

Spiritual Music: 'positive' negative theology? - Jonathan Harvey

On the whole there is rather little agreement about what spiritual music might be; it is very difficult to prove this or that to be spiritual music. We have to say it is a subjective thing.

And if we try to define the spiritual per se, we end up with what Wittgenstein called a cluster of properties rather than any property in itself. But what one can say is that the most important property of spiritual music, or even perhaps of good music, is that it is ambiguous, or that it is *perceived* as ambiguous. One could also say that only ambiguous music is good; unambiguous music is banal music, or chaotic music. If music has a certain quality of complexity and subtlety - we might even find it in a 'simple' good pop song - then it has something ambiguous. That could probably be proved with some analytical diagrams on manuscript paper. It is quite close to saying that all good music is spiritual. Intriguingly, Stockhausen also, when asked what spiritual music is, recently said "good music". But this needs explaining.

We have first of all to step back to gain greater clarity about the nature of music we like, and ultimately to the nature of consciousness itself: much more difficult.

First the music. The ambiguities of music are everywhere; we have various opposites which are frequently and astonishingly united. For instance, the role of distinctive musical material, an idea, a musical personality very often will start off in a subsidiary role as an accompaniment; a little later it will appear as a principal. Or the other way round; it will start off as a tune, as a subject of importance, then a little later it will become subsidiary in role, it will become an accompaniment to another melody. Such are just two levels of what are actually very many levels of role-importance which the same piece of material possesses. So looking at one instance of that material one will find it intriguingly multi-referential - it reminds of this, that and the other - it's always changing its appearance like a chameleon. As a composer you get your idea, it's moderately interesting, or you may be quite excited about it, but the principal feeling will articulate itself as: "Now I'm going to do things with it; it's going to be hidden, disguised this way, that way, stretched, compressed, higher, lower" - all sorts of transformations which light one up. *Then* it begins to have some degree of substance.

The same could be applied to the musical cell. In an interesting piece a cell plays hundreds of roles in different forms, different rhythms, different configurations. The same cell is highly ambiguous in meaning and has many manifestations, each reminding of the others.

There are also the nested levels of tonality, clarified by the work of Heinrich Schenker and contemporary tonal analysis, the many levels which are on top of each other, or within each other: the big one, which is the whole piece, and the little ones progressively elaborating the detail leading up to the complete foreground. Taking any one moment in a piece in C major, it could be a chord of F# major, that moment of F# major is embedded in a moment of, let's say, B minor, and B minor is embedded in a moment, somewhat larger, of G major, and G major is part of the vast C major. The point is that at that moment of F# major one is conscious of all those levels, otherwise it would almost certainly not be so interesting. One chord can therefore, astonishingly, 'be' in several keys. The listener is perhaps unconscious, or just semi-conscious, of all those levels, but they're all ostensibly and plausibly present, giving the work what we call tonal richness. Tonal richness means many ambiguities, many

levels; it's all of them together. If you subtract any of the levels and, say, make the tonic for the whole piece into F# major, immediately it's a completely different, poorer, less ambiguous meaning for that split second in the middle of the piece.

This can be extended into thoroughgoing bitonality, an extension of the above in time and emphasis; it is obviously an ambiguous feature of much 20th century music.

From the moment in the seventeenth century tonal when syntax becomes firm, chromaticism is nothing if not the delectable slithering away from certainty, the thrilling dissolution of the (false) security, of a fabricated structure. The development in the finale of Mozart's Jupiter symphony sweeps the ground from under our feet. The 'dream' motif from Elgar's *Dream of Gerontius* - which I played on the piano incessantly as a child of eleven, and which remains an archetype - wafts us helplessly into an oneiric eschatology.

Pursuing the ambiguities of tonality, we can consider the idea of the appoggiatura too, the substitution, the F in the C major chord. The fact that the F is not an E is a very important feature of that F; and it's that 'absence which is a presence' which so informs the musical meaning at the moment where there is the F itself and simultaneously a gaping absence of E; this is a kind of ambiguity which is unlike saying "This is a table, but it's not a chair", which isn't very interesting. The F which is not the E is very powerful because the F dynamically 'contains' the expected E in the sense that normal differentiation does not.

And then there are also appoggiatura tonalities, where the whole tonality is a delayed substitute for some tonality that is expected, and a prolonged and distant voyage is experienced through the multivalence of such a meaning.

Dynamics - crescendos and diminuendos - also contain double meanings. In *most* phrases, one could even say, except when they're played on the organ, there are moments when the sound gets both louder and softer at the same time. For example, in a series of phrased-off half-note couplets the second note is always a shade softer as it is off the beat, and the successive on-the-beat notes might make a crescendo to the upcoming downbeat of the next bar. So in each couplet the music gets softer but the whole string of couplets is getting louder - any one second note of a couplet is simultaneously louder and softer (a logical impossibility, yet normal in music). Almost every phrase has ambiguities of this sort. Something depends on your level of perception, your perspective, which can emphasise a partial picture, but *both* levels are actually present in our perception of the full meaning of that note.

Up/down contour is the same. Consider a little triplet figure which falls in steps, yet the triplets rise as a whole, each triplet based on a higher starting point. You have a descending phrase which is rising. Ask of any of those little triplets, is it going up or down, and one has the same ambiguous answer; it is doing both. This is not possible in logic, music is necessarily always the opposite of logic, it destroys the exclusion.

The same with faster and slower, of course. There can be an accelerating harmonic rhythm and a slowing melodic ornamentation simultaneously and one can experience the wonderful sensation that both faster and slower are occurring in one and the same thing. All these ambiguities make for the 'high points' of musical experience.

The analyst can isolate levels, yet, crucially, each level is using the very same notes as every other level, so there is only artificial conceptual isolation, not empirical.

The ambiguity of pattern and onomatopoeia furnishes a more 'aesthetic' example perhaps; from this double meaning we see that music is always itself and something else. The music may be concerned with patterns and repetitions and transformations on a very engrossing level, but it cannot escape the pressure of the question of how it relates to a normal heartbeat. Has it got the excitement of moving faster? Has it got the feeling of a tranquil breathing, some kind of tranquil physiological state? What about the incipient muscular movements I feel? I almost want to dance, I feel a kind of impulse. These are things which are surely present even in the most abstract and pure music we ever listen to; however engrossed in form and pattern we may be, we cannot escape them, and we go backwards and forwards, our awareness experiencing this oscillating flip-flop ambiguity of emphasis wherein they're both always to some extent present.

Interval and material form the same kind of duality. The pure interval we rejoice in, the perfect fifth, the perfect fourth, the beauty of the tuning of intervals, is one side of the inseparable ambiguity; and against that is placed the particular grainy, gutsy voice that is singing them, or the motion of hair sticking on some instrument's strings, the physically astonishing speed of sound-change or whatever the special material nature of the physics of the sound may be. Emphasis flips backwards and forwards between the Pythagorean mathematical purity of music and the materiality of its manifestation; and both are always present, they tangle with each other in a fascinating way.

The identity of timbre - is it a flute, is it an oboe? - this is another ambiguity often exploited by many composers from Berlioz, or more radically from Mahler and Debussy, onward; and when a composer like Lachenmann orchestrates then it becomes extremely ambiguous. With the rise of spectralism and the use of electronics, the transformation of a flute into an oboe and all the spectral stages in between produces a no man's land which is neither, and both. There are many ways in which morphing and changing one thing into another can be seen as a questioning of identity, that the rigid, name-enforced convention, "you are Jill, I am Jack" is blurred, no longer clear. I can turn into you, you can turn into me at a moment's notice. The composer likes that, toys with it. Also the borders between pitch, timbre and harmony are completely ambiguous now, for the same reasons.

In particular because of electronic computer techniques, spatialisation has been developed out of all recognition. The players are on the stage, but the sound is coming from everywhere. There is a kind of dreaming of the ensemble, their thoughts are going out into space. Where are they, really? The space becomes fluid, it becomes questioned.

Another type of ambiguity is the sense of suspending disbelief. For example, if you are at Die Walküre of Wagner and you hear the storm music, you 'believe' in it because the music is very descriptive, very powerful; Wagner wrote it as onomatopoeia, using the energies of scrubbing strings and so on. But one does not therefore reach for one's raincoat. What is this coupling of belief with disbelief? Some would answer right brain with left brain.

Between the banal and the chaotic ambiguity hovers, and makes good music. Our minds don't want the obvious where we can predict everything as clear as boring daylight, and we don't want it too confused either; confused because of complexity in some modern sense or because it's just too shambolic in some amateur sense, the work of some student composer who simply can't make forms with the ideas at all - perhaps there are too many ideas. At a certain point the very complex meets the very simple, neither yields anything.

In this sweet area between the banal and the chaotic lies the area of *statement and dissolution*. Statement means that the ideas are strong; let's consider a first subject, a heroic theme, it's something striking we remember, something which imprints itself on our perception. Then let's imagine the dissolution of that - a blurring, a transformation, a sense that some entity is being questioned, being 'dissolved'. It is often striking. That's why ambiguity within strength is so important: there must be something worth dissolving. If everything is dissolving, nothing is dissolving. But any further explanation can only be started by looking at the nature of consciousness.

What is the consciousness that plays with this experience of ambiguity; and what is the spiritual connection between the consciousness and the ambiguity? The two questions are in fact connected.

In a cognitivist view of mind there's a kind of "society" of small units, or cells, each of which is extremely limited in ability, but which is capable of self-organisation.

In the early years of cognitivism computers would try to model the mind with symbols and rules, that's to say, objects and dictators' orders. But that has evolved into a more self-governing model. These small units - a hundred billion neurons - biological but almost without consciousness, organise themselves by repetitive acts, structural coupling as it has been called, and in their interactions make a pattern, a structure, a neural pathway. It's clear from scanning the brain's activity that in general many parts of the brain are active for any particular function. No one area is for music, it's usually far more complex. There are back and forth resonances between such areas as the sensory activity and the internal setting at the primary cortex. There's an emergence of a global state among the resonating neuronal ensembles.

Francisco Varela, in *The Embodied Mind* (writing with co-authors Evan Thomson and Eleanor Rosch), here explains this organisation of the brain, the pathways, the pattern-findings.

The strategy is to build a cognitive system not by starting with symbols and rules but by starting with simple components that would dynamically connect to each other in dense ways. In this approach, each component operates only in its local environment, so that there is no external agent that, as it were, turns the system's axle. But because of the system's network constitution there's a global cooperation that spontaneously emerges when the states of all participating "neurons" reach a mutually satisfactory state. In such a system, then, there is no need for a central processing unit to guide the entire operation. (You might call that the "self or the soul". There's no need for such a central processing unit to guide the entire operation.) This passage from local rules to global coherence is the heart of what used to be called self-organisation. Today people prefer to speak of emergent or global properties.(1)

An "attractor" notion is produced as a function of a process being fed a very simple component, an equation, which replicates itself many times and after a certain point begins to generate something coherent and complex - a system, a robot, a thing that almost seems to know itself. Brains are, it seems, rather different from what we normally think, according to this 'bottom-up' theory; there is neither a 'me' nor an internal or external commander.

Marvin Minsky wrote about the representation of the brain, which doesn't really have inputs and outputs in the normal sense, it has processes.

Why are these processes so hard to classify? In earlier times we could usually judge machines and processes by how they transformed raw materials into finished products, but it makes no sense to speak of brains as though they manufacture thoughts the way factories make cars. The difference is that brains use processes that change themselves. This means we cannot separate such processes from the products they produce. In particular brains make memories, which change the ways we'll subsequently think. The principle activities of brains are making changes in themselves, the whole idea of self-modifying processes is new to our experience.(2)

As Varela comments:

What is remarkable about this passage is the absence of any notion of representation.(3)

By representation we mean that the mind 'sees' the world and represents it to itself. The world is out there and representation occurs of it, in the mind. But Minsky says nothing about representation, there is an absence of any notion of it.

Minsky does not say that the principal activity of brains is to represent the external world. He says that it is to make continuous self-modifications. What has happened to the notion of representation?

In fact, an important and pervasive shift is beginning to take place in cognitive science under the very influence of it's own research. This shift requires that we move away from the idea of the world as independent and extrinsic, to the idea of a world as inseparable from the structure of these processes of self-modification.(4)

The world is not 'out' there, because we are inseparable from it.

This research recalls what David Hume wrote some 250 years ago, about the failure to find 'himself'.

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.(5)

This is a significant statement in western philosophy. And not only western - but of that more shortly.

Kant added to this the impossibility to find the outer, pre-given world in itself, as that is a possibility only as a mental representation. And the self exists only in a general, transcendental way, which has little to do with our experience.

So, the pre-given world which exists in itself before we observe it, which we are supposed to be representing to our consciousness through the senses, cannot be found in itself. The observer changes or even (partly?) creates the observed.

These twin losses, of self and world, are extreme and disturbing. Many thinkers and most others sneak one or the other back into their thinking: the subject, the self, is studied, then of course it becomes like an object. Or an object is studied and its unobserveability makes it subjectively part of a self.

Absolutism, or naïve realism, on the one hand (how we normally live our lives) is about the existence of the self and the world; and nihilism, on the other hand, is about the terrifying non-existence of either: these are the two positions we must make a choice about. As Nietzsche said, we are in a position where we cannot believe in all the things we value most highly any more. Both positions are strongly present today. Absolutism is normal everywhere and nihilism has coloured much philosophy and art in the last century. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Mallarmé, Samuel Beckett or Marcel Duchamp, for example. Is there nothing in between?

Varela himself believes a new renaissance is happening, not of ancient Greek wisdom this time, but of eastern wisdom and especially of Mahayana Buddhism with its so-called middle way, (Mahdyamika). Nagarjuna, the Indian philosopher, addressed exactly these same questions in the second century AD. Philosophy in Nagarjuna's time was based on awareness, experience and the introspection of prolonged meditation, rather than anything equivalent to the objectivity of computer-aided modelling. Let me quote a modern Tibetan monk, Tsultrim Gyatso explaining this search for the self. His tradition is firmly based on Nagarjuna.

To have any meaning such a self has to be lasting, for if it perished every moment one would not be concerned about what was going to happen to it the next moment; it would not be one's "self" any more. Again, it has to be single. If one had no separate identity why should worry about what happened to one's "self" any more than one worried about anyone else's? It has to be independent or there would be no sense in saying "I did this" or "I have that." If one had no independent existence there would be no-one to claim the actions and experiences as his own... We all act as if we had lasting, separate, and independent selves that it is our constant preoccupation to protect and foster. It is an unthinking habit that most of us would normally be most unlikely to question or explain. However, all our suffering is associated with this pre-occupation, all loss and gain, pleasure and pain arise because we identify so closely with this vague feeling of selfness that we have. We are emotionally involved with and attached to this "self" that we take for granted.... The meditator does not speculate about this "self." He does not have theories about whether it does or does not exist. Instead he just trains himself to watch... how his mind clings to the idea of self and "mine" and how all his sufferings arise from this attachment. At the same time he looks carefully for that self. He tries to isolate it from all his other experiences. Since it is the culprit as far as all his suffering is concerned, he wants to find it and identify it. The irony is that however much he tries, he does not find anything that corresponds to the self.(7)

Anyone who has meditated, tried to still the mind, guiding the mind to mindfulness and awareness, knows that it's extremely difficult, but possible. The mind is like a very lively horse, or like a hyper-active monkey - many are the Buddhist images.

The recognition of (illusory) self-grasping's connection to dissatisfaction and disquiet is important. To realise that on any constant basis is to achieve a sort of liberation. If freewill *can* be understood, it surely has something to do with this process of release.

Likewise Buddhist philosophy disposes of the outer world, nothing there has inherent existence from its own side, only in mind. It exists, but not in the way we normally think.

Everything has co-dependent origination, which means it 'emerges' in conjunction with a complex web of cause and effect; we're all tied up in this web, it's too complex to understand, but everything is coupled and arises together just as, in Varela's structural coupling, the little cells interact with each other and through an attraction achieve a kind of an entity of some sort, a form. Co-dependent origination - everything originates in that way, a

mass of little causes and effects. Nothing just is as an isolated independent unit. The bee and the flower are structurally coupled, they affect and need each other, like our brain cells.

Thus everything has been and is constantly changing, re-forming, impermanent - even before the gas and stardust of our own particular 'origins'. To grasp with too much attachment at objects with their stuck-on names is as illusory as self-grasping is, and brings as much disappointment.

So world and self, we see with either relief or anxiety have both gone into the dustbin.

However, there is the liberating middle way. It holds together both this absolutist world of realism we live by most of the time and the nihilism of non-existence by emphasising *experience*, not by saying what things are. This would be illusory.

Conventional reality and fundamental reality are terms often used to distinguish but not separate within this field - the conventional is the one we know; the fundamental is the one we see lying beneath it, permeating it. And artists try to fuse them. The master Buddhist lives on both levels simultaneously, ambiguously. By practicing mindfulness we can achieve that. It's not easy. But it's important to begin.

Why? Because the dangers of self-grasping are glaringly obvious: social self-serving, corrupt tribalism and racialism of all types, ecological greed, hoarding, and indifference, for example. The cry of peoples around the world for release is as widespread as it is heart-rending.

Equally crucial is the result of 'realising emptiness', as this view of the world is somewhat misleadingly called. The tranquillity and clarity of the resulting mind so acquired breathes warmth. It's not an empty emptiness, it's an emptiness, which becomes full. One can't say what of, because that would be going into duality. According to the tradition of masters and to personal experience, what is expressible about these things is that there is a warmth that arises, a tranquil warmth, an unconditional affection, even love. With it flows compassion for the other, whether it's a person or animal or generally for the world - an unconditional love like a mother's, which derives from the fact that the self/other unity has completely eliminated conflict, rivalry or selfish possessiveness.

This arises almost automatically and is absolutely primary to Mahayana Buddhist thought, in which emptiness and compassion are equally fundamental.

From this mind springs healing insight of the sort such unusual people as Rudolph Steiner attained with his clairvoyance, and recently Barbara Brennan, the American NASA scientist, a well-trained physicist, who turned to developing herself as a leading healer observing the structure of the aura in intricate detail. She illustrates this meticulously in her books.(8) These are examples of Varela's "embodied actions". We almost seem to be looking at the mind. *The Embodied Mind*, the title of his book, 'materialises' mind, but in a non-reductive way. There are traces of experience in neural pathways, *visible* facets of the inner world (mind) in the outer world (body). In fact inner and outer lose all meaning in such instances.

Vajrayana Buddhism, which I practice myself, described these things in great detail over 1000 years ago.

How, finally, does all this relate to music?
It relates to all the arts, but with music the match is closest, I find.

Music makes strong statements - themes, ideas, gestures, textures - and audibly dissolves them, rearranging the 88 notes in a motion of almost infinite flux. The joy of composing lies in the dissolving of strong ideas; one must have both form and emptiness. Composing is like meditation. One should, in a certain Buddhist practice, fixate on an object of meditation, perhaps it's the I. And it's only when it is fixed, very clearly, very sharply - what this 'me' is doing at that point when I'm indignant, for example - that one can begin. I must think about when I was last indignant, insulted, embarrassed, my 'self' exposed - one must be able to visualise it very, very clearly. Then one can begin to try to understand how it has no reality, it is an invention; you can only dissolve it once you have it stated. It's exactly the same in music. A whole string of variations with no theme has little meaning; one needs the theme. The 'reality', the theme-personality, must be like a big ego before the fact that it's kidding itself is made blatantly, beautifully clear. Macbeth's or Lear's insightful transformations would not be so enthralling if they had not been powerfully larger-than-life characters to start with.

Music's ambiguities de-solidify reality, mirroring the discovery that objects and concepts are illusory. So music's function is a kind of mirroring. For me this is the mystery of music - what music is. Why is it so endlessly fascinating? When I began to think about Buddhist philosophy, quite late in my compositional career, it dawned on me that it is music's activity of imitating the mind which constitutes its fascination. One sees in music the 'play' of mind, the veil of maya and its unveiling.

We live music as *experience* not only as an object, but as experience in fluctuating time. We catch forms, yes, forms precise and objective-seeming; but they're fluctuating, they're in memory, they're beautiful but fragile, they crumble and they reform themselves with time. Yet time too is sensed to have no inherent existence for its own sake, from its own side.

We sense ourselves projecting time onto the music - together with our emotions, our passions, our epiphanic dances, struggles and fears; and all these projections are dissolved in the play of the 88 notes, ultimately. We see through them, we know they're not real. Our emotions are woven out of ambiguity. We change when we listen, and we change the music each time we listen. Observer and observed are linked, like the structural coupling of brain cells. Neurons are the bearers of karma, the predilections, inclinations, habits, obsessions, addictions, 'attractors' we all carry through our lives and perhaps from life to life. Our biology determines what we receive of the music, and over time the music changes our biology. The neat segmentations of musical statements are dissolved in the blurred borders created by variations and transformations.

Hitherto only pure music has been the subject of discussion in this article, not music with text or other associated components having referential meanings. In my own music, though, there are often links to these exterior elements, a Buddhist text or theme. Naturally these links are emphatically expressive of my joy at participating in the liberation which music is, in the liberation of what could somewhat paradoxically be called positive 'negative theology'. Indeed a somewhat arcane category for music might well be 'positive' negative theology. But let us be more specific, and illustrate, in the avowed intention of one composer, what is supposed to be going on.

My three operas, like many modern operas - Birtwistle's, for example - have a strong element of ritual entrainment, ancient in origin and powerful in neurological interconnectedness. Mari Riess Jones, for instance, has done fascinating research showing that neurons oscillate in synchrony with musical rhythms (8). Iain Morley cites Rappaport on ritual: "Unison does not merely symbolize that [larger] order but *indicates* it and its acceptance. The participants do not simply *communicate* to each other *about* that order but *commune* with each other *within* it." (9)

This is literally true in *Passion and Resurrection* (1981), which rises from the mass, whose text is quoted at the beginning and end, because there are sung audience responses. Jesus commanded at the last supper: "Do this in remembrance of me". Points of maximum ritual entrainment in *Passion and Resurrection* are reached in the three great traditional plainsong hymns, in which the audience (or congregation, more strictly) joins, while seeing before them a tableau of the words' significance on the 'stage'. Of course it is possible and meaningful to trace the mass back to even more ancient ritual lineages, Hebrew and Greek.

The work is intended for a sacred space, and was commissioned by Winchester cathedral, home of the tenth century Bishop Ethelwold's pioneering work with latin liturgical drama, the West's first 'operas'. Such dramas also folded out of the mass, often replacing the reading of the gospel with a vivid ritual of music and drama.

In my second opera, *Inquest of Love* (1992), the phrase of final resolution – 'O love-filled light! O healing love!' - is repeated nine times in rhythmic unison by the entire cast and orchestra in an incandescent meltdown of all argumentative discourse.

In *Wagner Dream* (2006) likewise, there is another, but gentler, climactic entrainment. The tortured heroine, Prakriti, accepts a life of joyful renunciation as a Buddhist nun, rather than the death of dark glory typical of Wagner's heroines. At her acceptance all sing the simple unchanging mantra OM MANI PÄME HUM sixteen times, echoing a ritual at least as old and mysterious as Buddha Shakyamuni himself. Mantras are considered equally significant as speech and sound, and have multiple meaning, floating ambiguously somewhere between music and discursive thought.

'Floating intentionality' (10) is at the heart of another mantric work - *Messages for chorus and orchestra* (2007). The text consists only of angels' names, sung in homophony using a very slow in-out breathing rhythm. These names, intoned in an almost superhuman tranquillity, evoke some ontological-epistemological ambiguities. One could hear them as being sung either by humans invoking angels, or angels invoking God arrayed in a Fra Angelico-like heavenly choir. Most listeners, I gather, float between these intentions at different moments. Attached to this is a second more fundamental ontological ambiguity as to whether angels actually exist. Or rather, in what borderland of consciousness? Music, in its unique power, can expose our 'double standards': one half of the brain is grown-up and dismisses them rudely, the other half bears them affection and secretly believes.

If names are a rich source of floating ambiguity, the prosody of speech is even more so. Listening to the emotional 'meaning' of languages that are incomprehensible to us, hearing the babbling proto-speech of infants, imagining Steven Mithen's 'Hmmm', the ancient musical signalling sounds that came before 'real' syntactic speech - this powerful field of expression is, as Mithen claims, at the root of music's origins. (11) He claims these sounds were holistic (not constituted by grammatical sub-elements), multi-modal (involving

gestures and other communicative devices), mimetic (imitating the energy of the thing described) and musical (fixed pitch, contour and rhythm designators).

Taking up traces of this ancient tradition, my work *Speakings*, for orchestra treated electronically (2008), has the orchestra play speech-like sentences drawn from computer analyses of the melodic line traced by men and women talking happily, angrily, poetically, crudely, etc. These purely prosodic lines, which have no semantic meaning, then undergo a further treatment. Via microphones these lines are fed into the computer which imposes a filtering structure on them; this is relayed into the loudspeakers in the concert hall sounding simultaneously with the original orchestral line. The filtering is determined by data analysed from speech recordings. So, for example, we hear an angry woman's quick vowel and consonant patterns shaping the orchestral line. No words can be understood. One hears just the expressivity, rhythm and colour of speech mingled with orchestral sound. Audiences hear various things - an exciting social gathering, a madhouse of human chatter, a comedy or an uncanny threat.

The work is part of a Buddhist trilogy on the purification of body, speech and mind. It is, *inter alia*, a quest for 'pure mind' the mind of peace, free from delusions. *Speakings* progresses from the condition described above through mantras intoned by this 'speaking orchestra' to a 'transcendental' hymn music still coloured by the flickering vowel changes, and ultimately to silence coloured only by the baby sounds with which the work began. It is a meditation on the origins of music and language, and where that can take us.

Space does not permit more than a mention of such explorations of ambiguity as the *Bird Concerto with Pianosong* (2001), where the 'pathetic fallacy' that birds are musicians is highlighted by actual sounding birdsong being changed seamlessly into instrumental song, played by oboe or violin; there is no point at which one stops and the other starts. This is effected by computer electronics, which unites all fields in the play of the digital.

Or the *Fourth String Quartet* (2003), where well-defined music is electronically dissolved into almost inaudible shadowy ghosts flying immaterially around the hall at the end of each of the 'cycles'. An image perhaps of Buddhist cyclic existence, *bardo*, karma and reincarnation. Dissolved substance ('emptiness') achieves an unignorable presence in the concert hall.

All these, like most of my works, are attempts to (dis)locate the spirituality of music, which, as Marcel Corbussen has written, 'means to leave places, infinitely exploring (inter)territories, always dynamic, always on the move. Therefore spirituality has to be found between places, in the 'in between'. Like the nomad.' (12)

Footnotes

1. Francisco Varela, Evan Thomson and Eleanor Rosch; *The Embodied Mind*. MIT Press, 1991. P.88
2. Marvin Minsky; *The Society of Mind*. Simon and Schuster, N.Y. 1987. p.287
3. Varela et al.; p. 139
4. Varela et al.; p.139
5. David Hume; *A Treatise on Human Nature*, 1, VI, iv.
6. Tsultrim Gyatso; *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*, trans. Shenpen Hookham. New Marston, Oxford: Longchen Foundation, 1986. P.20-21
7. e.g. Barbara Brennan; *Light Emerging*, Bantam Books, 1993

8. Jones, M.R. Musical Time. In the Oxford Handbook of Musical Psychology. Eds: Hallam. S., Cross, I., Thaut. M. OUP Oxford UK. 2008
9. Rappaport, R. Ritual and religion in the Making of Humanity. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. 1999. P.220
10. The term is Ian Cross's.
11. Mithen, S.J. The Singing Neanderthals: the Origins of Music, Language, Body and Mind. London: Orion. 2005
12. Corbussen, M., Thresholds:Rethinking Spirituality Through Music. Ashgate, 2008. P.77

March 2010