

“Finding a way to compose in a globalised world”
(Hong Kong, March 2008)

If we want to talk about globalisation and how to find a way to compose in a globalized world – what do we need? We need a globe.

Thinking of globalisation is not possible without the image of the earth as a ball running around the sun, making clear that there is in a double sense no centre: no centre on earth, because a ball has no centre on its surface and the earth itself is not the centre of the world, because it is like other planets circling around the sun, which is also only a very little star in a part of a system of systems. Or - like the French philosopher Alain Badiou says – an endlessness of endlessnesses.

I want to show you a map. 400 years ago the Jesuit Father Matteo Ricci produced a world map, which was copied in the same time (1602) during the Qing-Dynasty in China and it is the first example of a western style map with Chinese names and with latitudes and longitudes. Short time after Europe found out, that the world is not flat, the Chinese also had to realize, that China is not the centre and that there is a new and until then unknown continent called America.

100 years later and 300 years ago the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was one of the first to imagine a global culture. He was very much interested in China and Chinese culture and in his work “Novissima Sinica” (1697) he describes that the most developed cultures on earth are placed at the most extreme points of the Eurasian continent: China and Europe. We should not forget that in this time America was just a European colony and nobody could imagine an American culture.

Leibniz developed the idea of a World Academy of Sciences where Chinese and European scientists should work. He read as much translations of Chinese texts as he could and he was very much interested in Chinese language and writing. A really surprising detail is that Leibniz, after reading about the ideas of the legendary Chinese Emperor Fu Hi about the I Ging, developed the binary number system, which is now the basis of all number operations in computers. And it is for me as a composer not surprising, that the last book, that Johann Sebastian Bach read before he died, was not the bible - it was a book of Leibniz.

These little examples may show that if we talk about globalisation we should not forget that there is a wide history behind globalisation and that it did not just fall down on earth.

Unfortunately a globalised world – and unfortunately this is also true for the first global political movement in human history, for communism - does not mean

that everybody in this world is in the same situation or has the same chances. Our world is connected by the internet and we have planes and ships that bring people and things to every place in the world. But some people still even don't have electricity where they could plug in their computer (if they have one or if they already had the chance to know that it exists) and they don't have enough money to travel from A to B.

But globalisation is not only a question of money. The world is full of many *asymmetries* between cultures and there are many ways how different cultures can get in contact. Some keywords, that you know for sure, are: exclusion, imitation, accommodation, assimilation, syncretism (mixing cultures) and hybrid cultures.

And we can see other aspects. It is important, if the cultures are on the same level or not when they meet. This is very often but not only a question of power: it very much depends of the inner constitution of each culture. In addition it is also relevant, if there is a real adaption between cultures or if it only "looks like" an adaptation. We find this in what I would call the "democracy game", when countries have elections, parliaments and parties, but their existence does not mean anything for the political reality. And, as we know, the existence of parliaments etc. in so called democratic countries also is not a guarantee for democracy. Another question is, if there is a weak or strong tendency to adopt or to accept each other and if the culture exchange takes place in the periphery, at the border (like in Hong Kong) or in the centre of a country or a governmental structure.

And last but not least it is important, if there is an accepting, friendly or a refusing, xenophobic reaction; if cultures live in segregation, that means living together with few or even without any exchange, a situation which is taking place most of the time in different social layers, or if there is a "creolisation", a mixture of cultures with the creation of a new culture.

Many of these aspects are part of daily life here in Hong Kong; they constitute the character of Hong Kong as I see the city since the short time I am here. And of course all of them are very important for a globalized world. But there are other upcoming factors which are - maybe in the same way or even more - important. As I pointed out there is a difference between cultures in centres, peripheries and borders. I think this is very important, because for the first time in human history nowadays more people live in big cities than on the countryside. A new city-culture is growing and very often, especially like here in Hong Kong and maybe soon in the whole Pearl River Delta, it becomes a mega-city culture, which is in a certain sense becoming more and more independent from a special surrounding land. In this sense it is no longer important that this city is at the south top of China and that it is a characteristic

mix of Cantonese and British culture. For a mega-city it is only necessary, that there is a surrounding land, which produces all the products the mega-city needs. These products might have a local touch, but – as Michael Müller-Verweyen pointed out – if I want to have the choice between five different kinds of “Knäckebröt”, which is for sure not Cantonese food, it is indeed possible to find them here. This type of cities creates a worldwide culture with all the names we know: McDonalds, Louis Vuitton and Chanel are everywhere and you can find the same hamburgers, bags and perfumes in Dubai, Istanbul, Johannesburg and the Pearl River Delta. The difference is not between the Chinese city and the Chinese land it is the difference between global city and local land.

The city of Hongkong strongly feels these aspects; please let me quote a short text from the “Refabricating City”-exhibition about architecture last week in the Old Police Station: “We are now all Central! Hong Kong as a unique concept of urbanism, is currently in the frontline of conflict and integration from the view of both global and local political, economic, cultural agenda. The tension revealed from this process is apparently and gradually transforming the city in both morphological and metaphysical way. Fragmentation of urban space, degeneration of cultural diversity and other homogenizing and oversimplifying trends make “Freedom” a luxury in the city. When the city is viewed as a reflection of irrational prosperity, arbitrary judgement, and insulation of opportunity, then it comes a stage for an alternative show. Central is an extreme urban fabric etched by enormous capital flows. It is gradually being shaped into an urban isolated island, hardly to be intimate and lack of spiritual quality. Ironically, this area is the city’s mostly presented urban-image.”

The situation in mega-cities is – in certain aspects – an extremely exclusive situation: We can find high qualified, hard working minorities in hermetic glass buildings, living in apartments and bungalows in security areas with private guards taking care of the tennis court and golf yard. Their children studying in universities abroad with closed campuses, which cost a lot of money. For this part of the society, the international community, social service is not necessary and no longer social in the words sense, because the rich pay only for their own social service. They don’t have insurances, because they don’t need them. And this part of the society is online, that means, it is not (!) part of the whole society: people online communicate around the world and create their own community, but they only communicate with people on the same level. The difference between the word “society” and the word “community” is explaining itself.

On the other hand, in the lower layers or outside the city, in the *banlieue*, we find the majority of poor, again, but for other reasons, without social insurance and – as I already pointed out - most of them without internet and very often even without electricity.

But the mega-cities offer also a lot of chances to get in contact with other cultures and especially to develop a new culture - what is not as easy as it sounds.

When we discuss about the question what it means to compose in a globalised world and in a world, where different cultures more and more assimilate, we should not have too many illusions and we should not underestimate the influence of the social aspect in our musical thinking. One could see a very rude effect of this fact at the Hong Kong Artwalk: in some galleries we could see pictures of suffering poor Chinese people on the walls, painted by less suffering young Chinese artists, but the gallery was only filled up with non Chinese people (like me), because the tickets for the Artwalk were too expensive for poor Chinese people.

And we should keep in mind that a globalized world has also a strong tendency to become a world of the simple present without tradition. This is for sure a very important aspect for us composers. If only the present remains, if the present is *attacking* the past and the future, we can only *pretend* to have traditions, like the art deco-posters in the “French restaurant” in my hotel, and we can imagine future only as the *makeable things* we can do right now in this moment.

It seems to me and I fear that the way we use the word *tradition* is very often just the attempt to escape from our reality. But on the other hand, I have to admit, that I am no longer sure what it means to say: “my own tradition, my own culture”. I personally prefer the word *heritage* and I am very happy, that the times are over when people exactly knew what *tradition* is.

Globalisation is ambivalent and – in *good German tradition* – I pointed out the negative side much more than the positive. But the reason why I am here and why I can talk to you about globalisation and composing in a global world is globalisation.

I don't want to present simple solutions here how a composer could react in his music in this new situation; I think it is much better to discuss about that after. And of course I think that there is not only one way to find for composing in a globalized world. But I would like to show you at least one possible way, a way how we can think, how we as composers - but also everybody - could react on the present situation. In culture history people very often say that music is *late* in the sense, that new cultural developments are first reflected in art and literature and only in the end, some years later, in music. Although and because music is very much related to mathematics, music is deeply instinctive and sensitive and therefore sometimes reacting slowly and conservative. One may say that music is late but I would say music is in a good sense *anachronistic*. *Anachronistic* means for me to be in many possible ways in an opposite or a distant position to

the present time. That does not mean to be against the present time, please be careful and don't mix up *anachronistic* with *anarchic*.

To make more clear what I mean, I would like to give two examples, which you may know: the music and theatre piece "Tears of Barren Hill" of Danny Yung here in Hong Kong three weeks ago is one example how anachronistic elements (in his piece video, Chinese Opera, Bachs music, transformed in an anachronistic way, and a minimalist scenery) can create something very new. Another example is the work of Liu Sola, who brings together Chinese music with Blues and Jazz and at least also classic contemporary music. Interesting for me in her work is that she is not only a composer; she is also a writer, and an excellent performer. She is not only a composer waiting for her music to be played, she is part of it and she can feel all the frictions between text, music and scenery in a direct way. I would like to recommend her work also, because it shows one possibility to avoid academism in contemporary music.

I think being *anachronistic* is a good way not to get absorbed by a world just concentrated on the present, a world which unfortunately prefers *canned food* and also *canned art*. Global culture tends to understand scientific and economic progress as an automatism in science and production, in which only the question *How* the progress can be realized is important. But art and humanities have to ask a different question: they have to ask *Why* something is taking place. This question disturbs automatic progress (like sand in the engine), it is *anachronistic* in the sense that it slows down the production (and no illusions please: art is part of global production). I want to call this position an *offensive anachronism*, which is not only arguing from the past, from the side of the *tradition* against the present; it can also argue from another, a parallel present, from an image of the future, from a general point, from a point outside of time etc.

And there is a very human aspect: Music is composed, played and listened to by people. It is also an *anachronistic* aspect of us as human beings that we are or that we have *a body and a personality*. The problem with us and maybe the problems solution is simply, that we cannot become *a global body or personality*. Although there is the internet, I have to accept, that I was born with *this* body and I will die with *this* body. And, although there is so-called canned music everywhere, the best music is still life music played and listened to by real bodies and personalities.

Coming back to Matteo Ricci I want to show, that we are not yet completely globalized: if you watch television in different places in the world you can see that we still dream of being the centre of the world. The Chinese Matteo Ricci map shows China in the middle, European Television shows Europe in the middle, Japanese Japan, American America etc. And our instinct still tells us, that in the morning the sun is rising (and not the earth is descending) - and I

think the instinct is not completely wrong, because scientific descriptions and explications are, like music, only descriptions and explications of certain aspects of the world. They are part, or better to say translations, but they are not the world.

Again coming back to Matteo Ricci, I ask myself: what is a *Map*? For me the Chinese Matteo Ricci map looks like a score of music, it is a score but it is not the music, and music is not the world.

And I ask myself: is this map showing the *past*, the *present* or the *future*?

The map itself of course is part of the past, because an internet connected world believes, that it does not need geography in this sense any more.

Of course the map does not show the present – neither the present of Matteo Riccis time nor our present time. Anyway the present is the worst “observer position” to talk about culture, because we are part of it (we are the frog in the well with no idea of the sea). We are deep inside without a real chance to see what is going on and there is no observer position above the present (because we are not in the situation of a god).

In fact and surprisingly the Chinese Matteo Ricci map shows us the future, at least a possible future of Matteo Riccis present, because the world that it presents never existed in this way. In his time a lot of the details on the map simply had to be invented, because nobody really knew the geographic details. Matteo Riccis map is, with a strong relation to the world, a translation or an invention of the world how it *might* be.

The most shocking contrary to our map is the one invented by Jorge Louis Borges, which has exactly the same size as the land, which it describes, because it absolutely wants to map all its details.

But our map is *open*, open for our imagination and interpretation and it shows us that there is no future without the past, no past without the future and that we have much more possibilities how we can think and compose in our time. Our map is – like music in general - *anachronistic and inventive* in the same time.