

Interalia: Colliding structures and musical remnants

Interalia, for ensemble, was composed for and presented at the workshops of Centre Acanthes 2010 in Metz, France. In this piece, as in many of my recent works, I avoided considering the ‘material’ to be a pre-defined point of departure for composition, rather taking it as a result of organised sets of possibilities in different levels (‘paradigms’) independent of their final distribution on the time axis (their ‘syntagmatic’ disposition). These paradigms define a number of aspects which, when superimposed, give profile to a musical situation. As these definitions can quite often be seen as contradictory to each other, I consider the result to be a remnant or vestige of these colliding forces moving in different dimensions.

The first aspect to be considered here is the set of possible pulsation ratios, allowing us to define a rhythmic grid that imposes a certain level of contrast between parallel ‘voices’ allocated to different instrumental groups. These pulsations, still to be modified by means of rhythmic profile, were grouped in three basic sets:

1. Regular and quintuplet semiquavers (1/16 and 1/20).
2. Triplet semiquavers and regular demisemiquavers (1/24 and 1/32).
3. Quintuplet and sextuplet demisemiquavers (1/40 and 1/48).

In an attempt to control several components of material definition in an integrated manner, a three-dimensional space was defined in which the correspondent axes determine the following aspects:

- melodic contour (static/mobile);
- rhythmic definition (regular/irregular); and
- articulation (smooth/sharp).

Thus, any portion of music in the piece can be located within the resulting cube, whose corners represent definitions in these three related aspects of musical profile:

	Melodic	Rhythmic	Articulation
000	static	regular	smooth
001	static	regular	sharp
010	static	irregular	smooth
011	static	irregular	sharp
100	mobile	regular	smooth
101	mobile	regular	sharp
110	mobile	irregular	smooth
111	mobile	irregular	sharp

Figure 1: Table of definitions in three dimensions

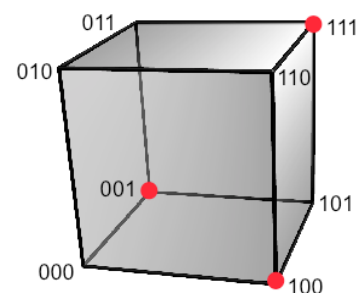


Figure 2: Cube defining profile characteristics of the first fragment of *Interalia*

In the first fragment of the work (see **Figure 3**), the woodwinds are defined at point [111] as melodically mobile, rhythmically irregular and sharply articulated. Brass at [100] are defined as melodically mobile, rhythmically regular and smoothly articulated. The strings group is defined at [001] as being melodically static, rhythmically regular and sharply articulated. This kind of distribution of profile definitions through the instrumental groups is periodically redefined, the pace of these redefinitions being controlled by structures whose detailed explanation would be impractical for the aims of this brief report.

Pitch was organised in tetrachords within the range of a tritone, transposed a semitone up for each adjacent register in order to avoid them octave-mirroring themselves. Two semitones were added at each end of these tetrachords, to produce a hexachord in such a way that notes 1-2 and 5-6 are stable and shared with the hexachord preceding and following, whilst notes 3-4 are variable, giving 'identity' to each group. Quarter tones were added between intervals of a semitone (including 1-2 and 5-6, producing a greater degree of referentiality between registers). Thus, a certain balance can be achieved between stable and changing harmonic content, also allowing the instrumental 'voices' to slightly overlap (see **Figure 4**, below).

Figure 4: The first of nine pitch fields occurring through the work

the original tetrachords are formed by notes 2-5, with 1 and 6 added as links. Pitches in colour indicate the added quarter-tones.

Figure 3: first fragment of *Interlalia*

Interalia is my first attempt at a fragmentary work. This responds to a desire to escape the standardised unitary ten-minute-piece-for-ensemble, and furthermore, defying the ideal of fluency and directional development as aesthetic goals. The piece is therefore constituted of eighteen fragments of different lengths separated by pauses of some four to eight seconds (variable, up to the conductor). This fragmentariness together with the parametric definition of the material, are understood as aiming to avoid a 'narrative-like' unfolding of music, a quest for a music regarded as a collection of glimpses at an object (in this case the object being the 'paradigmatic' universe of set possibilities) from a diversity of angles and perspectives.

In the procedures exposed above and their application in *Interalia*, the manifestation of profound contradictions becomes apparent. Figures defined as rhythmically regular, yet based on changing basic pulsations; an instrumental group that unfolds separately from the general system of profile definition, but is nonetheless fully integrated with the rest in respect to its pitch content; a line of great rhythmic density and diversity though utterly static in its pitch; zones of material condensation finally erased according to a superimposed structure defining presence and absence of instrumental groups. These, among many others, are examples of the contradictory results this way of composing allows one to achieve, which instead of being dismissed as 'defective' reifications of ideal rules, are regarded as generating the necessary tension in order to give birth to a music that aims to shift the focus from certainty to possibility.

Pedro Alvarez is currently enrolled in MPhil/PhD studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London. In 2006 he studied composition privately with James Dillon in London. Previous studies encompassed Master and Licentiate degrees in composition, as well as studies in Philosophy and Viola at Universidad de Chile. A research grant from the same university enabled him to pursue a research residence in Mexico in 2007. His works have been presented in several workshops and seminars across Europe, including Centre Acanthes, Darmstadter Ferienkurse für Neue Musik and Impuls Academy, which have allowed him to work with the Arditti String Quartet, Klangforum Wien, Orchestre National de Lorraine, Ensemble Interface, etc. He has been recipient of several grants and commissions from the Chilean Arts Council.