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Konstnärlig masterexamen i musik, 120 hp

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**A short walk
in the woods
of music theater
(version 2)**

Written reflection within independent work.

The documentation also includes the following excerpts:

Futur/scènes

Clavigo, act II

Eltamin (to be recorded in May 2026)

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Introduction

I have been taking notes on a future music theater piece for some time (the “K” piece); a piece that will be connected to some of Kafka’s works. The idea was never to make a straight adaptation of any of them, but the opposite, picking some key narrative elements and turning them upside down. My starting point was, given the way Kafka stages the world of his time, how would his tools resonate in the world of today? I imagined I was to deal mostly with themes like *the individual facing absurdity*, alienation, etc., but as soon as I started gathering material I found I was wrong. Kafka’s works are traps in that they resist the “enemy”, that is, *sense*¹.

(...)

It is easy to say that some “Kafkaesque” processes have long been present in contemporary dramaturgy: narratives are fragmented, recomposed or invisible², characters are multiplied³, dislocated or erased. But I wondered, what could these processes mean for the music itself? In this text I open the first phase of creation of a new piece, and wonder if the *minor character* of Kafka’s prose as described by Deleuze and Guattari can compare to a *minor character* applied to composition, for example in the context of writing of a libretto (...).

¹ ‘Comment entrer dans l’œuvre de Kafka ? C’est un rhizome, un terrier (...) Le principe des entrées multiples empêche seul l’introduction de l’ennemi, le Signifiant, et les tentatives pour interpréter une œuvre qui ne se propose en fait qu’à l’expérimentation.’ in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Kafka : pour une littérature mineure*, Éditions de Minuit, 1975, p 7. ‘How do we enter Kafka’s work? It is a rhizome, a burrow. (...) Only the principle of multiple entrances prevents the introduction of the enemy, the Signifier, and their attempts to interpret a work that is actually only open to experimentation.’

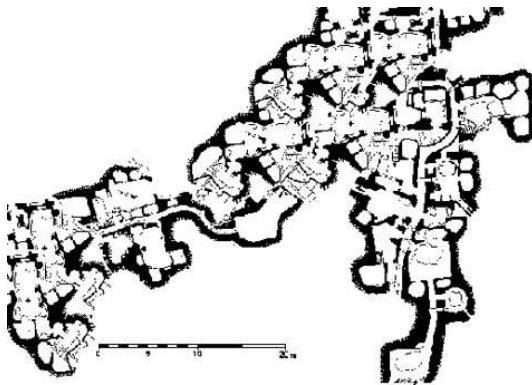
² see how Peter Eötvös modelled the libretto for his opera *Tri sestry* after Anton Chekhov’s play: each of the three acts tell the same argument from the point of view of one of the sisters. See also music theater works where the chronology of parts is decided by the performers, or cyclic systems in George Crumb’s works.

³ see how Kirill Serebrennikov explodes the character of Hamlet in *Hamlet/Fantômes* in October 2025 at Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris.

The walk⁴ will be with Kafka, and a few other fellow travellers: this essay is a free report on a mind experiment, a sort of chronicle of thoughts. Just like my upcoming music theater piece will not be a straight adaptation of any of Kafka's works, I am not either embracing anyone's interpretation of it. I am only looking at different *tools* – processes and concepts – that may be relevant in the first phase of conceiving a new work.

‘Ich habe den Bau eingerichtet und er scheint wohl gelungen⁵.’

(‘I have completed the furnishment of this burrow and it seems to be successful.’)



*a map of the underground city of Derinkuyu
(7th c. BCE – 10th c. CE) [detail]*

Maybe this walk in the woods turned into a crawl inside a *Bau*. In my wandering of reflections, I have found some dead-end galleries, some of which I have left unexplored; amongst the ones I have indeed explored, the reader is free to consider or omit, like a “Choose Your Own Adventure”-book from the 1980s.

(...)

⁴ named after Umberto Eco's *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*, Harvard University Press MA 1994.

⁵ Franz Kafka, *Der Bau*, folio bilingue 2018.

I - Topographies: maps and sounds

1. Mapping thoughts, creating territories

I have long organised my music pieces cartographically⁶, to map material outside of linear representation. How does the way we model our thoughts support our reflection? Can these maps of the mind relate to spatial thinking in musical composition?

Simonides and memory palaces

Around 400 B.C., Scopas, a wealthy wrestler from Thessaly, hosted a banquet to celebrate a victory and hired the lyric poet Simonides of Ceos to compose an ode in his honour⁷. Finding little to say about Scopas himself, Simonides devoted most of the song to praising the twin gods Castor and Pollux, which angered Scopas who refused to pay him the full agreed fee. During the feast, Simonides was supposedly told that two young men were waiting for him outside; as he stepped out into the night, the building collapsed – some sources say from an earthquake – killing all guests inside. The bodies were mangled beyond recognition. Simonides, however, was able to recall the seating order of the feast, which helped families identify their dead. He then inferred that if he could mentally reseat the guests at the banquet table, he could also have seated there all lyric poets to memorise their sequence. From this experience, Simonides deduced that memory is fostered by placing images in a structured spatial arrangement, and thus became known as the “inventor” of the art of memory. The method of loci⁸, further developed in Roman times and throughout the Middle Ages, teaches that any familiar architectural structure can serve as mental storage for large amounts of information – a technique that is still used in our digital age⁹.

Mapping time structures

Synaesthetes’ disposition to associate colours with tones is often described as a source of inspiration for creation and appears intriguing to non-synaesthetes. In fact, these associations may associate qualities other than colour, like genre or character, to systems other than tones, like numbers or letters, depending on the individual. These pairings anchor sensory impressions within familiar patterns, rather than create genuinely new connections. A less often discussed aspect of

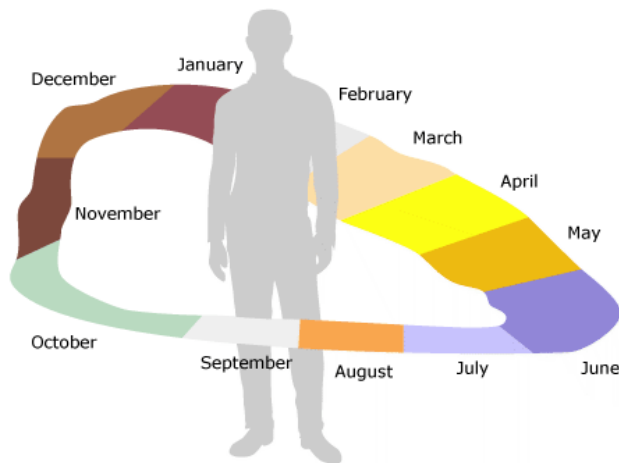
⁶ on a plan (a space in two dimensions), like a map.

⁷ A story told by Cicero in *De Oratore* II.86–88, with further details from Valerius Maximus, *Factorum et Dictorum Memorabilium* I.8.

⁸ The history of memory palaces is told by Frances A. Yates in *The Art of Memory*, 1966.

⁹ https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/02/20/magazine/mind-secrets.html?_r=0 [retrieved 21 Aug. 2025]

synaesthesia is the mapping of temporal structures, such as calendars, in three-dimensional space, often perceived as a ribbon or crown surrounding the subject. This feature is common among synaesthetes but can go unnoticed, as they may assume it is normal. However, several studies¹⁰ have shown which spatial layouts most frequently occur. I believe this aspect is more relevant for creativity in art forms that unfold over time, such as music. The example of a calendar suggests a linear representation that also expresses the cyclical nature of the system. By contrast, a non-cyclical temporal structure could be organised as a map with virtually any number of dimensions¹¹.



Example of synaesthetic calendar representation (illustration by Carol Steen)

In my practice: spatial considerations from maps to stage

I composed the piece *Musicomexp*¹² on board a sailing expedition in the Pacific. The map was our friend and ally: the two-dimensional map was the ground tool, although it was left undetailed in least-travelled regions. The sonar was adding the vertical dimension, but it could not scan deep enough in these sometimes kilometer-deep blurred zones¹³.



Sailing maps, A Composer on board the Ocean Mapping Expedition.

¹⁰ Ramachandran, V. S., Vajanaphanich, M., & Chunharas, C., 'Calendars in the brain; their perceptual characteristics and possible neural substrate'. *Neurocase*, 22(5), pp 461–465, 2016. Vulgarised here <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8248589.stm> [retrieved 8 Sep. 2025]

¹¹ Such objects are described in the domain of topology https://verse-and-dimensions.fandom.com/wiki/Infinite-dimensional_space [retrieved on 18/12/2025]

¹² more information about this piece in the bibliography or at www.musicomexp.com

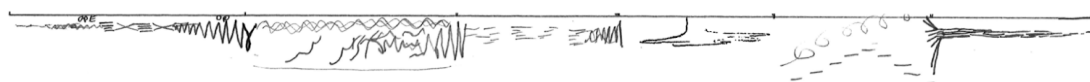
¹³ because the returning signal is too attenuated to be retrieved by the sonar on its way back up.



Sailing maps, A Composer on board the Ocean Mapping Expedition.

A map is a set of possibilities: it shows for example where point A and point B stand and displays a network of possibilities to connect the two – leaving to the reader the choice of the path to be travelled. When I got home after this expedition, I carried large amounts of obscure and abstract composed material, some of which could not be notated, and I had to organise it all to navigate through. I had to think the work as an “open composition¹⁴”, and the spatial representation made this possible.

Musicomexp is not a notated work, but when I composed notated pieces after this one, I used maps both to start with, and end with. At first, I draw a map to allocate material and create sonic regions, a map onto which I can wander without being bound to a linear form. At the end of the compositional process I also map the outcome, which can then be associated to the piece as some abstract graphic material¹⁵.



Post-mapping of Futur/scènes

At the same time, the way I dealt with space organisation (spatialisation) in my practice took a different turn. As I was touring with my underwater piece (*Musicomexp*), each live performance superposed two spaces: a space of the mind in which I map the music in three dimensions, transposed every time into a new, real space in which I had positioned each source of sound and light, including instruments and performers. This process of repetition¹⁶ made me apprehend space and stage in a new, stronger way than I used to within multichannel sound creation.

¹⁴ These processes are dealt with in Umberto Eco’s essay *Opera aperta*, Bompiani Milan, 1962.

¹⁵ I used to create graphic material associated to all my works when I made music as records. Now that I write scores, maps are a way to keep a graphic, extra-musical component with my works.

¹⁶ *reprise*, as defined by Søren Kierkegaard in *Gjentagelsen: Et Forsøg i den eksperimenterende Psychologi* (1843). In French the translation of the title was recently updated to “reprise” instead of previously “répétition”, the difference is to be read in a musical sense.

I have long been an avid visitor of opera houses across Europe and beyond, but for many years the scenography created a distance between the music drama and myself as a listener. I “fell” into opera by the fault of Wagner’s large-scale works, which for me already had many dimensions within the music itself – so the staging was in the way. Along the years, staging naturally started to first intrigue me, then fascinate me and suddenly it was playing a significant role, next to who was singing, playing and conducting, when my comrades and I found ourselves considering which productions to go see. The opera form attracted me increasingly as a composer and I had to find out about staging. Two years after I was back from the Pacific, while I was touring with the underwater piece, I contacted opera director Mariame Clément who suggested I join her staging team for the production of Jules Massenet’s *Don Quichotte*¹⁷ at Bregenzer Festspiele in 2019. Working with singers was not new to me, but collaborating with them in the frame of a staged production was incomparable. At this point, composing music theater appeared like the ideal meeting point of my interest in space, both as a physical and conceptual dimension, and my interest in dramaturgy.

When I returned to composing and started sketching the “K” piece, my notes were mixing indistinctly scenographic and musical content; these sketches manifestly showed that I was drawn to a kind of distortion process in the dramaturgy – a subject will consider in the last part of this document. I wrote a few pieces playing with the use of voices, but I felt the need to anchor the dramaturgy more deeply into *words*.

2. Emergence of sounds in literature

Literature is (unlike music!) an art of silence, but like music it unfolds along a timeline – even two, one of the narration, and one of the reading. Strangely, earlier this year, while composing *le fil, l’abîme*¹⁸, I found myself – though I have had Nerval’s text with me since I was a teenager – this time constantly interrupted in my reading by sounds: ... ‘a mysterious hymn’, ‘this monotonous hum’, ‘screams of fright’, ‘a bird that began to speak like a person’, ‘the cries, the roars and the confused whistles (...) modulated to this divine air’, ‘the dogs barked (...) the roosters crowed’, ‘a mysterious choir’, ‘the nightingale’, ‘the horn’, ‘two notes’, ‘an octave’... all this while the reader is in a state of deep discomfort, never knowing if the sound is real in the narrated story (diegetic), or if it is the result of a dream, a vision or a delusion.

¹⁷ Österreichs Musiktheaterpreis 2020 for best opera production and best lead role for Gábor Bretz.

¹⁸ composed in 2025, over texts by Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia* (1855) and Antonin Artaud, *Le Pèse-nerf* (1925), for members of Métaboles and Multilatérale/intercontemporain.

When I got back to Kafka I was struck by the silence of the prose: reading was like watching a silent movie, more precisely, it felt like a comic strip rather than a cartoon. Could this “silence” make Kafka’s literature a good subject for a musical adaptation? Not really (although musical adaptations of Kafka have been many) as it is indeed a literature deeply anchored in the language. And I am still not interested in making a straight adaptation, precisely I am willing to *re-use* these literary processes. Deleuze and Guattari note that Kafka has little interest for music, only a few anecdotes about musicians can be found in his diary. They write, ‘It isn’t a composed, semiotically shaped music that interests Kafka, but rather a pure sonic material¹⁹’, which brought to my mind Giacinto Scelsi’s way, the creator being more of a transmitter than a narrator. ‘What interests Kafka is a pure and intense sonorous material that is always connected to its own abolition – a deterritorialised musical sound, a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words (...)’. Actually “non-music” seems to interest Kafka more than music itself: a cancelled concert, singing animals (whistling?), a ‘sound out of nothingness’.

My impression of (diegetic) silence may come from Kafka’s language itself, as he writes: ‘Almost every word I write jars up against the next, I hear the consonants rub leadenly against each other and the vowels sing an accompaniment like Negroes in a minstrel show.’²⁰ According to Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka’s invention is thus to detach language from sense and use it as pure sound: ‘Language stops being representative in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits.’ They believe that indeed, sound *becomes* the language, as meaning is defeated. We are back to the *Bau* quoted at the beginning of this text: the burrow has several entrances, which defeats the enemy (the signifier) – so Kafka’s work resists symbolic interpretations. I doubt this conclusion because Kafka’s words above come from a part of his diary where he expresses great difficulties in his creation; they seem to me more a sign of distress and frustration than an artistic decision.

But this ambiguity does not matter here, as my aim is to look at what Kafka does with language. The most important point is that he processes language to make it do something else, this causes a tension between *expression* and *representation*, which we will see is fundamental later in this text. Deleuze and Guattari analyse this process and formalise it under the term “deterritorialisation”, explaining that Kafka ‘deterritorialises language by sound’, a process made possible by a “minor” character of the literature Kafka is writing within. In the next part of this reflection, we will look at what these notions mean, and what these concepts may imply within a creation process. There

¹⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka : Pour une littérature mineure*, p 11.

²⁰ Kafka, *Diaries*, 15 December 1910, p 33 (translated by Dana Polan).

are several types and levels of language in a music theater piece, so we may try a number of different paths.

II - Deterritorialisation and minor writing

1. Definitions

When Deleuze and Guattari write about Kafka in 1975, *territory* has not yet been defined as a Deleuzian notion: in this text we take the word in its original sense, a characterised topography, defining an area from its features, and we start connecting it to the other concepts we need. At that point though, *deterritorialisation* has already been introduced as a notion in an Oedipian sense²¹, but we will only consider its specific use around Kafka to understand the concept of “minor literature”. In this context, *deterritorialisation* is the process by which practices, identities, or meanings are uprooted, lifted out of their characteristic, “stable” settings (*territories*) and set into motion, opening them to transformation, reconfiguration, or new connections. It is usually paired with *reterritorialisation*, the process of growing after replanting, forming new structures after deterritorialisation.

When reading Kafka from this perspective, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that his expression is conditioned by the fact that he is writing in a type of literature which they call *minor* – minor not in the sense of inferior, but related to a minority within the majority. In a letter²² Kafka describes ‘the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German, the impossibility of writing otherwise’ for his minority. The two philosophers list²³ three characteristics for their definition of a *minor literature*:

1. a processed language: in it, ‘language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialisation’,
2. a political function: ‘everything in it is political’,
3. a collective dimension: ‘everything in it takes on a collective value’.

They believe that this character of Kafka’s writing lets him use specific processes that stand beyond symbolics and significance: ‘it is expression that precedes contents (...) to have them run along lines of flight’²⁴. These *lines of flight*, literally the lines following perspective in a drawing, turn into powerful tools for Kafka to operate outside of representation, not as a way to *avoid* it but to set contents in motion – which *will* be useful in music theater. Other critics find that anchoring an interpretation of Kafka in this system is a reducing and blurred reading of his work, which may ignore facets like his aesthetics, which we will get back to later in this text.

²¹ in *L’Anti-Œdipe* (1972) Deleuze and Guattari define deterritorialisation as the movement by which desire or flows escape from a territory, code, or system of capture.

²² in a letter to his friend (and later editor) Max Brod in June 1921, about the situation for German-speaking Jews in Prag. Deleuze argues that other writers in the same situation (like Meyrink or Max Brod) have found approaches very different from Kafka’s, ‘to swell [German language] up with symbolism, oneirism, esoterism, of a hidden signifier.’

²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka : Pour une littérature mineure*, pp. 29-33.

²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka : Pour une littérature mineure*, pp. 152-153.

Deleuze creates concepts which are meant to be used as tools in one's reflection. These tools are also dynamic, they evolve along his own writings, which also makes it possible for us to pick one and explore it in a different context. Music does not exist outside of territorial and sociological parameters, but to discuss these would be a digression in this reflection. We will leave the sociolinguistic context on the side and use the idea as a purely conceptual tool, to attempt a strictly artistic experiment: how could the notion of deterritorialisation be read, and used, within music writing?

2. In music composition

a. Processing modality

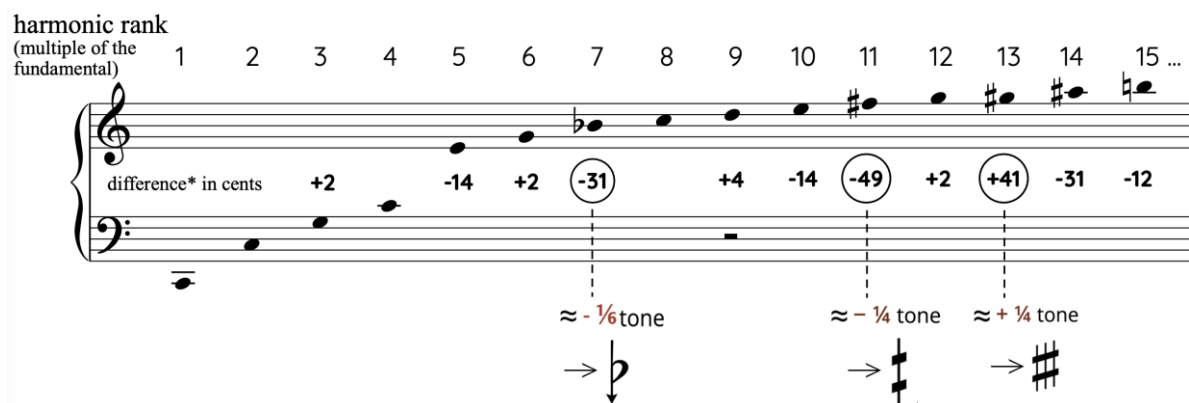
Tonality and modality in music are historically “major” systems: they are codified, recognizable; some modes are used in many different cultures in the world. These structures made of intervals and degrees have arisen from auditory perception: ground chords are built from ratios taken from the first steps of the natural overtone series. A few simple intervals build up all more advanced chord systems, based on a strong stable ground, and the duality Major/minor²⁵ is a fundamental principle. I chose to *shift* some of these basic intervals with some microtones to undermine this dual ground. I want this process to be consistent and not just an ornamental, superficial effect. For this reason, I will only use a very few, specifically picked microtones, and find *strategies* to ensure that exactly these pitches will be used.

These pitches should be exact: in case of slight variations, beatings appear and turn each pitch into a “zone”: then microtonality is only an effect to blur tonality, which is not what I am after²⁶. An easy objection is *of course*, that the orchestra is the *worst* vehicle for exactitude. But it is an orchestral piece I am working on, this is the reason why I am using the strategies below; the medium also offers numerous possibilities given the variety of registers and instrument constructions. These possibilities are as many opportunities to experiment, and I call this piece, *Eltamin*, a *study* for orchestra.

²⁵ not in the Deleuzian sense here!

²⁶ I have seen different situations and solutions for this in new music, for example performers seating with a tuning device and trying to adjust to a value in hertz while they are trying to play the piece, each note adjusted when initiated. Or performers required to tune to a certain frequency in hertz, which makes further intervals unadjusted if the instrument is conceived to intonate correctly at the named frequency, and then other performers in the ensemble required to produce a matching pitch at this frequency – not realistically possible, indeed the result is a “blurred zone” and no exact interval. These solutions may be adapted to a single, specialised performer, but it seems to me they make little sense in larger combinations.

In order to anchor the chosen microtones to a given pitch, I pick them from the natural overtone series. This way the pitches can be achieved directly as natural harmonics without being “individually intonated” by the performer, which allows the score to refer to exact pitches for a single instrument or even a whole section playing an (almost true) unison. As we see below, with the C harmonic series as an example, the natural overtones offer very close values to a quarter of a tone (by the 11th and 13th harmonics), and a sixth of a tone (by the 7th harmonic). Given the high ranks of these partials, they will only be available as natural overtones on certain instruments; for the low strings only on one of their empty strings – which strongly restricts the choice of pitches in this system.



Harmonics or overtones are multiples of the fundamental frequency. Here the harmonic series on C.
* difference between the notated note in equal temperament, and the note heard at the harmonic node.

It is important to note that “regular” accidental signs are used for quarter tones, while other signs (I chose the arrow) refer to smaller intervals such as a sixth of a tone. This is type of practice derived from spectral music is common in contemporary works²⁷, see below an excerpt from the “layout”-sheet that the ensemble Musikfabrik sends out to young composers.

Accidentals: For equal tempered quarter tones



Smaller intervals may be indicated with arrows or other symbols, but must be clearly labeled.
Spectral and just intonation: we recommend the additional use of ratios, partial numbers or cent indications. Apply quarter-tone accidentals only for the 11th partial.

Akademie Musikfabrik “Style Guide für Komponistinnen und Komponisten” (Stand 2022), excerpt.

²⁷ for established complex uses, see orchestral pieces by Georg Friedrich Haas such as *In Vain* or *Limited Approximations*.

At the beginning of the piece, the music develops across three parallel planes, or split objects that converge in discreet points: one of miniature gestures (in the percussions, woods and later higher strings), one melodic plane (starting at the bassoon, before going to the oboe and trumpet), and one of a string of chords that progressively builds up from isolated tones, which I call “choral”. Each one of these chords contains one microtone; we will look at the first one as an example. The quarter tone shifts this chord, otherwise of the most common type in tonal music, to an in-between, as Major as minor.



first chord of the “choral” in Eltamin.

In this chord we need a ¼-tone high C, the first microtone to be introduced in the piece. It can be found as the 11th overtone on G, or 13th on E.

Contrabasses can reach this note as a natural harmonic on their first string.



On this impractical high pitch, the players only have to hold long notes, to give the time to the partial to “ring”, and no vibrato is possible²⁸. This allows the whole section to play unison and only the demanded note can be heard – if the node doesn’t “ring”, no pitch is heard – this way, we avoid any beatings. The cello and viola sections join the chord on the other notes, A and E, which are tempered, low-rank partials, so much more easily reached as natural or artificial harmonics – keeping the same playing technique as contrabasses to unify the chord. On the brass side, horns provide a source of correctly tuned overtones when performed as natural horn, i.e. not adjusting the pitch to tempered tuning (...).

For all other instruments, the few selected microtones are used sparingly, as they must be intonated “directly”. Even though I only use a very small number of these non-tempered pitches, they must sometimes be assigned to other instruments for orchestration or compositional reasons. In the woodwinds, these microtones only appear in soloistic gestures; for large sections that must intonate each non-tempered note individually (violins) I avoid these tones except in small rapid patterns. The chosen microtones are always established in advance before these motives.

²⁸ because of this playing technique – although I have heard that some performers may propose different vibrato techniques on natural harmonics in chamber contemporary music contexts.

The finalised piece *Eltamin* will be performed by the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra in May 2026, but I was able to hear a first glimpse of how the whole idea might work during an orchestral workshop in April 2025. The Major/minor reference is built on natural overtones interferences which the ear refers to: when I heard the result, this foundation appeared to me as undermined. If we try to interpret this with the Deleuzian notions introduced above, we could possibly read it a deterritorialisation of modality²⁹: the Major/minor opposition loses its power; the new context is not “atonal” or “free” but different, like a *minor* version (in the Deleuzian sense) of our traditional modal duality. The concept is functional not decorative, intervals interact in a new way, a sort of reterritorialisation of the uprooted functions.

b. Using voice as an instrument

In my earliest projects³⁰, my own voice was the main, evident mode of expression. As I moved on to the world of electroacoustics, *that* voice disappeared, voice became an instrument, such as one of the sound sources inside a modular system which I used on improvisation projects³¹. When I wrote *Musicomexp* (2017-2018) on board a sailing expedition in the Pacific, I initially aimed to avoid any human-related voice, sound or instrument, to ground the sonic composition on material coming from nature. I was trying to get this material to grow into a voice, to make nature the main voice, but the opposite happened: a dark, abstract narrative appeared, along with some human voices and instruments. As I turned to notated works to write music theater, dealing with the use of voice was complicated³². In my recent pieces for large ensembles, I have been using voices inside the orchestra to create an acoustic plan parallel to that of instruments.

Vocalisation by instrumentalists has been used since baroque times, although typically to illustrate and exaggerate theatrical orchestration, or to imitate conducting commands in baroque dance and military ensembles. Examples from the classical era are scarcer, but later known instances are the pirates' screams in Berlioz' *Benvenuto Cellini* (1838) or the conductor's shout in Mahler's Symphony No.2 (1888-1894), which is seldom performed as such nowadays. Since the 1960s and the development of music theater, vocalisation by instrumentalists has become a common element in all currents of contemporary music. Not anymore used as an illustrative or

²⁹ In this chapter I am referring to modality, not tonality. Indeed, I was hoping at first to interpret the sonic effect as a deterritorialisation of tonality, but the reflection took it up on modality only.

³⁰ see *Cikatri\$*.

³¹ see *Space Jazz for the Future*.

³² see II.3.

imitating effect, it can serve various functions; but even when used purely as a sound (voice as an instrument), it always introduces an extra dimension. The player's voice, speaking or singing, is an extended technique of the instrument. It can also reveal aspects of the person's identity; and if any words are used, which we will examine in a later part of this reflection, they shape yet another facet in the music.

Voices appear in the instrumental ensemble in my piece *Futur/scènes*³³ (2023-2024) and the chamber opera *Clavigo* (2024); then I develop my idea further in the orchestral work *Eltamin*. Again my concern has been to establish the vocalisation as a function and not as a decoration. The first point is to create a separate acoustic layer for the voices. I use "action dynamic", where the dynamic sign refers to the physical action used by the performer to bring the sound to life, and not the actual dynamic result of the produced sound. Voices are never required "piano", and vocal dynamics only appear in a few limited options, until "as loud as possible". The second point is to make sure instrumentalists "dare" sing – not to achieve intelligibility, but to guarantee that this "vocal" acoustic plane *appears*: I only ask players to sing when they are not playing, or to sing the notes they are playing, with a relative pitch and relative octave matching their voice, either humming or "half opened mouth" (neutral vowel, schwa) depending on the nuance. *Futur/scènes* was a chamber piece, each player having a separate part to play became quite exposed when asked to sing or whistle it along. In *Eltamin*, only whole sections in a unison are required to sing, for this reason only string sections. The result can be heard in May 2026, but I had the opportunity to evaluate it in rehearsals: let us see what happened.

A large part of my catalogue exists outside of contemporary / classical music. However, when I write a score and give it to Musica Vitae so that they will play it on a stage, I cannot avoid my process to be regarded through the prism of a classical tradition. In that tradition (in contrast to my earlier works), the voice carries text, it is trained as a specialised instrument, and it acts as a central source for human expression: it belongs to a sort of territory. But these codes disappear when instrumentalists sing in this context. In my notated works they are never required to sing a melody; their non-"placed" voices do not project evenly, and do not develop in the room's acoustics like instruments so they seem to occupy a different, parallel space alongside the orchestra. They produce diffuse overtones and fluctuate in intonation so what appears is not a unison choral block but a fragile, unstable layer. In the very specific context I am describing here, the voice loses its regular power (no text, no melody, no traditional virtuosity) and becomes a new

³³ *Futur/scènes* was written as a preliminary study for an upcoming music theater piece—hence the title, whose grammar refers to the bootleg anthology zine *Futur Musique* from Rotterdam. The piece is built upon transmissions of acoustic energy: accumulation, exaggeration, breaking point. While composing *Musicomexp*, I encountered large groups of insects in the jungle of Gomai Island in the Solomon Islands, that repeated acoustic patterns in cycles of 16 to 18 seconds. I imagined they could only measure this passage of time through a collective perception of the accumulation and release of acoustic energy.

hybrid function, so it makes sense to interpret it as a kind of deterritorialisation of voice. At the same time, the orchestra is not anymore a purely instrumental organism; it takes on this new, peculiar layer. Rehearsals produced quite exactly that effect, and not by chance: we have listed above some psychoacoustics, perceptual and philosophical reasons to expect these results.

In these pieces however, the voice is confined to an abstract dimension of the music, it stays outside of representation, without text or melody. I was looking forward to working with literary content, which I did in other pieces I wrote at the time (*Duell*, *Clavigo*, and *le fil, l'abîme*). Using text inevitably raise further dramaturgical questions, which lets us redirect this reflection on music theater more specifically.

3. In the context of music theater

a. Some elements of my practice

In my recent works that include voice and text, I have attempted some types of dramaturgical shifts, some small distortions of the dramatic ground. *Duell* is an impossible duet between a live hornist and a recorded soprano singer who is projected in sound and video. The disappearing of a character is also a disappearing of meaning: the aphorism by Søren Kierkegaard is treated as a meaningless ritornello which turns into a sort of procession, maybe a death march.

I was able to experiment further on shifting characters' representation, in my chamber opera act of *Clavigo*. In this piece on a set libretto by Goethe, I chose to modulate the voice type and register to the "level of interaction" of the main character with the others ones: from negative value of interaction (unconscious to alone) to neutral (initial encounter) to higher value of interaction (confrontation with other characters). I aimed to avoid representing psychological states and interiority, by indexing the music on interactions more than subjectivity. In this purpose, also the voices of the musicians in the ensemble appear in the music, and rhythms of dances are used which follow the type and evolution of interaction along the act. I was allowed to alter the libretto as much as I liked, but I found myself in an impossible situation: I wanted to keep the story intelligible to listeners but simultaneously distort characters' representation. These contradictory dramaturgy choices did not function well, but they were an attempt of a shift. A sketch of the "interaction system" and a brief analysis of the beginning of the act are presented in appendix.

It seemed the conception of the textual content should be incorporated inside the musical composition, which I could do freely in the piece *le fil, l'abîme* over texts by Gérard de Nerval and Antonin Artaud. Historically, and still on occasions today, the composition of the libretto and

the music have been two separate jobs, for (good) literary reasons. If we look beyond these reasons, how does the writing of a libretto position inside musical composition?

b. The libretto as possible “minor writing”

To examine libretto in the prism of this notion may seem weak at first, because the concept of “minor” literature is rooted on a sociolinguistic plan, but as we have seen it also has deep consequences on expression. At the same time, opera houses are places of power and librettos have played a political role³⁴, so the parallel may not be as irrelevant as it seems. Again, let us see which useful methods may appear if we continue this strictly artistic experiment.

A libretto is a strange sort of text: it is condemned to be heard not read, and not necessarily to be understood (in isolation). This paradox makes it a hybrid material, the language is condensed, fragmented and repeated, a process imposed by the music. The tension between expression and representation which we saw in I.2 becomes clear here: it can be seen as a deterritorialised type of writing of a text. (...) However, a libretto is rarely written in the language of a minority, so the analogy is limited. We can still identify a potential minority in this type of writing, so we could consider some Kafka processes relevant to be “replanted” in this context.

(...)

³⁴ see Guy Cherqui’s chronicle on text <https://wanderersite.com/edito/plaisir-du-texte-et-theatre-elitiste/> [retrieved 15 Sep. 2025]

Conclusion

I am just about to start shaping my sketches and sharing them in this written work, as the genesis of the upcoming work was to be the destination of this walking reflection – but this would require much more space to fit within this text, so I must leave it to an upcoming work phase. This may look like a failure: let us take a look back at this wandering and find out what happened.

In the introduction I evoked a walk with Kafka and some other companions. Deleuze and Guattari have provided stimulating tools that I enjoyed playing with. I have formulated critics against their interpretation of Kafka in several moments³⁵ in this text – these complains were not significant for me at first, because I was only using their processes as tools of the mind, and because this text is not an essay about literature where I could formulate an analysis and judgement over their views – but then I had somewhat detached the tools created by Deleuze from Kafka's literature itself. Now that I am back to the words, initiating the first phase of the K-piece, which is precisely on the text, I am disappointed both by the material they are proposing, and by the fact that I let their playful tools occupy me in the larger part of this written work. A walk is also the art of leaving some companions behind – hopefully finding new ones on the way. This text has also been an opportunity to look back at some of the works I have written over 2024-2025 and set them in a different perspective. Some scores excerpts are attached to this essay, as well as an appendix.

I am now concretely planning the first phase of composing the “K” piece: writing the libretto, a project which will take me to several different places from 2026. This wandering through maps, sounds and processes has not produced a finished theory but a set of working orientations: the upcoming piece will be their laboratory.

³⁵ pages 7, 9, 10, and in the deleted paragraph 3.e shaping my sketches. See also: Milan Kundera, *Les testaments trahis*, Gallimard 1993, pp 128-130.

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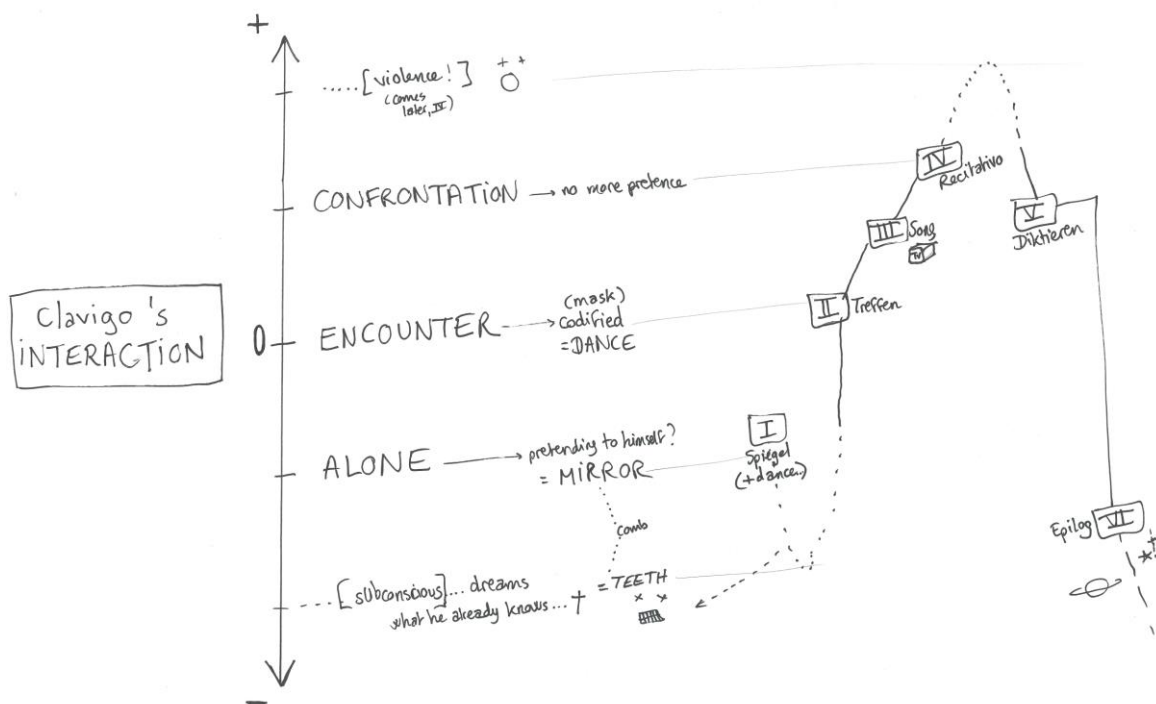
Appendix

Clavigo, act II – short introductory analysis

Clavigo is a chamber opera for four voices and a string ensemble, after a play by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. This project was made possible and produced by the Peter Eötvös Contemporary Music Foundation; the piece premiered in a lightly staged version on December 7, 2024 at Budapest Music Center and on December 9 at Collegium Hungaricum in Berlin.

While it was possible (copyright-wise...) to alter the original text, I decided, because I was writing the second act of four, to keep the narrative intelligible and so to base the composition process directly on the text. I ended up somewhere between building up a dramaturgic course from the original text, or destroying the dramaturgy created by the text - here are some elements about how I proceeded.

It seemed to me that the course of this act was centred on the level of interaction which the main character, Clavigo, has with other characters, so I built the musical material along the sketch



below.

Different levels of interaction call for different voice types, so I developed a palette of possible interaction levels between characters: singers sing *senza vibrato*, or *ordinario*, without pitch, or indefinite pitch, or indefinite rhythm, then *Sprechgesang*, some *parlando*, also the vocal

material is shared between the singers, the choir and the musicians, that vocal material is also imitated by the instruments themselves, making it instrumental ...

Notes:

- In this act, the two female characters do not have any words in the libretto, so I chose to use them as a “choir” in the antique sense, being both a musical and dramaturgical tool.
- I - VI in the sketch refer to the different parts of the score, as indicated in the libretto in following pages.

Parts 0 and I: **Alone** > interaction at negative level

b. 1-35

Clavigo is alone, pretending not to know why 'these French visitors' have announced themselves. At the same time, ironically, he is describing his bad presentiment, looking at himself into the mirror, half lying – to himself, because the answer to his own question is actually building up in the music, both in his own voice and the voices of the instrumentalists in the ensemble: the first sentence of the libretto is chopped into letters, gradually forming words over bars 10-35 (it will finally be fully enunciated from bar 36). This part of the score is an instrumental process; the voices being used as instruments.

There are also references to an even lower level of (non-)interaction, with the teeth functioning as a symbolic for fate and subconscious – in some cultures, dreaming of losing one’s teeth is interpreted as a presentiment of one’s own death – and the comb (heard at bar 35) functions as a link between this teeth imagery, and the mirror.

b. 36-51

In the end of part I, the encounter with a new character is getting closer.

From bar 36, a pulse gradually appears, together with some rhythmic elements, which start building the musical pattern of a dance. The dance is used as an image for a codified, planned interaction between two members of two royal courts.

Part II: **The encounter takes place** > regular/neutral interaction level.

The voice type used for this neutral level of interaction is *recitativo*.

In the music, the dance was expected, but it does not occur: instead, the pulse is lost as both characters are busier with interacting with each other and the encounter is not as neutral as planned.

(...)

Following pages: libretto after Goethe, Clavigo, act II.

