

Aesthetic shifts from the avant-garde towards the 'second modernity': The swaddling of a new compositional thinking

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Abstract: Sliding on the time-axis, starting from the beginning of the 20th century, a plethora of terms was used to characterize the facets of music, like New, Avant-garde, Postmodern, Contemporary Music, to sample some. New Music was mainly applied to the music of the early 20th century, in particular the Second Viennese School, to indicate a radical rupture with concert tradition, entailing a break with the traditional audience by, if not braking, certainly thoroughly disturbing the foundation of the bond between music and the audience. Avant-garde was used for the radical, post-1945 tendencies of a modernist style in several genres of art music, whereas in the 1950s, the term avant-garde music was mostly associated with serial music. Postmodern music is mostly defined in opposition to modernist music; it favors eclecticism in musical form and musical genre, and often combines characteristics from different genres, or employs jump-cut sectionalization (such as blocks). Contemporary music is simply the name appointed to all musical production in a given present unburdened by a comparable effect of being so emphatically estranged. Seeing the process of music composition within all these views, the concept of newness becomes, undoubtedly, its common endeavor. If the compositional thinking wishes to remain new, it must not only be constantly creative and innovative, i.e., an embodiment of the living present, but it must furthermore renew the concept of the new itself; by this redefinition, it can extend the frame of its reference beyond the mere present. From a methodological point of view, this approach is embraced by the 'second modernity'. The latter breaks with fundamental aesthetic convictions of postmodernity (e.g., a modern, new, innovative musical material is no longer possible, thus, all manner of material is equally usable; hence, self-consistent style defined with reference to the present is not possible or desirable). 'Second modernity', however, is not simply the negational counter-movement to postmodernism and solidarity with high modernism, but brings forth new aesthetic characteristics, by introducing a project of a future that is open and which artists can aim for productively. By adopting the framework of the 'second modernity', this paper attempts to examine those aspects that could be used as aesthetic trajectories from avant-garde to nowadays, upon which new compositional means (like complex, deconstructive), with both functional and educational potentiality, could be deployed.

The notion of the *musical progress*, that is, the promise that music is racing forward along the rails laid by ironclad laws, demanding that we must all scramble to keep up with its accelerating pace, has thoroughly discredited in our days (Cox 2004). This, consequently, doomed the fate of the attendant concept of *the new* to merely be consigned to and confined within those brief periods surrounding the 20th century's two world wars, when the need for an opening for radical new vision seemed almost unavoidable. Nevertheless, at several times in the past, the concept of *the new* has been used to express a radical break with an exhausted and degraded present, indicating an opening toward new vistas, showing a potential, an energetic attitude, to rediscover something long lost and long missed. Some direct examples include the return to the origins and/or going back, getting to the root. This initiated a *tradition-based approach to the new*, even adopted by the Second Viennese School, despite the fact that the latter is considered as the carrier of a final, radical break with the tradition of tonal music. In any case, the Second Viennese School has contributed to the alteration of the relationship between music and the audience, by exposing it (the audience) to something emphatically new (Mahnkopf 2004a).

The radical, post-1945 tendencies of a modernist style in several genres of art music that followed, established the avant-garde era (Griffiths 1981; Albright 2004); it mostly associated in the 1950s with serial music, and, thus, fostered an intellectualized nature of *the new* concept. In this vein, serialists were often accused of excessive structural and conceptual nature in their work, combined with a neglect of immediate expression and direct

comprehensibility (Claren 2004). On the other hand, they considered themselves as rationalists drawing in an apparently scientific degree of argumentational exactitude. It seems though that serial composers strived more for the maintenance of the highest possible level of the desired emotional tension on the musical surface at any point in their work rather than for the enabling a complete rationalization of the musical material. In this way, a precarious balance between construction and immediacy could be identified; a balance under the highest tension imaginable. In treating notes as quantities and following a serial organization in all parametric dimensions, serialism "confuses the order of a coherent acoustical content¹ with that of its aesthetic context²" (Adorno 1978). Serial works, thus, constitute a collection of solitary particularities unrelated to any common language; they do not reveal themselves aesthetically to anyone and remain the acontextual utterances of an isolated subject (Hindrichs 2004). It is like speaking a solitary language, precluding any association with anything universal.

In fact, in the post-tonal music an overall context for the notes was forced to be created that would objectify itself as a work, yet without having the means for such an objectification at its disposal. This loss of a common language was the outcome of a process of modernization that led to a reflection upon this language itself that further led to its dissolution. This was the motivation for the triggering of an iterative metacognitive process (e.g., a reflection upon this dissolution), often used as a generative means for new a language construction. As a result, some attempts for music aesthetic classification into somehow clumsy defined categories were proposed, i.e., modernist equals determinate, closed, rational, singular; postmodernist equals indeterminate, open, networked, decentralized³. Nevertheless, much stereotypically modernist music contained significant chance-derive elements, in a way that the determinate and the indeterminate often existed with a certain inherent conflict or contradiction⁴ (Cassidy 2008).

In this work, the trajectory of the aesthetic shifts in music from the first- towards the second-modernity are examined, as a means for the identification of creative elements of compositional thinking of today. Through the facets of the evolution of the concept of *the new* across the variety of the aesthetic trends, it is possible to collect those aspects that could serve as carriers of the compositional energy and define its forms of representation in the actual music works.

Tracing the aesthetic trajectory

First Modernity: Classical modernism

In classical modernism, the works of art became self-programmed and self-reflective, in terms of organizing the process of aesthetic experience purely through themselves. To this end, the work itself, with the aid of its own forms, could create expectations in its recipients about to which form will appear next and which might be compatible with the previous ones or not. In this way, the art is disembodied from its respective artistic medium, revealing the internal aesthetic binding-forces of its form as perceptible within it (Lehmann 2006). Cubism in visual art, free atonality in music and free verse in poetry are clear examples of the classical modernism essence; that is, the produced works were no longer pre-programmed by any medium, thus, freeing themselves from the tradition and putting the medium that traditionally constituted them out of action.

Art at the start of the 20th century gains new level of autonomy; an autonomy that allows reflection and breaks with all previously familiar forms of seeing and hearing, almost provoking an entirely new aesthetic attitude of the recipient. This phenomenon is also observed at the social level, combined with the social changes due to revolutions, great technical inventions, wars, or global economic crises. Apparently, the works of classical modernism, negated not only the established styles of their time but transferred the negation into the art system itself. Consequently, an art that could negate the medium of art was then possible to exist, fueling the art system with a new level of freedom, understood as the

separation of medium and work and realized as a change in many decisive factors of art at once.

Although classical modernism separated the work from the medium it still kept ties to the aesthetic tradition by showing a dependence on a background philosophy that translated the language evident in the art work into a particular expression of reality. To this end, the works of classical modernism became "commentary-dependent", that is, "their meaning, which could not be ascertained from the [artwork] itself, established itself alongside the [artwork] as a commentary, as art literature, and as we all know, also as art chatter" (Gehlen 1960, 53). In summary, classical modernism expressed the seeking of direct access to the order of the world from within itself, yet without any mediation of the medium.

First Modernity: Avant-garde

In a step further, avant-garde fought back the *a priori* understanding of art clearly seen in classical modernism. To this end, it introduced a distinct questioning of the ordering context between the work and the world, considered natural and necessary so far. To achieve this, avant-garde adopted a strategy to produce works that had no perceptible combinations of forms that limited and provided an explanation of one another; these, could only be explained through the perspective of a reflective action upon art. Consequently, by implying a polemical negation of the work-character, avant-garde turned to the so called *object art*. In an alternative facet, avant-garde became a *conceptual art*, due to the dependency on the reflection of the concept which declared such object as art (Lehmann 2006).

By activating its twofold character, avant-garde caused a multitude of fundamental conceptual shifts. Through the inclusion of anti-works and anti-media (e.g., noises or chance events), avant-garde achieved the separation of work and reflection, contributing further to the artistic autonomy; that is, art gained an autonomy of reflection. This brought the art system in a new position, where art initially abstracted from its medium-character and, then, abstracted from its work-character. This abstraction implied that the concept of *the new* could "only be realized through the uncompromising progress in the material" (Lehmann 2006, 23). This was attempted with the inclusion of new elements of reality in art, yet, with mere success to develop a new medium of art. Perhaps, the simple character of these materials (e.g., everyday objects), disconnected from any intellectual content necessary for the perception of the art itself, led to their incapability to serve as potential carriers of the new artistic medium.

First Modernity: Post-modernism

What followed avant-garde was post-modern art, contributing to the reinstitution of the banned use of tradition. To this end, old art styles were re-used in the context of advanced art, in an effort to define the new form of progress. This amounts to a cancelation of the negation of the old media of art (i.e., a second degree of negation), exhibiting a kind of progressive differentiation of art with the introduction of a difference between medium and work and the re-inclusion of the medium. The latter, though, was realized in a flippant and ironic way; that is, the past artistic styles were used as quotations, and as such, they were released from their previous functionality, i.e., structural contribution to the work. Consequently, the multiple use of different styles led to polystilistic works and an aesthetic pluralism, which hallmarked the essence of post-modernism.

Post-modern art adopted an open work-character that lies within the perspective of Umberto Eco (despite the fact that he developed it with reference to the literature of classical modernism) that "an open work of art takes on the task providing us with a description of discontinuity: it does not tell us about it, but rather *is* it. It takes on a mediating role between the abstract categories of science and the living matter of our sensibility; it almost becomes a sort of transcendental scheme that allows us to comprehend new aspects of the world" (Eco 1989, 90). The open work is the logical outcome of the particularly ironic and playful re-

appropriation of old media, posing a unique way of appreciation of the abrupt style changes within the work only through the meta-concept of the post-modern art. In this way, post-modernism fosters the view that art must always negate its medium if it is to be considered modern.

Second Modernity: Reflexive modernism

The perspective of progressive differentiation alters the view of the post-modern era as the telos of art history to an opportunity for a step further in the contemporary art. In an analogy to the re-inclusion of the artistic medium by post-modernism, the reflection upon the negation of the work of art introduced by the avant-garde (i.e., a second degree of reflection), could lead to the release of the work itself from all *a priori* ties to the medium and could be communicated within the art system as an autonomous work of art. The work then could resemble a self-organizing organism that incubates a *combination of forms*. The hermeneutics of the latter should be handled with care, as this should be perceived "without making this idea more concrete, on the one hand, i.e., showing how the forms in a work of art 'combine', and on the other hand, without reflecting upon the normative status of this statement" (Luhmann 1995, 271). These contemporary works would be more biding than open and use their medium in no longer a broken form through irony, but in a rather functional way. In this way, the progressive differentiation expresses itself through a new phase beyond the post-modernism, the so called *reflexive modernism*. The latter imposes a forced reflexivity in the art system, so the interception of the problems resulting from that progressing differentiation could be feasible. Distancing from avant-garde and post-modernism taste, these autonomous works of reflexive modernism are now in the position of functioning within their social system as the basis for identifying the successful art within the arbitrariness of its current continuation, setting the facts of the second modernity.

Table 1 epitomizes the basic characteristics described in the aforementioned tracing of the aesthetic trajectory.

Domain	Art Aesthetics											
Social history	First modernity									Second modernity		
Art history	Classical modernism			Avant-garde			Post-modernism			Reflexive modernism		
Modernization phase	Progressive differentiation									Reflection		
Autonomy gains	Autonomy of work and reflection			Autonomy of reflection			Autonomy of the medium			Autonomy of the work		
Negation possibilities	Abstract negation of the art medium			Abstract negation of the work of art			Negation of the negation of the art medium			Negation of the negation of the work of art; work, medium and reflection are separable components of art		
M: Medium W: Work R: Reflection	M	W	R	M	W	R	M	W	R	M	W	R

Table 1. The characteristics of the art aesthetics according to the analysis domain. The last row of the table denotes the relation of the three basic elements, i.e., medium (M), work (W) and reflection (R), of the art work (denoted with gray area within the bold rectangular) for each period of the art history; faint letters denote the negation to the specific element, whereas the borderline types show the co-existence (dashed line) and the distinctiveness (wavy line) between these elements.

Facets of the second modernity

The term *second modernity*, and hence the naming of a phase after postmodernity, has already appeared in theories of film, New Music and visual art⁵. As already mentioned, the second modernity, which sets itself apart from postmodernity, negates the negation of truth. It takes over the total complex of classical modernity/avant-garde/postmodernity, yet by adopting the condition that all achievements, i.e., new materials, critique of the work, plurality are evaluated in terms of truth, or the capacity for truth. Everything is re-approached and redefined as something that was simply experimental before would now be normative and political. The commitment of the second modernity to the guiding principle of truth makes possible the production of convincing works once again; works that sustain their existence exactly from the truth of their existence (Mahnkopf 2008).

The after-postmodernism quality of the second modernity, both from a temporal and aesthetical viewpoint, implies opposition to the fundamental aesthetic convictions of postmodernity; that is, history had reached its end (a modern, new, innovative musical material is no longer possible) and postmodernism had overcome modernism once and for all (a self-consistent style defined with reference to the present is not possible, and indeed not desirable). Second modernity, on the contrary, focuses upon styles that are coherent in terms of technique, material and semantics using modern material, elements that have developed in recent times. In other words, "for second modernity is not simply the negational counter-movement to postmodernism and solidarity with high modernism; to the extent that it develops, it will bring forth new aesthetic characteristics which, one hopes, have a future. Second modernity means working on the project of a future that is open and which artists can aim for productively" (Mahnkopf 2008, 9).

Some indicative examples of the composers engaged within the second modernity are: Mark André, Richard Barrett, Pierluigi Billone, Chaya Czernowin, Sebastian Claren, Frank Cox, Liza Lim, Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Chris Mercer, Brice Pauset, Enno Poppe, Wolfram Schurig, Steven Kazuo Takasugi, Franck Yeznikian. These composers share some common ground in their compositional oeuvre that could be crystallized in the following values, which, in turn, imply the basic facets of the second modernity:

1. They adopt a critical engagement with the work concept, constructing it, unlike avant-garde, with clear internal and external boundaries, avoiding an experimental-like setup with uncertain results.
2. Their material is constructed as an autonomous material, with inherent innovation (degree of modernity), so the aesthetic success of the work is independent from the compliance between the material and the work conception, with the latter governing the construction of the former.
3. Through their artistic work, they place the emphasis on seriousness and artistic truth, excluding any motivation by careerism.
4. They deal with the unsolved issues of the artistic past (classical modernism, avant-garde and postmodernism) as problems in a course that takes into account both their own artistic philosophy and the rationality of the compositional act.

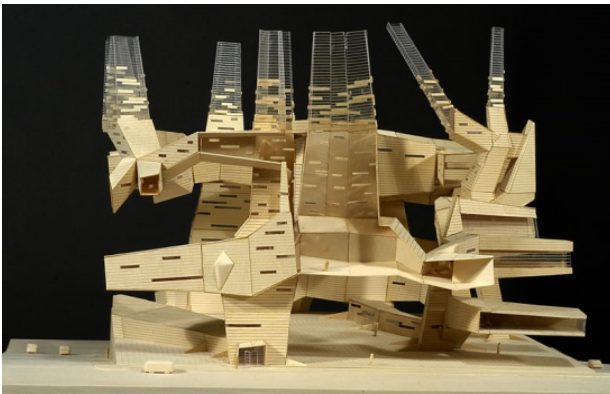
Some paradigm shifts of the second modernity could also be identified in the field of architecture (Klotz 1994), under the term *deconstructive architecture*, represented by the emanating figures of Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid, Peter Eisenman, Frank O. Gehry, Rem Koolhaas and Coop Himmelblau, with many of them influenced by the ideas of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. Deconstructive architecture is characterized by ideas of fragmentation, an interest in manipulating ideas of a structure surface or skin, non-rectilinear shapes which serve to distort and dislocate some of the elements of architecture, such as structure and envelope. The finished visual appearance of buildings that exhibit the many deconstructivist styles is characterized by a stimulating unpredictability and a controlled chaos; Fig. 1 illustrates some indicative examples.



(a)



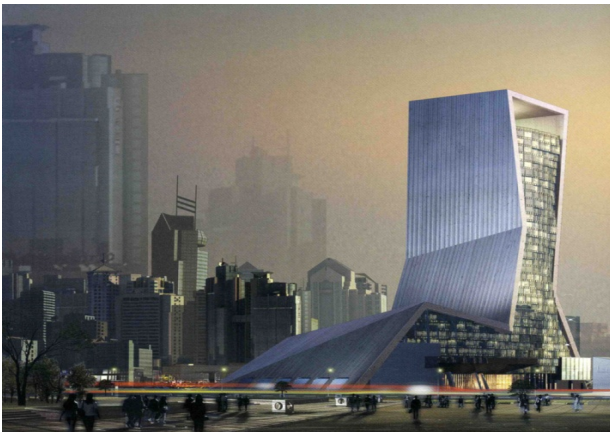
(b)



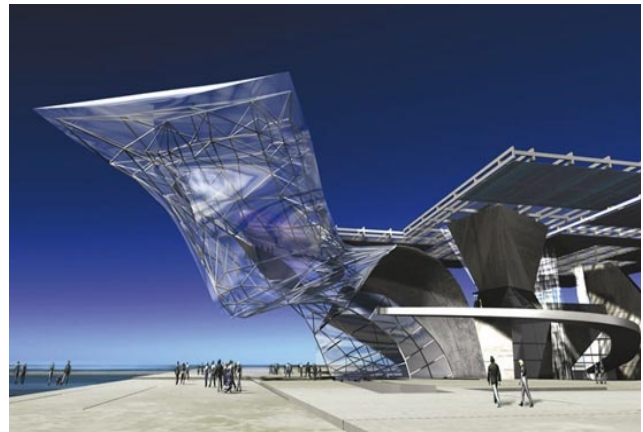
(c)



(d)



(e)



(f)

Figure 1. Characteristic designs from deconstructivist architects: (a) Daniel Libeskind, (b) Zaha Hadid, (c) Peter Eisenman, (d) Frank O. Gehry, (e) Rem Koolhaas, and (f) Coop Himmelb(l)au.

In an epitomized aesthetic transition one could identify in the first modernity a tendency for: (a) *reductionism*, that is, sound design assists the recognizability of the works (basing a work on a particular musical quality, often the specialty of the respective composer), and (b) *centrism*, i.e., a strong thought is adopted that aims for unity, self-identity and inner

systematicity. Especially in the post-modernity the work is (a) *hedonistic* (its reception occurs in the mode of pleasure), (b) *narrative* (it presents a musical narrative, not a composition of sounds or structures), (c) *formally heteronomous* (the problem of form is solved via a strong connection to previously existing and functioning forms), (d) *refers outside of itself* (its material is taken from other music), and (e) *ironic* (distorts artistic truth and what is presented is not in the way it is presented). On the contrary, in the second modernity: (a) the *material* is exploited via microtonality, complex rhythms, nested formal constructions, poly-works, live electronics, computer-assisted composition, the whole spectrum of pitch and noise, hybrid playing techniques, (b) the *style* has an autonomous aim towards a cohesive personal language, and (c) the *artistic self-image* is defined through the production of music relevant to our times and its character is build based upon artist's and not the audience' taste.

In the second modernity, work, medium, and reflection no longer form a unity (see Table 1); they exist in a substantial deconstructive relationship with one another. Musical deconstruction assumes a different notion of structure, one that is principally no longer unanimous. It is the task of musical deconstruction to evolve this multi-dimensional concept of structure. The aim of the musical deconstruction is to shed light upon contradictions (so called *aporiai*) within the music, the construction, the form, the material, even the conceptual goals (Mahnkopf 2004a). This totally transforms the concept of the compositional task itself. As Cox coins: "where the earlier post-war composers gave the structures, the skeletons of new and foreign worlds, these composers [e.g., deconstructivists-compexist] create the flesh, the sinews, and the nervous systems, not of traditional bodies, but of entirely new creatures, which move according to yet-unknown laws of 'virtual motion'" (Cox 2000, 7).

The concept of modern music within the perspective of the second modernity is realized through the four aspects of *reflection*, *critique*, *utopia*, and *messianity* (Mahnkopf 2004a).

Reflection refers to the handling of the music in a reflexive way when the very basics of music become problematic, yet accessible to subjective freedom. In this way, one can hear how the music enters in a relationship with itself; a kind of self-observation. The lack of this internal reflection, through audible inspection, could be interpreted as an expression of insufficient modernity. On the contrary, when reflection becomes a blended ingredient of the music, it also emanates its functionality to the extra-musical process of self-understanding, contributing to the shaping of the cultural discourse.

Critique could be initially seen relatively to the society. This viewpoint of critique is not directed primarily at music, but rather at the social and cultural factors that determine it. As such, critique could be a productive force in achieving new phenomena at the social level that could influence the environment of the compositional production. Some characteristics examples would be the interpretation of atonality as a critique of the established tonal idiom or the antagonistic attitude of some avant-gardists after 1945 who relied on the denunciation of their elders to establish themselves. The social perspective of critique could further be transferred to the music itself. In this vein, whatever the concrete form of critique is (e.g., of taste), "it should reflexively contained within the music as a form of social critique" (Mahnkopf 2004a, 39). To this end, composing becomes *reflexive*, i.e., an awareness of the non-universality of the material, technique, and inherent stylistic implications exists, and *critical*, through the necessity of distancing the compositional process from history, avoiding the repertoire that saturates the musical culture among contemporaries.

Utopia is defined through the assumption of cultural situations as non-existent or as *yet* non-existent. This reflects unrealistic demands concerning the realization of a composition within lies the anticipation of something not yet manifested or not yet achieved. For example, the buildings depicted in Fig. 1 provoke such utopia when considering their realization in practice, in terms of the financial support and technical advances (e.g., new types of construction materials, innovative machinery) that prerequisite. Nevertheless, this inherent utopia, at a second reading, emanates the modern character to the final construction and extends critique

to a step further preventing it from remaining mere critique. An example of the utopia in the compositional domain could be the expectation of the audience to become accustomed to the redundancy (too much) of the music information. The saturated musical content (e.g., apprehension of extended use of microtonality) or demanding (extended) techniques (e.g., that seem impossible to be applied) could seem utopian. Under the increasing pressure of precisely such utopian situations, the conditions are forced to be changed and what once seemed utopian become possible, or even standard, with time⁶.

Messianity is a quality that is implicit within the previous three ones; that is, reflection contributes to the completion of the piece as a form of *entirely fulfilled music*; critique opens the dimension for unease at the status quo towards a *totally liberated-like music*; utopia provokes for the concrete change it anticipates, reflected at the *society radical change*. Combined all these in the essence of music, the messianic quality in musical terms could be identified and aimed at. This defines an artistic stance, above a concrete aesthetic or compositional practices, that concerns the whole, i.e., music and society, through the perspective of "an 'other' connection to the present" (Mahnkopf 2004a, 43).

Compositional practices in the second modernity

From the previous analysis it was made clear that the compositional thinking in the second modernity adopts the concept of *deconstruction* as its functional domain that integrates the aforementioned four qualities of the *new music*. What basically characterizes musical deconstruction is non-identity; that is, it takes identity as its point of departure and, then, renders it in a non-identical way (Mahnkopf 2004a). In this way, an internal critique is initiated and matured through the stronger correspondence to modernity of the compositional outcome.

A specific analysis of the deconstruction-based compositional practices at different levels follows.

At the strategy level

From the strategic point of view, the compositional process could include *multi-parametric handling*, involving parameters that are expressed through different degrees of information. For example, the dynamic alteration of the range of parameters could define their dynamic functionality, such as dynamically shifting between periodic-aperiodic, rhythmic-arrhythmic, stationary-nonstationary states.

Another strategy would incorporate *fuzziness* in the clarity of the musical phenomena. This approach could model the degree of nebulosity as a compositional strategy, which has the potential to modulate many aspects of the music work itself (e.g., structural, aesthetic, functional, reflective).

At a higher level, the *combination of contradictory strategies* could form new, hybrid compositional strategies that incubate deconstruction and negation to their nature, yet with a constructive way. In this way, poly-harmonization could co-exist with severe de-harmonization; formation of music spaces could be simultaneously perforated and scaled down to a degree that the spaces themselves are totally deformed and unrecognized; correlated structures could be undermined towards uncorrelated co-existence.

The relation of the work to *phenomena of dialectics* that intensify the work itself provide another compositional perspective. In this vein, paradoxes, ambiguity, discrepancies, dead-ends could serve as aims of deconstructive composition.

All the above strategies aim at establishing a non-identical character in the identities or determinates of the work, in a way that music could not either survive.

At the parameter level

Moving on to the concrete parameters of music (e.g., pitch, rhythm, timbre), deconstructive compositional practices adapt to each parameter separately.

Pitch is the most stable and identical of all parameters, thus, its non-identification calls for microtonality. The latter splits the spectral characteristic of the sound into a refined level of spectral bins obstructing the clarity of the intervals, thus, imposing a noise-like interference to the absolute pitch recognition. This is also reflected to harmony (e.g., microtonal chords) and to the heuristically created hierarchies that are formed in the effort to achieve non-identity avoiding an *ad hoc* diffuseness (chaotic-like behavior).

Rhythm could also be handled in a comparable way to microtonality. The flexibility of the rhythm could increase its non-identity; this could be achieved by defining the durations, morphemes, patterns, accent relations, through a combinatory way that interlocks tuplets and additive rhythms in a degree of refinement that lies within the details of microtonality (microrhythm-like).

Timbre and playing techniques could be approached through the transitional concept. In particular, periodic-aperiodic-random shifts between different playing techniques (e.g., extreme *sul ponticello*-extreme *sul tasto*; completely breathy to completely stable sound) would increase the deviation of the stability and foster the transient character, thus, increasing the non-identity of the sound. This could further be combined with different types (distributions) of noise (e.g., Gaussian, impulsive) and/or signal-to-noise ratios (SNRs).

Morphology asks for counter-strategies that take into account both shape perception and sonic redundancy. The shape could be perceived differently under alterations of its rapidity due to alterations in its degree of ephemerality. Moreover, the boundaries of the shape could be dissolved through abundant variability, sonic saturation and dissociative sound production, provoking, simultaneously, the self-destruction at the instrumental domain.

Texture could be modulated according to its density. Using the lacunarity of the texture (how the sound lacunas are distributed), different textural types could be formed and related to various degrees of identity and semantics (the thinner and clearer a texture is, the more its non-identity and pre-expressiveness is increased).

Form results as the outcome from counter-strategies with different effects upon structure, showing a multivalent quality. For example, one of the form qualities would be fragmentation, which elevates the role of the segment in a medium as something that denotes *absence* rather than something that is missing.

Musical space is perceived here as a fragmented, inhomogeneous, shattered, lacunar medium.

Musical language here focuses at the individual phenomena, rather than on terminology, with its expression being modest and doubt-filled, derived from a combination of specific/abstract, semantic/a-semantic material.

Performance practice in deconstructive music reveals a kind of ambiguity; that is, the paradox that combines the productive unplayability of the music piece with the intelligent seeking for performance solutions. Consequently, the ideal of perfectionist virtuoso is revised through the concept of dealing with new challenges imposed by the complexity of the music that asks for the invention of alternative (perhaps yet unknown, which wait to be discovered) performance practices.

Indicative case

The concept of the musical deconstruction exhibits an important dynamic to be considered as the basic compositional strategy within the aesthetics of the second modernity. As it is still under development and shaping, it could not be considered as an established new style, but rather as an ongoing experiment, which, through the non-identity of the work, supports the messianity intention, i.e., the expression of an opening towards something entirely unknown or as Mahnkopf states: "the vision of another world" (Mahnkopf 2004a, 48). To get a glimpse of such attitude, an indicative work is shortly described below.

The Courier's Tragedy for violoncello (C.-S. Mahnkopf, 2001)⁷. The work belongs into the deconstructive compositional strategy and it was written by Mahnkopf following his desire to write a solo piece for the composer-cellist Frank Cox and to integrate it within his poly-work *Hommage à Thomas Pynchon* (Mahnkopf 2004b). The latter is a compound piece for ensemble, solo cello and live electronics, realized as combination of ensemble music, musical theatre and musical installation in one. In this way, the cello piece is both a solo work and a constituent of the poly-work, something that complies with the polyvalent character of the deconstructive form. The process of the compositional production was initially conceived as counter-musical, nonsensical, with a strict adherence to the fictitious play *The Courier's Tragedy* from the shortest of Pynchon's novels, *The Crying of Lot 49*. The syntax, metric, scheme and tempi correspond to the text (Mahnkopf 2004b).

What is immediately impressive from the inspection of the score is the complexity and multidimensionality of the scoring. The first page of the piece score is illustrated in Fig. 2. From there it is deduced that the piece is notated on ten systems (five for the left hand and five for the right hand), with two additional ones for the sounding pitches (piano reduction-like). The left-hand systems correspond to the four strings (I-IV), showing the precise positions and fingerings (fingered pitches, finger-percussion with dynamics, glissandi and left-hand *pizzicato*) and vibrato. The right-hand systems describe the rotation between *arco* and *col legno*, the bowing position between *molto sul tasto* (also behind the left-hand position) and behind the bridge, bowing speed from *molto flautando* to scrunch tone, assignment to the four strings with articulation, dynamics and production mode (bowed, struck, stopped), and general articulation, independently of the four strings.

Deconstructive effects of the internal critique are deduced from the notation, which places the interest not so much upon the sound-result, but on its production mechanism. In addition, the motivic structure is deconstructively deformed even at the notational level, with the notational separation of the two hands and their almost constant asynchronicity at the sounding level. This fosters the polyphonic playing techniques on the cello and modulates accordingly the formal process with a range of different qualities (both at the pitch and rhythm levels with lacunas due to sudden bow-movement interruptions).

Utopia is also evident within the piece, as it gradually exhibits increasing impossibility of playing the cello, especially with the "ultimately irrational overlaying of contradictory, rationalized patten of musical reproduction" (Cox 2000, 83).

Finally, the nature of the cello, as an instrument with a relatively strong body of resonance and extended range, is also exploited as a means for deconstructive treatment of the morphological structures determined by the pitch. This was achieved through the use of multiple playing techniques (e.g., finger-percussion) and the absurd, more visually than sonically actions (like playing behind the left hand), as the mobility of the cellist behind the cello asks for extended performance demands, towards the utopia of the unplayability of the piece (resembling the tragedy of a courier).

für / for Frank Cox
The Courier's Tragedy
 für Violoncello / for violoncello
 (2001)

Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf
 (* 1962)

»Possibilities for paranoias become abundant.«

PROLOGUE *fff*

$\text{♩} = 58$
 $\text{♩} = 184$

Drumming
 Position
 Geschwindigkeit

51
25,5

I
II
III
IV

Vibrato

Figure 2. The first page of *The Courier's Tragedy* for violoncello by C.-S. Mahnkopf (2001) (adapted with permission from the material used at the Compositional Workshop with the composer, Athens Goethe Institute, 13/14-11-2009).

Concluding remarks

The aesthetic shifts from the first- to the second-modernity were approached here, as a carrier for the identification of aspects of contemporary compositional thinking. The evolution in the conception of the role of the medium, work and reflection was identified through the adoption of first- and second-degree of negation, resulting in the current qualities of modernity, i.e., reflection, critique, utopia and messianity. The relation of these traits with the deconstructive compositional strategy equips the latter with a potential to express new practices in the compositional thinking of today.

The orientation to non-identical works that open the boundaries for the expectation of the yet unknown shapes the bed-set of the compositional creation towards the inner essence of music, i.e., the revelation of the truth. If the ongoing realization of the second modernity would be *the* solution or at least *one* solution needs to be proven in the forthcoming future. Effective compositional thinking, however, sustains the motivation for a constant rethinking of the past and appreciation of the present.

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¹ Coherency in the acoustical context arises when acoustical quantities are bound by an order that gives them their identity.

² The manifestation of the aesthetic context is evident through the aesthetic structure where the individual moments of a work must occupy exactly the positions they have and no others.

³ Postmodern music is mostly defined in opposition to modernist music; it favors eclecticism in musical form and musical genre, and often combines characteristics from different genres, or employs jump-cut sectionalization (such as blocks).

⁴ See for example the works of Stockhausen (*Klavierstück XI*), Cage (*Music of Changes*), Xenakis (*Evriali*), Ligeti (*Poème Symphonique*), Maderna, Berio (*Gesti*), and so on.

⁵ Oliver Fahle (Fahle 2005); Peter Ruzicka (Ruzicka 2004) (Ruzicka, who was artistic director of the Salzburger Festspiele at the time, chose "Second Modernity" as the New Music focus of the festival in 2005); Heinrich Klotz (Klotz 1994).

⁶ An example of such transition from utopian to normative situation is Xenakis' first piano work *Herma*, written in 1961, where the pianist Yuji Takahashi seemed to be the only one worldwide who could perform it, due to the extreme difficulty and demanding techniques. This piece that time seemed utopian for most of the pianists; it is the same piece, however, that nowadays is included in the repertoire of many professional pianists. The same analogy could be transferred to the technological aspect involved in music; what is technologically utopian today it becomes almost classical after some years of technological evolution.

⁷ C.-S. Mahnkopf's work *The Courier's Tragedy* for violoncello was commissioned by the Baden-Württemberg Ministry of Science, Research and Arts; Duration: 19'; First performance: 1 March 2003, Baltimore by Frank Cox © Sikorski, Hamburg, score: SIK 8646.