European Traditions of Solo Multipart Instrumental Music. Terminological Problems and Perspectives

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Abstract

The article deals with terminological issues of *solo multipart instrumental music* and related phenomena, based on a wide definition of multipart texture (*Mehrstimmigkeit*). The theoretical models and terminological solutions considered come not only from European ethnomusicology (folk music research) but also from historical musicology, music theory and psychoacoustics.

The musical textures discussed include so-called *virtual polyphony* (Albert S. Bregman 1990). Special attention is paid to the drone, which is defined in a broad sense (according to German and Austrian research tradition from Erich Moritz von Hornbostel to Rudolf M. Brandl). Therefore I also consider pitch modifications (*movable drone*, *alternating drone*, *harmonically regulated drone*), the relation between drone and ostinato, and temporal modifications (*discontinuous drone* and *drone accents*). A special phenomenon is the *mental drone* (James R. Cowdery) that exists predominantly in the inner perception of a musician. Among the widespread techniques of (solo) multipart music are episodic *chordal accents* and *harmonic foundation*.

The terminological solutions and working definitions and the English translations of existing German terms proposed in this article do not pretend to establish a fixed terminology, but should open an interdisciplinary discussion.

1. Introductory remarks

Vocal multipart music is always a result of group performance and therefore of social interaction. The only possible exception is throat singing. All other types of vocal multipart music making require "the co-presence of at least *two persons, producing deliberately differentiated but coordinated sound sequences*" (Macchiarella 2012: 10). Unlike the human voice, a huge number of musical instruments offer comfortable possibilities for producing different tones simultaneously and therefore for multipart texture.

Such a wide structural-phenomenological definition of multipart texture or *Mehrstimmigkeit* corresponds particularly with the German research tradition with regard to instrumental music. Walter Wiora (1955: 319–321) made a distinction between *Mehrstimmigkeit* in a narrow sense as a "community of different voices" ["Gemeinschaft verschiedener Stimmen"] (ibid.: 321) and in a wider sense, the latter including all possibilities of simultaneous combination of different tones. Not by chance this concept was fruitfully used by Walter Salmen for the analysis of the mul-

tipart instrumental music of medieval minstrels, playing "more than one voice" (Salmen 1957: 18) – in an ensemble but also as soloist musicians. In a similar way Bruno Nettl offered a "broadest possible definition of polyphony, that is, any music in which more than one pitch [...] is going on at one time" (Nettl 1963: 247). As Martin Boiko[1] has mentioned in his fundamental study on the concept and terminology of the drone, Nettl admits that Jaap Kunst's term 'multi-part music' comes closer to this definition than the traditional understanding of 'polyphony' in English-speaking musicology (ibid., cf. Boiko 2000: 20).

This wide definition does not ignore either the significance of the cognitive dimensions of multipart music or its alternative definitions, for instance in Rudolf M. Brandl's concept of *Mehrstimmigkeit*, to be understood not as an umbrella term but as opposed both to *Heterophonie* and *Polyphonie* (Brandl 2005), or in Ignazio Macchiarella's concept of multipart music as an essentially collective activity (see above). At the same time, it seems problematical to exclude from the study of multipart music all instrumental styles based

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[1] Unfortunately, Boiko's online article on the concept of drone is currently not accessible. A republication, particularly in English translation, would be most desirable.