

## The Score-Paper As A Canvas.

- a reflection on Material Investigations V: a laboratory for orchestra.

*It's not the material that matters it's what you do with it.*

(quote attributed to the composer Kaija Saariaho, 2001)

The canvas might seem to be an outdated medium. The young visual artist of today has found other territories for artistic activity. But let me temporarily propose that in the statement attributed to the Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho 'material' be substituted with 'the canvas'.

The German painter Gerhard Richter has documented how some of his "abstract paintings" contains a history of more than twenty "zustände" (states) before the process of painting reached its final stage. One can say that the depth (which in Richters case not is a depth in a perspective sense) is constituted by the traces of former possible stages. The final painting is an archive of the painting's history.

The nature of such a working process was striking: it seemed to me that Richter at certain of the stages in the painting process was injecting careless forms, colours and shapes. He does so without inhibitions. Some of these injections are strikingly brutal. He can do so, being aware, that the process not is at a final state. However brutal the injections are, they would later be modified and transformed into a less pronounced and explicit statements.

As I was working within a project of a series of 'laboratories' for a number of solo instruments, I thought it would be interesting to see how such a laboratory could be implemented within a larger ensemble. I chose the orchestra as a medium.

The notion of 'laboratory' was reached in response to the challenges of contemporary music. Since the genius character obviously disappeared in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new role had to be defined for the contemporary composer. What role could I take on as a composer?

Politically art have been deprived of its historical role as a nation builder, its role as a reflection of the society (Th. W. Adorno) is challenged and might even today be jeopardized as an institutional critique. Art practises take on the role of alternative research – an alternative to scientific research – trying to expose problematic matters of the society of today: the post-modern lack of memory (read 'history'); the nurturing of an unfocused anxiety by hinting at possible catastrophes (natural, criminal and political) etc.

After twelve years of teaching of young students in music composition, I reached the impossibility: I couldn't go on unaffected composing music as I did before, but on the other hand I couldn't be true to my experiences adopting uncritical to the 'trends' of the young generation in contemporary music.

The notion of 'laboratory' thus became an option: a researcher work systematically in a laboratory in order to see how the subject matter reacts on different imprints of influences.

The "Zustände" of the Richter experience represents a plausible research into the negotiation between control and submission to uncontrolled situations. Thus they take on an existential question related to political issues as the ones hinted at above, but it also challenges the notion of 'control' by proposing 'lack-of-control' and 'humility' as important parameters of dealing with art.

As a composer I have been taught to work with the architectural structures: the material was important in my years of formation. My students have de-learned me, and the statement of Saariaho become true even without the substitution of the word 'material'.

Thus I subject myself to a praxis that formerly was 'forbidden' and 'un-authentic' to me (my Adornian indoctrination). Now I simply lifted some material from an earlier composition in order to forget about its structural and architectural capacities. The material is treated simply a repository and thus it's its treatment – my approach to it – that come into focus. *Material Investigations* should be understood as investigations of the material nature of the material (as well as a hint to the American composer Morton Feldman's *Routine Investigations* – I once studied with him!).

But I also followed Richters daring inhibited carelessness about what gestalts could be brought in. The demands presumed for the genius of past times was to be abandoned. I give me in to a 'calculated intuition' (as Feldman did put it). My spontaneous reactions might be foreseeable, but their positioning later on might be surprising, or at least interesting to follow and discuss.

My work, in each stage, has been to react on secondary issues exposed. I wanted to open myself to follow hints and suggestions raised through the process of composing. In that sense there is a timeline, a certain stage follows another stage.

My hope for the listeners of this laboratory for orchestra is, that you simply observe the stages and tries to make sense of the different gestalts in terms of repetition of ideas from former stages; that you be open to the spontaneous insertions of new ideas, and not just judging in terms of geniality, but follow the possible recognisable paths through the different stages exposed. Let me invite you to seek meaning in this (at least at a certain level) free flowing fantasy, gradually building up a notion of an inner concern for human cognitive capacities as a corrective to non-reflection. In that sense I'm still a child of my lost time.

Ivar Frounberg, October 2012