems to have approved of her tempo performance, at least to have not disapproved of it; or the official published document containing a written statement about tempo which in all likelihood has been ratified by the composer, but differs in content from the statement in the manuscript?

The issue of tempo arises a third time in the film. It is brought up by the third actor, bass clarinetist Harry Sparnaaij (witness III). He has collaborated intensively with the composer several times, e.g., when rehearsing the latter's *Mountains* for bass clarinet and sound tape (1977) and *Trio* for flute, bass clarinet and piano (1990).

Sparnaaij brings the issue of time and timing on the level of energetic transmission when he refers to his experience of Ton de Leeuw's presence during rehearsals. The bass clarinet player states: 'The inner rest of De Leeuw, this is what we in principle do not have.' The latter used to underline 'Do not hurry. Take time to breathe.' The bass clarinet player testifies that to him and fellow musicians, the instilment of mental peace and the attention

14 Richard Taruskin, *Text and Act: Essays on Music and Performance*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

15 Monique Bartels studied cello with Jean-Louis Hardy and Jean Decroos. She played in Camerata Lys (Gstaad), the Amphion Ensemble (Antwerp), and, in the Netherlands, in the Parc Quartet, the Nederlands Strijksextet, the Doelenkwartet, the Trocadero Ensemble, and, as a solo cellist, the Amsterdam Sinfonietta. She teaches at the Royal Conservatory in The Hague and the Conservatory of Amsterdam.

to breathing indeed worked as a part of the music transmission by Ton de Leeuw. Harry Sparnaaij states: ‘We did arrive at playing differently.’

Sparnaaij also contributes to the tempo debate between the cellists, relating to the written tempo prescription of MM 150, discussed a moment ago. The bass clarinet player emphasizes that the given figure is not to be taken as a strict prescription to be interpreted in the absolute sense, but rather as a reference value:

‘There are composers who sometimes provide a tempo figure of which they say themselves: “it is impossible to realize.” I reply: “But why do you write it in the first place?” Upon which they answer: “Yes, but when I write 60 it becomes slower anyway.”’

According to Sparnaaij, the tempo figure is a matter of right understanding here: the composer should have wanted to stress a very high speed of playing, but not necessarily 150 beats per minute. Thus the tempo indication would be a form of exaggeration in writing, intended to *lead*, by means of what seems at face value a way of purposeful *misleading*.

This argument seems to favour the performance of the particular passage by Monique Bartels. Moreover one could point to the fact that the same passage already contains the expression ‘where possible’, relating to the instruction ‘tremolo on one string’: as this suggests a limit, but not an absolute necessity, why could this not also hold for tempo here? Such deliberations show how important it is to determine in what kind of tradition the particular written work to be explored is to be placed.

Performance Traditions: ‘Perfection’ and ‘Adequacy’ in Performance

Taruskin has sharpened our attention to this issue in chapter 14, ‘Finally, to Bach’s Dark Vision’ of his *Text and Act*, discussing the Teldec series of Bach’s church cantatas.¹⁶ His stance is that by employing performance forces which are able to approach a vocally ‘perfect’ rendering of the score, one will miss the ‘dark vision’ of Bach, which allegedly led this composer to set certain vocal passages close to, or even beyond the compass in which boys’ voices are at ease, in order to performatively – for both singers and listeners – bringing home theological issues of man’s weakness. We take this issue up, making a difference between a ‘perfect’ performance and an ‘adequate’ one, the former relating to standards held at the time of the performance, the latter referring to the discovery of performance values operative at the time of composing.

The issue of perfection versus adequacy in performance is also a vital one in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. To give an example, Edgard Varèse’s conception of organized sound entailed the provocation of sonic roughness and unpredictability by means of the prescription in his scores of extreme register positions, as well as extreme jumps between registers, and by playing instructions like *Flatterzunge*. In the course of the twentieth century, performers and ensembles have perfected their playing to such an extent that these once extravagant prescriptions can now be performed with a certain facility. The effect is that the roughness and unpredictability of sound is diminished – performances of Varèse’s work may attain even a measure of ‘polishedness’. The execution of the score is perfected, but the question arises whether it is adequate: does one not go against the spirit of Varèse’s work here? On the other hand, to willfully introduce imperfections in the performance seems artificial, – but then artificiality is also part of art.

Quite some performers are aware of this dilemma. Flute player Harrie Starreveld is one of them. He came to experience his increased technical perfection as a hindrance to ‘adequacy’ in performance, that is, as impinging upon the acuity of his sonic and musical

16 Taruskin, *Text and Act*, pp. 307-15.

attention. To counteract this, he turned to one of the Japanese traditions of playing the *shakuhachi*. This notoriously difficult instrument in terms of sheer sound production, within a tradition of completely abstaining from facilitating playing devices like keys, as well as of keeping distance from values of aesthetic sound perfection, offered to Starreveld the desired resistance to virtuosity and enabled him to regain musical attention.¹⁷

There are twentieth-century musical works and practices which make the relation between script and performance in terms of adequacy and perfection even more complex. Scores have been written which intentionally offer such an overload of instructions, that the integral performance of them is impossible. Performers can only *approach* what is written, and constantly have to make choices in what to play as they go. They will always remain short of playing everything notated; yet this is not imperfect, but adequate. An example is Xenakis's *Evryali* for piano (1973).

To which tradition may *Apparences* be related? Is the score (or parts of it) only a reference, the performance of which will always only remain an imperfect – though not necessarily inadequate! – approach? (cf. the more extreme case of Xenakis and the relative perspective of Sparnaaij). Is the score to be interpreted according to the idea of instrumental resistance, in the confrontation with difficult playing tasks on the cello? (cf. Takemitsu's apperception of Japanese instruments; after all, Ton de Leeuw was not only familiar with the ethos of Japanese music traditions, but showed himself also sympathetic to it in a number of his works in the 1960s). Or are the written instructions of the score to be taken literally, even if they can be attained only in due course of the performance history?

I have elaborated on these issues in order to show that the choices as to performance perspectives on a score, with which a present day performer is confronted, may be overwhelming indeed. Larissa Groeneveld, in an interview with the present author on 27 June 2008, made the following observation when she explained her tempo decision in the case under discussion:

'The tempo indication in the printed score, MM 150 for the quarter note, is indeed fast, but musically perfectly logical, and sounds to me musically much better than e.g. MM 120, the way Monique Bartels plays the passage. In any case, the tempo indication in the manuscript, MM 150 for the eighth note, must be a mistake; it leads to a boring result.'

In the same interview Larissa Groeneveld expressed her view about the performance perspective chosen by her. She stated that, to her, Ton de Leeuw is the kind of composer who goes along to a certain extent with the possibilities of the performer. In the case of *Apparences* this may lead, in the early stage of its performance history, to a tempo which is slower than indicated in the score. But the intended tempo is still valid, and it would be preferable if it were realized. According to her, composers do look for limits, in an interaction of mutual challenge with performers, but do not conceive this in the first place in terms of sheer technicality. Their orientation is foremost a musical one. In this perspective performers should strive to attain what is prescribed, as this is the result of an originally *musical* motivation.

On the basis of her statement, we may conclude that in her view performance is oriented on (musical) adequacy, and that from exploring adequacy (technical) perfection ensues. In this respect she does not take part of the performance history of the piece into account, that is, the contribution of witness I: she does not conform to Monique Bartels' tempo rendering of the particular passage and the latter's testimony about it.

17 Conversation with the author, 17 October 2007. Toru Takemitsu has emphatically pointed to the ethos of resistance built in into the Japanese traditional instruments in *Confronting Silence*, Berkeley: Fallen Leaf Press, 1995.

Further Explorations of *Apparences*' Performance History

The two cellists also speak about the character of the piece. This is one of the most difficult aspects of music to assess from reading a written document. It is here that kinetic and other forms of energetic transmission are needed most. The protagonist asks about how Ton de Leeuw wished the opening of the piece to sound. Witness I responds by showing the use of the bow (playing with the tip).

The film enters further into the composer's transmission. Monique Bartels has cooperated closely with Ton de Leeuw during the genesis of *Apparences*. Referring to her experiences, she even speaks of 'finding together' or 'co-invention'.

We are confronted with an early stage of music transmission here. At the same time we learn more about the division of labour in this stage of transmission. Bartels emphasizes that De Leeuw knew or came to know quite clearly what kind of sound he wanted. She experienced this sometimes as difficult in relation to her own role. Time and again the composer came up with prescriptions which differed from those they had invented together earlier. *Apparences* belongs to that strand of Western music tradition in which the composer assumes the final responsibility for the written text. (We have had ample opportunity though to demonstrate that this is not the end of the story, when we discussed the scope of interpretation of the performer above.)

We then arrive at a yet deeper layer of the transmission, with one audiovisual document embedded within the other. The film shows the protagonist and witness I looking at Eline Flipse's film *De klank van stilte* about Ton de Leeuw ('The sound of silence', NPS 1991). The fourth actor becomes visible now, the one who has played a role all along tacitly: De Leeuw as a composer and a thinker about music.

In order to clarify his vision about his intended music, De Leeuw uses a dynamic-static image in the video: a river which is ever changing in its currents, yet flowing within the same bed. This moment points to a mode of listening and philosophy of life which has been the subject of desired rediscovery by Ton de Leeuw, as well as of communication in the form of writing and speaking in various media during a large part of his years. Apparently this listening mode and life philosophy were not self-evident, even though De Leeuw's recurring prototypes, like the music of Debussy, date well before his age. Central in De Leeuw's communication were references to classical and court musics of India, Indonesia and the Arabic and Iranian world, early European music, as well as Eastern wisdom traditions.

A fifth actor enters the film here. He elaborates on the intended music of De Leeuw and his endeavours to communicate about it. It is Jurrien Slijter (witness II), reader in theory and performance practice as well as teacher of ensembles of contemporary music at the Faculty of Music of the Hogeschool Utrecht. Furthermore he is artistic leader and conductor of the gamelan ensemble Gending and the Basho Ensemble. He is a student of Ton de Leeuw, and consequently is part of the latter's music transmission. This aspect is evident in his editorship of an anthology of essays by and on De Leeuw.¹⁸ The transmission is also audible from Slijter's expression in language; not only the choice of his words but also his way of speaking bear resemblance to those of his teacher.

Indeed, a major effort was involved in the transmission of the ethos of De Leeuw's music, and this is due to the fact that its intention shows a marked inner tension. Pieces like *Apparences* belong to the tradition of Western new music, yet the composer intended it to stand apart from that tradition as well. He stressed its difference by relating it strongly to modal traditions of East and West. Nevertheless it very clearly cannot be counted among those traditions, as it is lacking their major characteristic: the (transmission of) common

18 Jurrien Slijter (ed.), *Ton de Leeuw*, Luxembourg: Harwood, 1995. Translation of J. Slijter (ed.), *Ton de Leeuw*, Hilversum/Zuthphen: CNM/Ravensburg, 1992.

knowledge about modal entities (use of scales) and ethical qualities.¹⁹ Interestingly, the way in which De Leeuw employs modal traditions bears a strong mark of the very new music traditions from which his work also intends to differ: eclectic generalization of modal traditions into what he calls ‘extended modality’.²⁰ It is understandable therefore that the composer went at great lengths to clarify the complex position of his music. The film testifies to this, by having him act posthumously.

Transmission of Music Philosophy

An aspect of written music transmission that needs attention here is the title of the piece and its explanation. Several titles of the period in which *Apparences* was composed, strongly suggest an intended perception and experience of the music as a *trace* of something else. See apart from the title of the cello solo, also *Invocations* (1983), *Résonances* (1984-5), and *Transparence* (1986). When we look into the question what it is that ‘appears’, that is ‘invoked’, that causes ‘resonance’, that is made ‘transparent’, and when we inspect written statements by the composer, we arrive at a layer of transmission in his music to which the composer attached considerable importance. He writes about *Apparences*:

‘Behind and within the transitoriness of these sound appearances the *model* is functioning as the symbol of the immutable unity of the (musical) matter.’²¹

Though this statement is intended as an explanation, it needs to be explained itself. Let us look first at the musical aspects. From *Invocations* (1983) onwards, De Leeuw used to prepare a composition by first making a recurrent multi-pitch single-duration chain of elements (a string of pitches each with the same duration), which he labeled ‘model’. Such a model usually is not actualized *in toto* in his written compositions (and by consequence in sound), but is subjected to various kinds of selection procedures, which highlight some of the model’s elements while suppressing others. These selection procedures change constantly during the course of the piece while the recurrent model on which they operate stays the same. This is the background of the composer’s explanation above: the ‘sound appearances’ result from the selection procedures, the ‘transitoriness’ of the former being due to the continuous change of the latter. That which is ‘within’ the ‘appearances’ is the model, because everything that appears in the score is extracted from it. Yet the model is also ‘behind’ those appearances because much of it, temporarily unselected, remains hidden. Therefore, ‘behind and within the transitoriness of these sound appearances’ the model, itself unchanging, is functioning ‘as the symbol of the immutable unity of the musical matter.’ So that which is present through ‘appearances’, ‘invocations’, ‘resonances’ and ‘transparency’ is, musically speaking, the model.

As far as I know the insight into the relationship between the model and its appearances was not part of De Leeuw’s transmission of his music to performers. The model is not stated or indicated in the score, and was not revealed during rehearsals. In fact, to arrive at an insight into the make-up of a model requires a lot of analysis, increasingly as the last phase of De Leeuw’s creative work progresses. Yet, it is quite possible that the model’s presence is intuited by the performers, but unlikely that they can point it out element by element. On the other hand, De Leeuw did publish some analyses of his work, clarifying how the model works compositionally, and he gave quite some lecture-demonstrations to various publics about it, including conservatory students and teachers.

19 See the discussion in: Rokus de Groot, ‘The concept of extended modality in recent works by Ton de Leeuw’, in: W. van Zanten en M. van Roon (ed.), *Oideion: The performing arts world-wide 2*, Leiden: Research School CNWS, 1995, pp. 93-112.

20 See Ton de Leeuw, ‘Back to the Source’, in: Sligter 1995, pp. 73-93.

21 Composer’s commentary, Archive of publisher Donemus, Amsterdam.

There is more to De Leeuw's statement about *Apparences* than musical technique. The adjective 'musical' having been put between parentheses, the words suggest a wider scope. It becomes clear from the composer's spoken and written reflections that his statement hints at his intuition of reality: that what is manifesting to our senses and in our thoughts is constantly changing ('transitory appearances'), while arising within single source ('immutable unity' embodied by the 'model'), immanent in ('within') and transcendent to ('behind') manifestation (again: 'appearances'). The imagery further suggests that the source itself cannot be experienced directly; it is with traces of it that we are dealing.

In the wording of this intuition we hear inspirations from Plato (the idealism in the relation between model and appearance), Hinduism ('immutable unity' of *advaita*), and Buddhism (the essential transitoriness of manifestation). It seems that De Leeuw conceives the compositional performativity as a reflection of this 'cosmic performativity': he views the creation of a piece of music as arising from the compositional performance on the basis of a single generative model, just as he takes the creation of the world as a performance from a single source.

Does the handing down of this idea of 'cosmic performativity' also belong to the process of transmission? Telling from the effort and time which Ton de Leeuw devoted to verbally communicating this intuition, it is apparently an important part of the totality of the transmission he set himself to undertake. Its effect can still be sensed in the atmosphere of seriousness and spirituality with which De Leeuw's work is surrounded in performance practice, and, as far as the film is concerned, in the way the solemn moment is staged by the directors, when the two cellists are witnessing footage of the video *De klank van stilte*.

Actual Course of Events in Larissa Groeneveld's Discovery of *Apparences*

The overall plan of the film was to give an account of a process of studying a piece of music new to the performer. After about three months of this process, the final recording of the complete piece was made, which ends the film.

The film suggests, though not always expressly, that Larissa Groeneveld's playing has been molded by the various strands of transmission which it highlights. In reality, however, the process took a different course.²² It was only in a late stage of preparing the final full recording of *Apparences* for the film that she visited Monique Bartels. In fact, that part of the film was staged and acted. It was on request of the directors that the protagonist consulted witness I, which she did just for the sake of the film's concept about music transmission. As far as the protagonist was concerned, it was not necessary to meet the other cellist. No cooperation between the two has taken place, e.g. in no way has the protagonist taken over aspects of bowing or fingering. She had already done her own research and had acquainted herself amply with De Leeuw's views through reading, independently from the film's concept and script. (Neither had there been contact with Jurrien Sligter: so that actor directs himself to the viewer of the film, and not to its protagonist.) The protagonist knew how to place the piece in a performance context when she first met witness I. In any case, as she underlines, the meeting with this witness has not changed anything in her interpretation of De Leeuw's score. The score's writing was perfectly clear to her in terms of specifying how the piece should sound. She stresses to have experienced the music itself as very lucid because of its own logic, which disclosed itself when reading the precise, well-detailed notation. The reason of the score's accessibility is, as she states, that 'Ton de Leeuw is close to what we do nowadays in performance.' In that sense the structure of the film's (re)presentation of music transmission has an anachronistic tone to her, as it seems to imply a distance which the protagonist did not experience. Part of the film's idealization of the music

22 Information received from Larissa Groeneveld by the author, interview dated 27 June 2008.

transmission is the presentation of the composer, even literally, as a *deus ex machina* (the filmed video playback on a television set).

The only part of the film that was not acted, is its opening. The protagonist did actually look at the piece for the first time then, and was proceeding to get acquainted with it the way she is used to do. Of course this does not mean that the protagonist restricted herself only to the written transmission by the score; we have just mentioned that she made her own explorations of supporting transmissions.

A Documentary / ‘Documentary’

So the film is partly a documentary and partly a ‘documentary’. In the latter respect it portrays an idealized process of music transmission. The process in this case has certainly not been entirely what it appears to be. In that sense, the film’s title, *Apparences*, is apt. As a ‘documentary’ rather than as a documentary, the film shows the complexity and complementarity of written, oral and energetic transmissions in music. The idealization of transmission does not turn the ‘documentary’ into sheer fiction, however. We have had ample opportunity to elaborate on some demanding aspects of decision making by performers reading a score. It also does not mean that the protagonist did *not* go through thick transmission; she developed her own process, which is largely not shown in the film. Audiovisual documentaries/‘documentaries’ are themselves becoming part of the music transmission they set out to document, and, like other strands of transmission, they well may prove powerful in the measure that they are mythical.