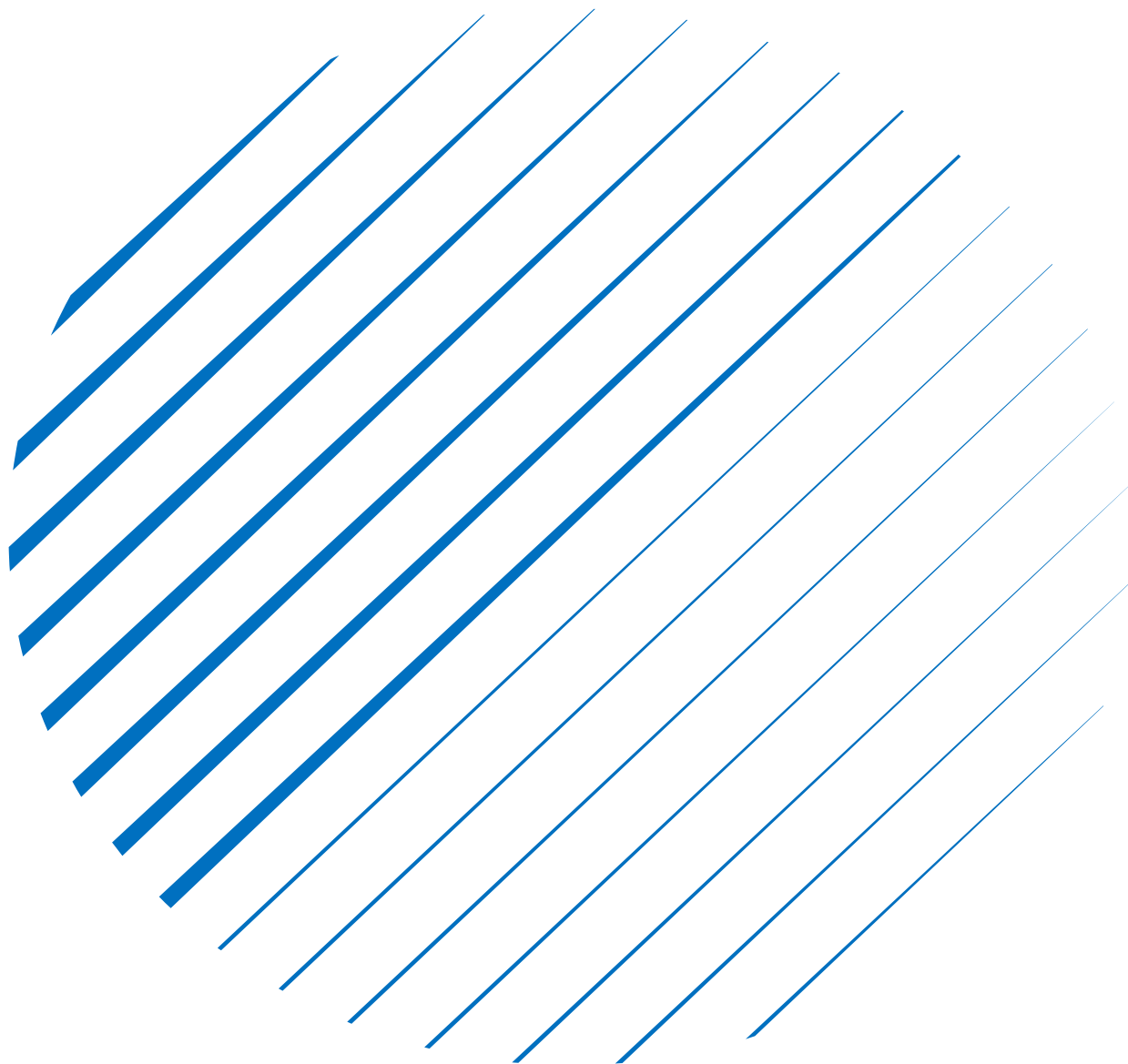


**Computer Music as a Dispositif:
The Compositional Influence of the Dispositif on Electro-Acoustic Works**



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Introduction

The term “dispositif” reflects media from a technological standpoint and the mechanisms of their perception, and discourses concerning them.¹ When thinking about a computer system, order and rules dictate everything, seen and unseen. The term “dispositif” originates from film theorist Jean-Louis Baudry, referring to an arrangement or apparatus.² Michel Foucault extended the notion of a dispositif and applied it to political power apparatuses. One can think of the “dispositif” concept as an apparatus, its direct translation from French, extending to other discourses and institutions.

In a musical sense, Gilles Deleuze classified a “dispositif” as “a tangled, multilinear ensemble ... composed of lines of different nature.”³ Relating to the noun disposition, “dispositif” is, by Foucault and Deleuze, parts that come together to form a whole. It factors into the design during the creation of music. Composers use their ideas, thoughts, and experiences to create that music.

During the compositional process, most musical designs tend to follow a rule and have an aesthetic. Even more frequently, if composers do not want to follow musical conventions, they use the concept of canon in music. Canon means a rule, and in music, it has many meanings. In this paper, it denotes a musical form or a compositional technique. Inseparable from music is forming a canon, a body of principles, rules, standards, or norms. Computer music got its formal space in music when composers began using the computer as a compositional tool. Electro-acoustic composers Simon Emmerson and Denis Smalley affirm that “all electro-acoustic music may be

¹ Georg Hajdu, “Disposable Music,” *Computer Music Journal* 40, no. 1 (March 2016): 25–34, https://doi.org/10.1162/COMJ_a_00342. 29.

² Jean-Louis Baudry, *L'effet cinéma* (Editions Albatros, 1978).

³ Gilles Deleuze and David Lapoujade, *Two regimes of madness: texts and interviews, 1975-1995* (New York; Cambridge, Mass.: Semiotext(E) ; Distributed by MIT Press, 2007). 338.

regarded as computer music, and although ‘computer’ may not fully represent the technological means employed, the term continues to be widely used.”⁴ Precisely, electro-acoustical composers that work by technical means use the mechanisms of their perception and the discourses concerning them combined with their compositional aesthetic to produce music.

The use of the *dispositif* in computer music composition and interactive music systems has an aesthetic history. Horacio Vaggione, a composer of electro-acoustic and computer-assisted music, uses the *dispositif* in music to “integrate and conjugate an ensemble of experience about the ‘transformational,’ stemming from diverse fields of scientific and technical research.”⁵ Pascale Criton writes that the choices made from scientific references, music informatics, and acoustics are quintessential in creating Vaggione’s music. Makis Solomos remarks that Vaggione centers the whole process around the concept of the operative in a system.⁶ Another prominent electro-acoustical composer, Georg Hajdu, defines “disposable music” as music that introduces conceptually created scores that are “authorless” and notated in real-time while being sightread by performers.⁷

The electro-acoustical discussion on Hajdu’s and Vaggione’s compositional processes emphasizes scientific or technological influences and perspectives. Even ties to the *dispositif* concept are less musical than they are scientific. The idea of the *dispositif* in computer music is foremost throughout Vaggione’s “SCIR” (1988) and “Nodal” (1997), and Hajdu’s “Ivresse ’84” (2007) and “Schwer ... unheimlich schwer” (2009) and connects through composition by affecting

⁴ Simon Emmerson and Denis Smalley, “Electro-Acoustic Music,” Grove Music Online, accessed December 2, 2020, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000008695>.

⁵ Pascale Criton, “Mutation and Processuality in the Musical Thought of Horacio Vaggione,” *Contemporary Music Review* 24, no. 4/5 (October 2005): 371–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494460500173798>. 373.

⁶ Makis Solomos, “An Introduction to Horacio Vaggione’s Musical and Theoretical Thought,” *Contemporary Music Review* 24, no. 4–5 (October 1, 2005): 311–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494460500172139>.

⁷ Hajdu, “Disposable Music.” 25.

music's formative elements, such as musical knowledge, action, and feeling. First, I explore the background of the *dispositif*, its origins, first conceptual applications, and its connection to music. Second, I examine the compositional and aesthetic approaches of Vaggione and Hajdu. I also assess how the *dispositif* concept affects those choices musically.⁸ Finally, I provide direct discourse on creating the pieces for both composers while also considering the formative elements of music in a musical analysis binds the *dispositif* concept to music. In other words, compositional techniques during musical composition.

The *dispositif*

In English, the *dispositif* means “apparatus.” There are many renderings of the *dispositif* concept. Baudry ties it to the cinematic, Foucault deals with the “government of men,” Deleuze reconnects it to the idea of an ensemble, and Giorgio Agamben expands Foucault's definition.⁹ Finally, Valentin Ris aims to interconnect canon and music as an academic field to a *dispositif* system.¹⁰ Each has slightly varied meanings because of their approaches. The *dispositif* can differ towards their respective field, meaning in language, a re-synthesis of an explanation or an idea of a person prior, more commonly Foucault. One thing is common among them all: apparatus mainly underscores the mechanical side of the term, and less the aspect of a specific “disposition,” both in the sense of “arrangement” and “tendency.”

Baudry elaborates on the idea of the cinema *dispositif* in his essays “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus” and “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to

⁸ Solomos, “An Introduction to Horacio Vaggione's Musical and Theoretical Thought”; Hajdu, “Disposable Music.”

⁹ Jean-Louis Baudry, “Effets Idéologiques Produits Par l'appareil de Base,” *Cinéthique* 8, no. 7 (1970): 1–8; Baudry; Foucault and Gordon, *Power/Knowledge*; Deleuze and Lapoujade, *Two regimes of madness*; Giorgio Agamben, “*What Is an Apparatus?*” *And Other Essays* (Stanford University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Valentin Ris, “Discursive Power: On Canon, Language, and Music as *Dispositif*,” *Kwartalnik Młodych Muzykologów UJ*, no. 2(41) (2019): 5–22.

the Impression of Reality in the Cinema.”¹¹ Baudry’s concept of the *dispositif* ties to *appareil de base*, the apparatus, or the moving image itself in cinema theory. However, that is inside the broader context of the cinematic *dispositif* in classical narrative cinema. To assure perceptions in classical cinema, they have developed specific formal operations, the continuity system. British film theorist Stephen Heath describes the process in the following terms:

The construction of space as a term of that binding in classical cinema is its implication for the spectator in the taking place of film as narrative; implication-process of a constant refining – space regulated, orientated, continued, reconstituted. The use of look and point-of-view structures [...] is fundamental to this process that has been described in terms of *suture*, a stitching or tying as in the surgical joining of the lips of a wound. In its movement, its framing, its cuts, its intermittences, the film ceaselessly poses an absence, a lack, which is ceaselessly recaptured for [...] the film, that process binding the spectator as subject in the realization of the film’s space.¹²

The continuity system describes a crucial process within the cinematographic *dispositif* and the *dispositif* concept. With the stitch-by-stitch process of creating cinema, space construction is fundamental, which applies to other areas. It is the broader context with this concept that defines the *dispositif* in music. Foucault was the first to relate the *dispositif* concept directly to the government. In an interview entitled “The Confession of the Flesh,” he states:

What I’m trying to pick out with this term is, firstly, a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral, and philanthropic

¹¹ Baudry, “Effets Idéologiques Produits Par l’appareil de Base”; Jean-Louis Baudry, “Le dispositif,” *Communications* 23, no. 1 (1975): 56–72, <https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.1975.1348>.

¹² Stephen Heath, “Narrative Space,” in *Questions of Cinema*, ed. Stephen Heath, Communications and Culture (London: Macmillan Education UK, 1981), 19–75, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-16579-7_2. 52.

propositions—in short, the said as much as the unsaid. Such are the elements of the apparatus. The apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements.¹³

Foucault's concept of the apparatus and its relation seems almost endless in terms of what it can connect or convert to concerning the "government of men." It is also the most common reference for Deleuze and Agamben's discussion of the *dispositif*. Deleuze notes the distinction between "social apparatus" and "apparatus," which is vital because it relates the *dispositif* to people and systems precisely. Another important highlight in "Two Regimes of Madness" is the detail of what composes the apparatus. In the chapter "What is a *Dispositif*?" Deleuze expands on the idea of an ensemble, but in the form of an apparatus:

Apparatus are therefore composed of lines of visibility, utterance, lines of force, lines of subjectivation, lines of cracking, breaking and ruptures that all intertwine and mix together and where some augment the others or elicit others through variations and even mutations of the assemblage.¹⁴

This definition of the *dispositif*'s idea is closer to music; mutations and variations are concepts graspable. A "social apparatus" can further explain the connection between the audience, performers, the system, and musical works to the *dispositif*. Foucaultian philosophy is the base for Agamben's definition of the *dispositif*. However, Agamben's Italian perspective further expands the definition:

I invite you therefore to abandon the context of Foucauldian philology in which we have moved up now to in order to situate apparatuses in a new context. I wish to propose to you nothing less than a general and massive partitioning of beings into large groups or classes:

¹³ Foucault and Gordon, *Power/Knowledge*. 194.

¹⁴ Deleuze and Lapoujade, *Two regimes of madness*. 342.

on the other hand, living beings (or substances), and on the other, apparatuses in which living beings are incessantly captured.¹⁵

Agamben's essay solidifies the concept of an apparatus: "literally anything that has in some way the capacity to capture, orient, determine, intercept, model, control, or secure the gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses of living beings."¹⁶ Understood from this perspective, Agamben's work, like Foucault's, may be described as the identification and investigation of apparatuses, together with continuous attempts to find new ways to define them. Agamben's, Foucault's, and Deleuze's perspectives connect the *dispositif* concept to music by technological means, a mentioning of the system, and discourse.

Ris addresses the connection between "aesthetic presence" and the perception of musical artworks. By looking at music and language conjoined with social context, subjectivity comes into play as a "vehicle." Subjectivity is the quality of being founded on or influenced by personal feelings, tastes, or opinions. To conceptualize the "vehicle," Ris reintroduces a term first used by Lawrence Kramer, "constructive descriptions," as a specific language function. Referencing Kramer, through his own words:

Descriptions of music are less a representation of perceived musical stimulus than an invention; "description" is not used in an ordinary sense but as a constructive force, through which meaning is applied to the object addressed. "Constructive descriptions," therefore, do not decode the meaning, which is already there, but "construct" or "attach themselves to the music as an independent form or layer of appearance." This kind of description applied to music can outlive the concrete circumstances of the utterance, thus becoming a historical fact that can be re-contextualized and, therefore, transform their meaning; that is,

¹⁵ Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?* 13.

¹⁶ Agamben. 14.

they are iterable signs. “So constructive description is more than a historical artifact; it is a historical agency, a cultural practice that installs the past in the present, and installs its objects in history even in the absence of overtly historical language.”¹⁷

Ris conceptualizes the language function of music and “constructive descriptions” as part of a larger *dispositif*, which forms listening, teaching, and performance practices. It also looks into subjectivization, normalization, exclusion, and interpretations of music. Knowing that a *dispositif* acts on an operational level, it is neither subject nor object, but order. The concept of order is a network of lines, which cross thresholds that make them either aesthetic, scientific, or political.¹⁸ The *dispositif* network is also divided and acting as power, knowledge, and subjectivity concerning societal areas. Therefore, the idea of “constructive descriptions” fits in the vocabulary of the *dispositif*. In understanding this, the canon is the lines of a *dispositif*. Ris explains:

As an analytical category *dispositif* becomes especially interesting because (1) it is not based only on language discourses but combines them with non-discursive elements as practices, institutional structures, or even architecture. We can now show interdependencies of discourses, which were perceived as separate and never part of musicology; the connection of musical instrument makers and physics or of pedagogical systems, politics, and musical instruments. This also applies to performance practices and media (or “sound reproduction technologies” in a narrower sense) as both shaped and shaping musical forms. Thus, (2) a *dispositif* explains the interconnection of musical forms and their performance and media practices. (3) It also integrates specific actors as the listeners with the analytic perspective. A listener (and of course also a musician) as subject is shaped by subjectivization lines of a *dispositif*; listening, as a bodily technique, is not

¹⁷ Ris, “Discursive Power.” 17-18.

¹⁸ Ris. 17.

only historically contingent but also is a culturally conditioned practice. A *dispositif* is also open to media studies insofar as it contains non-discursive elements as technologies and cultural techniques of a larger “discourse network.”¹⁹

According to Ris, the *dispositif* is not a limiter to music; it expands the idea of what can be. It incorporates “the idea that music always exists historically and cross-culturally in a multiplicity of ontologies.”²⁰ With these very same instances of what a *dispositif* is, Vaggione and Hajdu push forward in thought process, musical creation, personal theories, methodologies.

Horacio Vaggione

Horacio Vaggione is one of the most influential electro-acoustic and mixed music composers, combining acoustic instruments with various electronic setups. Decisively perspective in attitude, he fills the gap between sound and structure by developing a “multi-scale” approach to musical time, implemented employing “object networks,” conceived as “plural symbolic entities” encapsulating diverse systems of representation.²¹

Objects and networks are practical classes with the same degree of detail to different time-scales, from the musical note to the micro-sound or the macrostructure. Considering the non-linearities arising from the interaction between these different levels, they are, in Vaggione’s words, “positive carriers of form.” Vaggione conceptualizes most musical explorations in creative theoretical writings on music and proposes apparatuses virtually abstract to contribute to the elaboration of current composition theory.²²

¹⁹ Ris. 17-18.

²⁰ Ris. 18.

²¹ Makis Solomos, “Foreword,” *Contemporary Music Review* 24, no. 4–5 (October 1, 2005): 285–86, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07494460500171875>. 285.

²² Solomos. 311.

Vaggione is continually working on conceptualizing the most significant challenge of today's music: the bridging of the gap between "sound" and "structure," between material and form, or –to adopt Vaggionian terminology– between micro-time and macro-time.²³ Well known in the *dispositif* concept is the connection to social discourse. Vaggione's music and theory correspond to what Solomos calls a "moment of historical importance."²⁴

In order to find a way out of the crisis of the 60s and 70s, when music was torn between axiomatization and intuitiveness, between hyper-rational and irrational tendencies, Vaggione opted, from this period on, to combine what he would call the "formal" and the "informal," a choice which continues to characterize his approach.²⁵

Vaggione's theory has three stages. The first is a work-in-progress stage, in which Vaggione creates his line of thought and tries to connect it conceptually to his view; it's in constant revision.²⁶ It relates to the *dispositif* by the nature of the complexity, as Pascale Criton explains:

The expression of spatio-temporal and morphological dynamism requires the elaboration of a *dispositif*, a (logical, technical, intensive) field outside of which they will not be produced. What, however, determines logical division, as much as the choice of operations?²⁷

Second, Vaggione's thought integrates multiple references into a complexly woven fabric by proposing a locus of intersection for numerous disciplines, ranging from theories on instrumental music to computer music research and from science to philosophy. In some ways, his ideas establish a body of "layered concepts" that resemble his music, which he readily describes

²³ Solomos, "An Introduction to Horacio Vaggione's Musical and Theoretical Thought." 311.

²⁴ Solomos. 311.

²⁵ Solomos. 311.

²⁶ Solomos. 312.

²⁷ Criton, "Mutation and Processuality in the Musical Thought of Horacio Vaggione." 377.

as a group of “layered forms.”²⁸ Criton describes “layered forms” as axiomatics and works directly into the apparatus’s concept and the *dispositif*.²⁹ Third, Vaggione’s thought process is non-linear. It is through an attempt to “reduce it to simple issues” that the process shows the “interactive weaving of the subjects it treats.”³⁰ Non-linearity has many factors in the *dispositif* concept, which operates in Vaggione’s theory.

For Horacio Vaggione’s “SCIR,” the mutation and the “endlessly” re-defines and re-organizes itself.”³¹ The instrumentation of the piece is for bass flute and electronics. One can hear the framing of a soundscape of pure motions, stirrings, creepings, “unidentified actions,” for which there is no identifiable subject during the terracing operations and connections. According to a flow of variables, the transitivity organizes both perceptible and open in ever-changing gradations, a site of distinct/obscure hints, in which a single musical reference creates itself.³² Harmonically, it is varied. There is no direct source of the noise; instead, its creation is a mutation on transitive and electronic sound “materialities,” expressed through their musical actions and bass flute.³³

For “Nodal,” Vaggione uses maximum diversity and the unlimited potential of every possible musical connection. The instrumentation is for tape.³⁴ Criton reassures, “no doubt, the energy choice is a deciding factor, for it is part of a force that acts beneath the form and the outlay of events, in the same way, that wind contains a perspective in which motions entangle and affect each other.”³⁵ The connection to the *dispositif* concept for “SCIR” and “Nodal” relates to its creation—a polyphony of depths, events, and figures articulated with complexity in fluid and

²⁸ Solomos, “An Introduction to Horacio Vaggione’s Musical and Theoretical Thought.” 312.

²⁹ Criton, “Mutation and Processuality in the Musical Thought of Horacio Vaggione.” 375.

³⁰ Solomos, “An Introduction to Horacio Vaggione’s Musical and Theoretical Thought.” 312.

³¹ Criton, “Mutation and Processuality in the Musical Thought of Horacio Vaggione.” 379.

³² Criton. 379.

³³ Criton. 379.

³⁴ Criton. 380.

³⁵ Criton. 380.

composite layers.³⁶ Vaggione's musical theory and compositional process indeed is a dispositif of thought.

Georg Hajdu

Georg Hajdu introduces real-time composition and composition as a "dispositif" in the sense of Foucault and Deleuze, an apparatus. He defines "disposable music" as music that introduces conceptually created scores that are "authorless" and notated in real-time while being sightread by performers. An inseparable aspect of disposable music is the concept of the noun "disposition," which can also mean the arrangement of something. The modern term of "disposable music" is created from two sides, real-time composition and notation, and the creation of that as a "dispositif."³⁷ However, Hajdu's use of the term "dispositif" is ideally suited to bringing the different strands of thought that have been presented here into a framework."³⁸ Hajdu invites us to approach the dispositif analytically and allows us to see his compositional process:

The first task is to describe the arrangement of its elements: Usually, one or more musicians are integrated into a top-down computer network in which a central computer, calculating the music according to prescribed rules, conveys the data in the form of notation by means of network protocols to the musicians' computers. The strict hierarchy (in which, not unlike the matrix in the film of the same name, the musicians are threatened with becoming slaves of the machine) can be mitigated in scenarios in which (1) the score elements admit larger free space in interpretation (e.g., graphic notation); and (2) the network nodes (the

³⁶ Criton. 380.

³⁷ Hajdu, "Disposable Music." 33.

³⁸ Hajdu. 29.

performing musicians) exert greater autonomy or, by feedback, are influenced by the system.³⁹

Hajdu's compositional style and design process are strict. They show that the dispositif not entirely without any author, however. Only the roles have shifted: The composer has become a programmer. The machine has become a conductor. Depending on the scenario, the musicians or even the audience become composers. In a final note about the dispositif, Hajdu states that "highly heterogeneous discourses are bundled together: the disappearance of work and author, the question of intellectual property, *objets trouvés*, autopoiesis in networked systems, and human-machine interactions."⁴⁰ Hajdu's musical theory and compositional process indeed is a dispositif of thought, and the dispositif is his pieces' structure.

Hajdu's "Ivresse '84" has to do with difficulty, as he was grappling with John Cage's "Freeman Etudes."⁴¹ The inspiration for the piece was twentieth-century modernism and the notion of the Western avant-garde, which has become a historical practice. He interviews violinist János Négysesy because he had worked closely with Cage for his works' premier. Using the plan and the process of the dispositif, Hajdu outlines a composition as a result of intersecting lines:

I decided to base my piece on the first "Freeman Etude" and the first 4 minutes of the interview, attempting to create a crossover between a documentary and a real-time interactive composition for violin and four electronic musicians. The music consists of a version of the first Freeman Etude, transcribed into standard music notation, in which the material is rearranged to follow the narrative of the interview. For each of the 20 sections, a stochastic process chooses among a range of measures and recombines them into a new

³⁹ Hajdu. 29.

⁴⁰ Hajdu. 30.

⁴¹ Hajdu. 32.

structure, which is sightread by the performer. (This approach, of course, assumes familiarity with the material.) The soloist is accompanied by the electronic musicians who react to his actions and read instructions from their computer screens while playing audio samples taken from Négyesy's own CD recording.⁴²

Harmonically, "Ivress '84" is abstract; it uses audio recordings of the Négyesy interview at the performer's will with an atonal solo violin. Finally, "Schwer...unheimlich schwer" is Hajdu's attempt to put performers out of their comfort zone "and have to endure the uncertainty of their immediate musical future."⁴³ "Schwer...unheimlich schwer" from German translates to "difficult...incredibly difficult" in English, which has roots in an interview with Red Army Faction terrorist Ulrike Meinhof. The composition is for bass clarinet, viola, piano, percussion, and live electronics. Hajdu describes it as:

Schwer...unheimlich schwer is a musical portrait depicting this person's inner conflict, swinging back and forth between two sound textures, one affirmative, the other a brittle filigree. All of the musical material originates from a speech analysis of the interview (audio of Stefan Aust and Ulrike Meinhof) and is delivered in real-time to four players on their laptops. By stochastic processes, it is impossible, in many parts, to predict what the musicians will play in the next moment.⁴⁴

Harmonically, its twisting, intermingling, and doubling of instrumental lines backed with percussive hits on the downbeat are atonal. However, Hajdu argues that a dispositif suitable for performance is "real-time composition and notation of music generated for a man-machine

⁴² Georg Hajdu, "Playing Performers. Ideas About Mediated Network Music Performance," *Proceedings of the Music in the Global Village Conference*, 2007, 41–42.

⁴³ Hajdu, "Disposable Music." 30.

⁴⁴ Hajdu. 30.

network, seemingly without author, and performed by musicians in a top-down model.”⁴⁵ As a framework for the music, the context in which Hajdu establishes the term “dispositif” reflects media from a technological standpoint, and the mechanisms of their perception and discourses concerning them.⁴⁶ The self-defined word of dispositif by Hajdu intertwined conceptually is undoubtedly musical.

Conclusion

The idea of the dispositif in computer music is foremost throughout the pieces of prominent electro-acoustical composers Horacio Vaggione and Georg Hajdu. The concept of an apparatus, derived from the dispositif, relates to musical canon and aesthetics. It considers the formative elements of music in a musical analysis that binds the dispositif concept to music. The background of the dispositif, its origins, and its first conceptual applications connect it directly to the music.⁴⁷ The compositional and aesthetic approaches of Vaggione and Hajdu affect parts of their musical system.

There is a tie of the dispositif between both of the composers, but their use of it in composition differs in their works created; “SCIR” and “Nodal” for Vaggione, “Ivresse ‘84” and “Schwer...unheimlich schwer” for Hajdu. The dispositif concept involves those choices musically through meticulous thought processes. Whether that is the micro-time and object networks of Vaggione or Hajdu’s intersectionality and commentary, they link historically by a direct discourse

⁴⁵ Hajdu. 33.

⁴⁶ Hajdu. 29.

⁴⁷ Baudry, *L’effet cinéma*.

on creating the pieces from both composers.⁴⁸ The dispositif concept influences compositional techniques that affect the formative elements of music.

⁴⁸ Solomos, “An Introduction to Horacio Vaggione’s Musical and Theoretical Thought”; Hajdu, “Disposable Music.”

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