

**COLLECTION**  
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**Interferenza mente sovrapposizione,  
das erschwiegene Wort!... ausgeweitet...**

**Ernst Helmuth Flammer (\*1949)**

**ORCHESTRAL WORKS BY ERNST HELMUTH FLAMMER:**

This thing we call time, and the way we think about time as a phenomenological category – the very content of time articulated in music as temporal form so to speak – was always important to me as a composer. Here, an awareness of time is to be understood as structural, taking place within the categories of the past and the present, and as part of tradition and aesthetic progress. Aesthetic progress is for me an inner necessity, because it also takes on the aspect of historical legitimacy as it feeds on tradition seen through the gauze of reflexion, whilst departing from tradition itself and – whether consciously or unconsciously – building upon it. Aesthetic progress, symbolically placed in limbo, neither grounded historically, nor reflected in the choice or options provided by its agents, remains unaccommodating, without aim or form, and will not lead to any unification within a context of omnifariousness. At worst, it leads to its own dissolution: when the structural is addressed, it is clear that society today is marked by the collapse of contiguousness, and is descending into a plethora of mock styles, ones which at best serve to drape the façade...the direct path to postmodernism it turns out. Form, whether it be based on the rigorous limiting of compositional means or, simultaneously, their consistent elaboration and differentiation in compositional treatment, always develops as part of an overarching historical tradition. Thus, form is necessary for the inner relationships within a work, inasmuch as these are desired. In the past, formal approaches were frequently blemished by the negativistic protagonists of decay, a societal rupture intended by the white-bread classes. The dissolution of art is just one tautology of the same within society.

Aesthetic rigour – in my case always present in diverse implementations – took on for me during my journeyman years as a composer a serial sense of self-awareness, one which soon gave way to other priorities remaining dependent on a particular subject. These in turn were oriented more towards artistic demands that resulted from individual projects. Rigour was soon subordinated to an increased number of aesthetic categories. This occasioned in many a case strict minimalistic structures, in that temporal form was radically restricted. Such structures appear from time to time in the present cello concerto *Interferenza ...* (in both the live orchestral music and the electronic part) exactly when time would seem to have “stopped still.” Aesthetic rigour is however always reliant on one compositional component or the other: textual, performative and instrumental limits are plumbed, and there, where space, perspectives and visions become vistas, are consistently extended. Such behaviour serves to influence instrument construction – unfortunately much less in our times than in past ones because of the rapidly disappearing significance of contemporary music, but leads to even greater creative energies in the area of interpretation.

New attempts to deal with the legacy of the solo concerto (immediately audible in both examples on the present CD) evoke two completely different results. These in turn signify a total renunciation of the traditional approach to the solo concerto, one which by no means allots the soloist the role of Circean virtuoso, but orders the player to don the garb of compositional innovation and become an integral part of the fabric of the entire ensemble – the orchestra in this case. In many other concertos (in the piano concerto *Zeitzeichen–Zeitmaße* for example), the soloist appears as a mere obligatory figure, as a *primus inter pares*, as is the case in the First Piano Concerto by Brahms. The two concertos discussed here are both in just one movement and thus through composed.

*Interferenza mente sovrapposizione* for violoncello, live electronics and large orchestra was written between 1988–1990. It is, in principle at least, a concerto for two soloists and large orchestra, whereby the electronic part – manipulated in real time by a sound engineer – takes on the character of a joint partner in dialogue with the solo cellist. In none of my previous works using large forces, such as the oratorio *Der Turmbau zu Babel*, or the Violin Concerto (in which the electronics are treated as orchestral inserts), did the electronic part take on as important a function as in the present work. At the very most, the oboe in the orchestra does at one point create polyphony in the strictest sense of the term, although this does not come about by overlaying surfaces of sound, but by using the instrument in a deconstructive way as a sound generator to filter the solo cello. The oboe takes on this function and thus inhabits a role in the generation of sound that is more active than a sound engineer would have been able to provide in a former non-digital age. The conception of the electronic part was realised at what was then the *Experimentalstudio der Heinrich-Strobel-Stiftung des Südwestfunks* during the years of the work's composition.

An original title that remains to all intents and purposes untranslatable might be rendered “Interference in the sense of overlay”. In a non-digital age electronic timbres were built up by layering sound. This made necessary the use of numerous orchestral interludes that functioned just as refrains do, forcing a piece into a certain formal plan, the rondo in this case. This rondo form becomes more intelligible in that the electronic scores, despite similarities at their outset, evinced strongly varied musical landscapes as they progressed. Such a gradual stirring up of sound and layering of sonic surfaces have a decisive advantage over today's (digital) possibilities that make the organisation of chains of temporal events appear much easier to operate: the sound spectra are allowed to “breathe” in manifold ways, thus avoiding sterile technical perfection (but see Luigi Nono's *Das atemde Klarsein*, where these things are wonderfully clear). By means of a starkly conceptual use of the halaphone, new surface timbres emerge and become more comprehensible, serving to push back in a deconstructive way previously dominant surfaces of sound, even in cases where orchestral instruments are active simultaneously. The halaphone was developed at the *Experimentalstudio*, by Hans-Peter Haller; it is a kind of sonic spatial diffuser that causes sounds to wander in patterns both circular or resembling a roller-coaster, but also in more byzantine configurations such as overlaid motion taking place at various speeds within the space. What must be understood here is the allegory of existence as something that is process-like (existence and time) in the sense of perpetual becoming and that which passes. The constant presence of these emulous if converse states of being leads in an aesthetic sense at least to a deconstructive approach that subordinates itself to a self-regulatory equilibrium, one which guarantees the existential continuance of all that is.

The electronic part is contingent on the inclusion of the cello as a solo instrument, any musically expedient transposition in terms of transformation of material creating a pitch height structure – regardless of exceptions subjected to other instrumentation – that lies in a middle register, from c to c3, this in turn prompting the use of orchestral forces that lean towards extreme high and very deep bass registers. If various percussion instruments are discounted, this led to the employment of four piccolos, two piccolo trumpets, four (!) double bassoons, four bass trombones and two bass tubas. An additional transparency is created between individual levels of sounds produced, rendering these easier to differentiate.

It is some time ago now, but an idea was advanced – in consultation with Hans-Peter Haller, the Director of the Freiburg Experimentalstudio until 1989 – to place live electronics at the centre of a solo concerto with orchestra. One particular work acted as a kind of guardian, Kazimierz Serocki's *Pianophonie* for piano, live electronics and orchestra, also realised at the Freiburg studio between 1976–78. The use of an instrument – the violoncello – that is at complete variance with what have since become hugely advanced studio techniques opened up the chance to arrive at radically different solutions, far removed from any that Serocki might have proposed. Thus, while both pieces share the same point of departure, they have nothing else in common, although the two works are suffused with the atmosphere of the Experimentalstudio, using this as common ground and remaining oriented toward the place in which they first saw the light of day. In the studio itself a number of discrete sections of the score were realised. The actual compositional phase consisted largely of fitting various parts together, a process that came to fruition in the final stages of the work, towards the end of 1989.

In complete contrast to my earlier works for solo instruments and orchestra, the latter takes on the function of accompanist. A non-electronic prologue, apparently more virtuosic than the following one, exposes the material subsequently developed using electronic means. Generally speaking, the orchestral part is, on the one hand, composed two dimensionally; on the other hand, it is contrapuntal, in that sonic surfaces are superimposed on each other. This forced me to use harmonic material that favoured within the progression of notes the smallest intervals, ones which in turn resulted in a saturated chromaticism within this contrapuntal stratification. Such a harmonic principle – for a traditional orchestral piece certainly not entirely attractive – proves however only too well suited for live electronic techniques of stratification and retardation, as well as for filter techniques, and for a teasing out of overtone structures, arriving here at its own highly convenient deployment. One example of the instrumentation of extreme ranges based on this chromatic harmony also resulted from this congruence with electronics, which in the virtuosic part of the piece – and due to the increasingly opaque stratification operations and almost impenetrable division of sonic space – is more and more left to itself.

The overall form is governed by three layers:

Symmetry: it is most easily felt in the two large orchestral interludes which appear at the beginning and close of the work.

Rondo form. This has already been discussed above.

Developing variation from as a method of variation in the Beethovenian sense, the tenor of which is forged via “unity within diversity”: it determines a process of gradual alienation in the area of electronic transformation of sound. This is why the use of denaturalised sounds and performance techniques could mostly be avoided when writing for the orchestra itself, without producing the sensation that the aesthetic rigour of the work would in any way be endangered.

These three formal layers relate to each other in a deconstructive way in the sense of the retention of an inner equilibrium engendered by their simultaneous emergence and the way that they are pushed into the background. The manner in which this complex formal construct functions thus becomes clearer.

das erschwiegene Wort!...ausgeweitet... (the word's telling silence!...extended...) for solo percussion and large orchestra was written between 1993–1994 and in aesthetic terms is couched in a somewhat negative mood. Many an aural expectation is revoked by an abrupt breaking off of structural lines, cantilenas, and musical phrases. The division into sections, miniatures, and fragments exemplifies this, the work adhering strictly a notion that virtuosity must be avoided in the orchestral sectors. The relationship between orchestra and soloist is ruptured, although the latter is given music that relates strongly to the parts allotted to the orchestral percussionists (two percussionists, one timpanist). These parts are much more demanding and complex than the rest of the orchestral parts. And thus any rupture is tempered by deconstruction.

The treatment of the percussion instruments sets off along new paths in any case, there being a conscious move away from pulse towards sound that in the first instance is created by using double bass bows, although other means are drawn on too. The structures that arise have a surface quality about them, but rhythmically speaking inhabit a more inward-looking “imploded” complexity that is seemingly foreign to any dynamic and surging flow in the language. It is at that point that another perception of time is felt, one which relates more strongly to south Asian notions of how time passes. This is borne out by the fact that I lent the percussion techniques material that takes into account those sound worlds more frequently met in Japanese music. It is certainly in Japan that this new world of percussion sound has its origins. Spiritually, it is a contemplative exercise bound strongly to Zen Buddhism. My personal experience of this sphere of human experience came about through what was to become a friendship with the two wonderful soloists: Isao Nakamura and Yuko Suzuki.

Despite the fractured nature of the form mentioned above, there exists an easily perceivable formal structure in this single movement work, one that busies itself with deconstructing episodes, ruptures and single moments. Continuity is achieved by the way that episodic sections share points of commonality. A more detailed account of the form taken by the work may be found in the programme notes on the occasion of the first series of performances in the early 1990s. Giving these in full here will aid a general understanding of the title itself:

Various reasons led me to imbue the title of my music for solo percussion and orchestra with a motto by Paul Celan taken from his *Argumentum e silentio*. New percussion techniques refer to the original German word “ausgeweitet” (extended), with these allocated partially to the orchestra and sometimes to the soloist, who for lengthy passages shuns the orchestral forces. Not everything that is feasible or possible is good for us. This viewpoint on life is reflected in the way the orchestra is treated here.

The solo part is subjected from time to time to a highly virtuosic treatment, no adequate answer being found in the orchestra (“the word’s telling silence”). The ellipses in the title stand on the one hand for the conscious state of refusal between the soloist and the orchestra, and on the other hand for the momentum, the lacuna, and the episodes that characterise the formal constraints of the work itself, ones which allow only a tender and sublime relationship between the partners. The repudiation of an ever-present and experienced hypertrophy is conceivable, too, as a musical answer. The rapid tempo with which such virtuosity is accompanied is visibly slowed down, and the rate at which time passes comes to a standstill, having back-pedalled for a moment. And this is an answer that arrogates a silencium whilst simultaneously being extended. As momentum becomes the focal point, the passing of time takes on a general torpidity, donning an even great significance than otherwise would normally be justifiable. This significance is in turn subjected to a reductive process, in that it is made to rank alongside numerous other events. Its relativity to time space enters our vision and the relativity of our lifetime becomes nothing more than a tiny episode in the universe. When rhythmic structures dissolve into sound or even into more foreign, virtual noise, a complete cessation of time seems to have occurred. And here, where both propensities arrive unexpectedly at a nexus, they embrace each other in what is indeed a hushed world.

Each formal event and each temporal event makes use of a pendant located at another place in the work, allowing symmetrical considerations to play – along with other developmental contours – a major role in the overall formal plan. The material belonging to the exposition expands continually right up to the end of the work. The twelve time islands are connected one to another by interludes, the framework of which emits a solo cadenza that, in the very sense of the word repudiated, is expanded to 21 bars yet still does not produce an answer – a definitive and glabrous moment.

A commission from Japan allowed me to compose this work. It is dedicated to the admirable Japanese percussionist Yuko Suzuki.

Ernst Helmuth Flammer  
*Translation: Graham Lack*