Mathias Monrad Møller

Speech

for the 50th anniversary of Aarhus Unge Tonekunstnere (2016)

orchestra with speaker or tape, programme note, no conductor

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Speaker (amplified) or recording of the speech
54 Musicians

For the <u>optional</u> composed part, the following instrumentation was used:

      Piccolo
      Flute
      Oboe
      English Horn in F
      Clarinet in Bb
      Bass Clarinet in Bb
      Bassoon
      Contrabassoon
      Horn in F 1
      Horn in F 2
      Trumpet in C1
      Trumpet in C2
      Tenor Trombone 1
      Tenor Trombone 2
      3 Percussionists:
            1) Timpani (G, A, c#, e, h), snare drum
            2) Marimba
            3) Vibraphone
      Harp
      Strings

For larger set-ups, any part can be doubled by further instruments.
Notes can be transposed in octaves.

For performances, no conductor is needed.

Information for anyone preparing a performance of this piece

This piece is for orchestra without conductor, with a person giving the speech using amplification, or a recording of the speech being played. The beginning and end of the speech also marks the beginning and ending of the piece.

Rehearsals

Due to the extreme openness of the concept, every performance will be different, and it might be challenging to find the right approach to rehearsing. Rehearsing is indispensable though.   Some advice:
Before the first tutti rehearsal, all musicians should have read the score and made a decision on whether they want to perform an own contribution, or whether they want to play the composed part. Tutti rehearsals shouldn't be used for discussing the piece, but rather for getting used to and finding a way through what might be a fragmented and chaotic result. Single rehearsals, and/or rehearsals and discussions in smaller groups might be helpful to get started.

Technical considerations

Make sure to amplify the speech in such a way, that both musicians on stage and the audience are able to hear it at all times.

Programme note

The programme note (see below) has to be printed in sufficient amounts and handed out to the audience in advance to inform about the concept of the piece.

Conductor

As stated before, the piece is performed without a conductor. In the optional composed part, musicians react to the words of the speech (see explanations in the appendix). A conductor that helps communicating the concept of the piece and structures rehearsals might be helpful; however, this can also be done by the concertmaster or a third person. Neither the conductor nor any other person is allowed to make decisions on behalf of the musicians.

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Score

You are free to contribute to the performance with actions of <u>any</u> kind.

Pay attention to these restrictions only: The performance begins when the speech (either given live on stage or played as recording) starts with the words „Dear audience"
and ends with the sentence „Maybe we can begin from there."
The speech should at all times be audible to the audience. It will, however, be amplified.
Use of instruments is optional.

As an <u>optional</u> choice, I have written instrumental parts to play along with the piece. It is <u>by no means</u> obligatory that any of the composed parts sound during a performance.

The audience will be informed about the concept of the piece through a note in the concert programme.

The duration of the piece varies depending on the speech rate.

Transcript of the speech

Dear audience,

this piece was supposed to be about democracy. Mainly, because I am pissed off with the current rise of right-wing populists and the way that they are twisting democratic principles and thereby ultimately abolishing democracy. I wanted to do the contrary. I wanted to set the musicians free, and let them decide what to do. But, paradoxically, that again would be authoritarian. I realised, that of all artforms, music produced in the traditional division of labour is probably the least suitable to envision or even realise an ideal world of free and equal individuals. Musicians are willingly trained to do as they are told, and I am used to telling them what to do. But I can't order freedom. Nobody can. Freedom has to be claimed. Accepting the traditional concept of composing means embracing both the chain of command between composer, conductor and musicians and the idea of an individual expressing him or herself through others. So, ironically, I, as a composer, am mute. To get a recognisable voice within the limited field of academic composition, I started to invent special playing techniques and to repeat my signature sounds over and over. My concern is: will I be present through the score? Will you hear *me?*

Sometimes, I like to ask myself another question: is what I'm doing something I do because I *can* do it, or because I *want* to do it? And why music, if I can speak?

Music is not just organised sounds. It is the implication of countless historical, economical, philosophical, social processes. Musical aestethics are the result of these processes, not the origin. Composing only with regards to aestethics is like wiping away a thin layer of snow from a frozen ocean. You will see a beautiful icy surface, and you can scratch your name into it. But if we truly want to examine what music is, we need to cut through the surface and dive under the ice, in the freezing water. There, we'll find sunken ships, military material, strange plants and traces of forgotten battles that shaped what we today find natural, what we accept as given, what we build on.

But the implications that form our music aren't just historical. Down in the water, we'll find that the ice cover is permeable from below, and that history works through it. We discover, that the dark glossy surface of the hole through which we slipped into the water is a double-sided mirror. Where in the waves is that point between air and water? Old and new forces constantly struggle and form music, and we have some power to form it as well. Music is the art of action, composers make people act. Maybe we can begin from there.

Letter to the musician

Dear musician,

in this piece, I am asking you to switch places with me. Instead of a fixed notation-score, I am giving you the task to decide, what action *you* would like to perform on stage as part of this piece – and then perform it meanwhile I'll be giving the speech. You are the composer of your part and can decide freely, what you'll be doing during the duration of the piece. I am well aware that you didn't sign up for this, and that this task might put you in an unusual and awkward situation. So why am I still asking you to do it?

As I am stating in the speech (you can find a transcript of it in this booklet), I am utterly disturbed by the direction, political discussions today often take: to maintain the achieved democratic standards (which are so often confused with the wealth of the Western countries), demagogues of all professions and across the aisles propose and conduct actions that effectively mean abolishing the rights that constitute the very character of our democracies: freedom of speech and thought, freedom of justice, minority rights and so on. I find it hard, not to relate to this in my work. So I am thinking of this piece as a political action; quite literally, not metaphorically.

The level of freedom in the Western world is unprecedented. This isn't to say, that our political systems are perfect, nor that we aren't supporting dictators and benefiting from unjust regimes, nor that inequality doesn't exist. But the rights Western democracies – at least on paper – grant their citizens, are worth fighting for. Which isn't easy, because both the constant confrontation with the unknown and insecurity come with the democratic system. Democracy means challenging yourself and respecting who or what challenges you – without leaving the common ground of basic human and democratic rights. Freedom comes with insecurity, there is no way around it.

Speech is meant to be a demonstration of basic individual freedom and the paradoxical limitations that go along with it. However, I am not only ordering you to do whatever you like. I am offering you a choice. If you do not wish to follow the order of doing whatever you like to do, or, if what you like to do is following orders, then I have composed a part for you which you'll find in the appendix. Think of this part as a piece within the piece. Or think of it as an election – if you choose „my" version of the piece, you are supporting the traditional concept of music-making. The parts I have written are not totally traditional though, and I will disclose, that they together form a unison. Effectively, this means, the more musicians choose this more traditional way, the more obvious this decision will be to the audience; and the result maybe less interesting.

So I would very much like to encourage you to contribute to the piece in the most creative, beautiful, radical, sensual, playful way possible. The only limitations are loudness (I'd like the actual speech to be understood by the audience) and your sense of responsibility. Be aware that all other musicians have the same task, too (you might consider collective actions as well) and that *not* taking part and not choosing either option is an option, too. However difficult this task may be - either way, you can't do anything wrong.

Last but not least, this is a piece on control and powerlessness, and the relationship between the composer as authority and the musician as a (willing) submissive subject. By giving you the paradoxical instruction to take control of your own role, I am inverting the traditional relationship between composer and musicians, thus hoping to reveal the strange ambiguity of the orchestra as both an outstanding form of collective organisation and a dictatorial regime of composers and/or conductors. I hope to spark thoughts on the way that we organise both music and life.

Respectfully,
Mathias Monrad Møller, July 2016

Programme note

The concept of *Speech* is that of radical openness: the musicians are free to do whatever they like to do, meanwhile a speech is given. Neither the conductor nor me as the composer are telling the musicians what to do. They can, however, choose to play a composed part; a unison. *Speech* aims at making the composer unnecessary and giving back the power to the individual musician.

Appendix

How to play the composed part

The optional composed part is a game based on reacting to the words of the speech.
In your part, you find the words of the speech to the left, and the music you're supposed to play *after* you've heard the words, to the right.

Three different notes indicate different durations, all durations differ depending on the speech rate.

a) long note, to be held <u>until the next note</u>, meanwhile the speech goes on. Indicated through „triangular" fermata:

Dear audience,
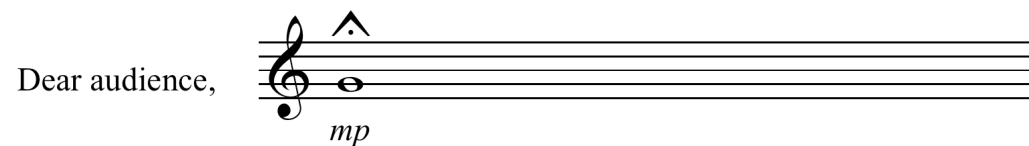
b) shorter note, to be stopped when the speech goes on:

of free
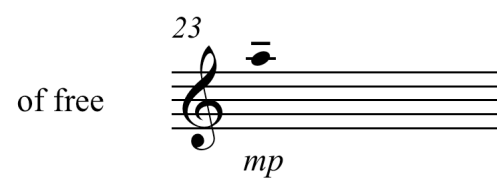
c) very short note, often in combination with an sfz:

music,
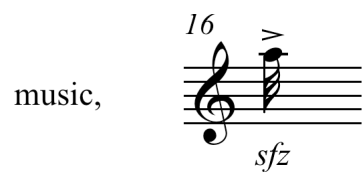
The piece also makes use of quarter-tones:

a quarter-tone sharp:

three quarter-tones (minor 2nd + quarter-tone) sharp:

a quarter-tone flat:

three quarter-tones flat:

Speech

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Optional, composed version

DEAR AUDIENCE,   **THIS PIECE WAS SUPPOSED TO BE ABOUT DEMOCRACY.**   **MAINLY,**

BECAUSE I AM PISSED OFF WITH THE CURRENT RISE OF RIGHT-WING POPULISTS   **AND THE WAY THAT THEY ARE TWISTING DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES**

AND THEREBY ULTIMATELY ABOLISHING DEMOCRACY. ↓ **I WANTED TO DO THE CONTRARY.** ↓ **I WANTED**

TO SET THE MUSICIANS FREE ↓ AND LET THEM DECIDE ↓ WHAT TO DO. BUT, ↓ PARADOXICALLY, ↓ THAT AGAIN WOULD BE AUTHORITARIAN.

I REALISED,   THAT,   OF ALL ARTFORMS,   MUSIC,   PRODUCED IN THE TRADITIONAL DIVISON OF LABOUR

IS PROBABLY THE LEAST   SUITABLE   TO ENVISION   OR EVEN REALISE   AN IDEAL WORLD

OF FREE ↓ **AND EQUAL** ↓ **INDIVIDUALS.** ↓ **MUSICIANS** ↓ **ARE WILLINGLY TRAINED TO DO AS THEY ARE TOLD**

AND I   AM USED   TO TELLING THEM WHAT TO DO.   BUT   I CANT ORDER FREEDOM. NOBODY CAN.

FREEDOM ↓ **HAS TO BE CLAIMED.** ↓ **ACCEPTING THE TRADITIONAL CONCEPT OF COMPOSING** ↓ **MEANS EMBRACING** ↓ **BOTH THE**

CHAIN OF COMMAND BETWEEN COMPOSER, ↓ **CONDUCTOR** ↓ **AND MUSICIANS,** ↓ **AND THE IDEA OF AN INDIVIDUAL**

EXPRESSING HIM- OR HERSELF THROUGH OTHERS. SO, IRONICALLY, I,

AS A COMPOSER, ↓ **AM MUTE.**   **TO GET A RECOGNISABLE VOICE** ↓   **WITHIN THE LIMITED FIELD OF ACADEMIC COMPOSITION** ↓

I STARTED TO INVENT SPECIAL PLAYING TECHNIQUES ↓ **AND TO REPEAT MY SIGNATURE SOUNDS OVER AND OVER.** ↓

MY CONCERN IS: ↓   **WILL I BE PRESENT THROUGH THE SCORE?** ↓   **WILL YOU HEAR *ME*?** ↓

SOMETIMES,   I LIKE TO ASK MYSELF ANOTHER QUESTION: IS   WHAT I'M DOING

SOMETHING I DO ↓ BECAUSE I *CAN* DO IT ↓ OR BECAUSE I *WANT* ↓ TO DO IT? AND ↓ WHY MUSIC ↓

IF I CAN SPEAK? ↓   MUSIC   ↓   IS NOT JUST ORGANISED SOUNDS. ↓   IT IS THE IMPLICATION   ↓   OF COUNTLESS

HISTORICAL, **ECONOMICAL,** **PHILOSOPHICAL,** **SOCIAL** **PROCESSES.**

MUSICAL AESTHETICS ↓   **ARE THE RESULT** ↓   **OF THESE PROCESSES,** ↓   **NOT THE ORIGIN.** ↓

COMPOSING ONLY WITH REGARDS TO AESTHETICS   ↓   **IS LIKE WIPING AWAY A THIN LAYER OF SNOW**   ↓

FROM A FROZEN OCEAN.   YOU WILL SEE   ↓   A BEAUTIFUL ICY SURFACE,   ↓   AND YOU CAN SCRATCH YOUR NAME INTO IT.

BUT   **IF WE TRULY WANT TO EXAMINE WHAT MUSIC IS, WE NEED TO CUT**

THROUGH THE SURFACE ↓ **AND DIVE UNDER THE ICE** ↓ **IN THE FREEZING WATER.** ↓ **THERE,**

WE'LL FIND SUNKEN SHIPS,

MILITARY MATERIAL,

STRANGE PLANTS

AND TRACES OF FORGOTTEN BATTLES ↓ THAT SHAPED WHAT WE TODAY FIND NATURAL ↓ WHAT WE ACCEPT AS GIVEN, ↓ AND WHAT

WE BUILD ON. ↓   **BUT THE IMPLICATIONS** ↓   **THAT FORM OUR MUSIC** ↓

AREN'T JUST HISTORICAL. ↓   **DOWN IN THE WATER** ↓   **WE'LL FIND,** ↓   **THAT THE ICE COVER IS PERMEABLE**

FROM BELOW, AND THAT HISTORY WORKS THROUGH IT. WE DISCOVER, ↓   **THAT THE DARK,** ↓   **GLOSSY SURFACE**

OF THE HOLE THROUGH WHICH WE SLIPPED INTO THE WATER

IS A DOUBLE-SIDED MIRROR.

WHERE IN THE WAVES   **IS THAT POINT**   **BETWEEN AIR AND WATER?**

HAVE SOME POWER TO FORM IT   **AS WELL.**   **MUSIC**   **IS THE ART**   **OF ACTION.**

COMPOSERS   **MAKE**   **PEOPLE**   **ACT.**   **MAYBE WE CAN BEGIN FROM THERE.**