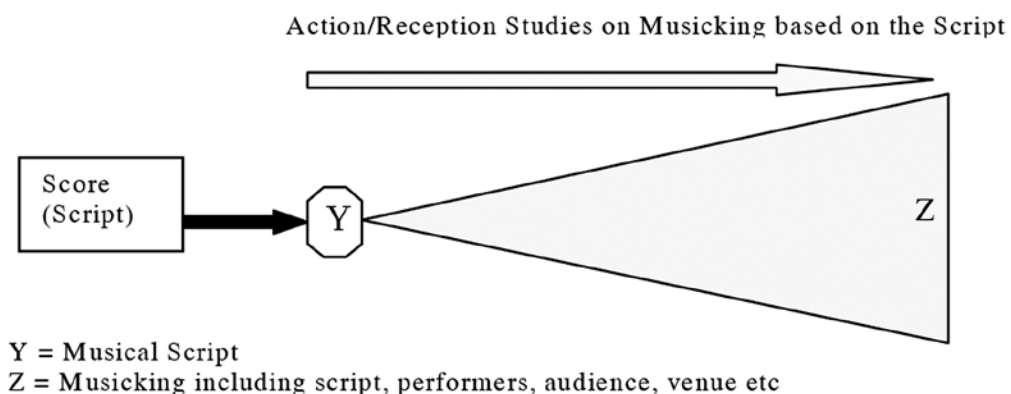


Composition as Musicking: Habitus, Agency and Composer Construction/Re-construction of Social Reality

Western art music is a literate tradition; its study focused on literacy, developing philologically. A prime detractor of this has been the separation of its social nature and institution of an ardent individualism and impenetrable mysticism around its creative processes. Consider the mythology surrounding Beethoven as proto-typical creative genius and cultural icon in light of DeNora's (1995) *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius: Musical Politics in Vienna, 1792–1803*, or what Busoni expressed in 'Theory of Orchestration' (1905), 'The Future of Opera' (1913), 'The Oneness of Music' (1921). Schönberg, ever reminded of public reaction to his music wrote 'My Public' (1930) and there is Babbitt's famous essay, 'Who Cares if You Listen' (1958). Obviously social interaction is integral to what composers do, let us consider this importance.

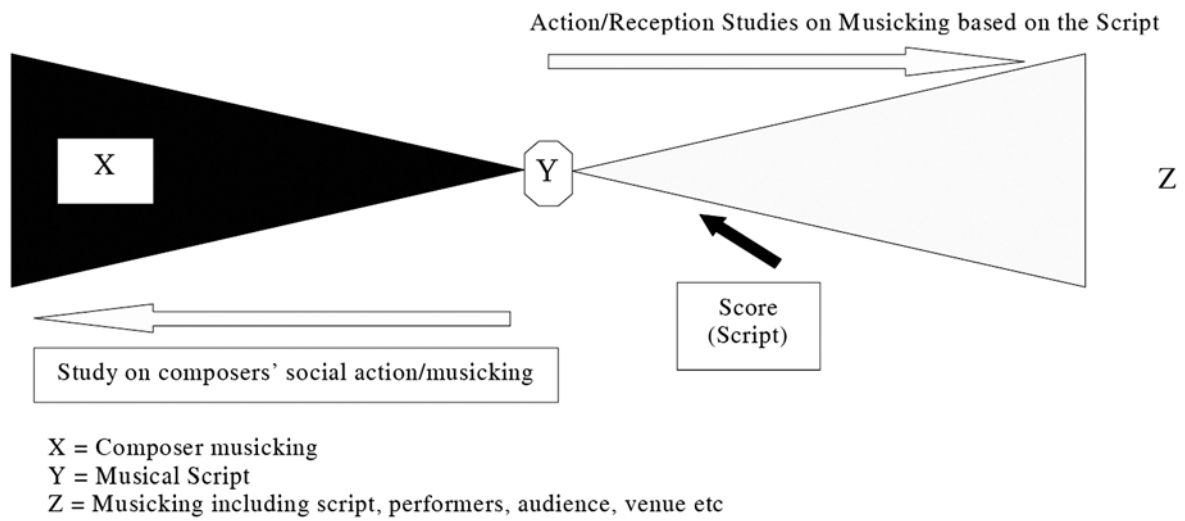
Christopher Small (1998) brought the idea of musicking to the fore, situating music as an act, not a thing; defining it in its performative process not in the score. Nicholas Cook (2003) tackled this issue in his article 'Music as Performance'. Cook showed how a text based approach situates music as belonging to appropriate written material, not as sonic manifestation in real time. Using ideas from theater studies he moved from philology focused musicology to performance focused musicology where music includes its social context; where the score is only one part of the overall event joined by the sonic world it appropriates and the social context in which it is performed. Cook pulls this together with the idea of musical 'script', a term affording discourse about the serial plan for real-time social interactions (206). According to Cook the best approach is to study the action and reception of music, understanding it as a social phenomenon. Cook considers how performing musicians *music[k]* with a script. The process is then the actuation of a composer(s)'s/arranger(s)'s pre-extant set of instructions through social activity. Graphically represented we can consider the direction of the study:

Figure 1



This idea of reception studies has garnered much interest and has proved most useful. What it does not study is how the script came to be? What if we look at the composer as social actor in a similar way as action/reception studies look at the performance as social action (see DeNora, 2002)? How did the composer musick to create the script and how is this musicking, the compositional process, mediating society? This would mean conceptually cloning a mirror image of the above diagram:

Figure 2



The compositional process has long been steeped in mysticism, dependent on romantic discourse. Jason Toynbee discerns three main elements of this concept; the creative process is solipsistic, creation is in many respects involuntary, composition occurs in stages from new idea to definite form (2003, pp. 103–104). Surrounding this is the idea of creator/genius existing on some higher plane or the receiver of divine intervention.

This view of the creative process, and the individual engaged in it, places composers outside the realm of the social world, ideology antithetical to reality as we are all born into society. I suggest we turn to the sociologists Giddens, Bourdieu and Becker, to consider the composer as social actor, or more broadly, social agent. We are all social agents – having the potential to act. When we act as social agents we are both producing and re-producing action, and doing so through shared or 'mutual' meanings. Social action is, even if unintentionally, recursive (Giddens, 1984, p. 2). Consider the case of language. As we speak or write in a grammatically correct way we are both acting socially by communicating and also reproducing and substantiating our language – maintaining social continuity. Music is much the same way. As a composer writes in a certain way he or she is both producing and reproducing social action. The way in which he/she writes reproduces the traditions of composition from their experience but also has the potential to transform those experiences and traditions into something novel, original. This recursive nature of action which supports social continuity, in the Durkheimian sense, is both constraining and enabling. It gives us a framework on which to work, to perceive reality, but also provides the tools for elaboration and innovation. As social agents we are also reflexive in our knowledge. We continuously survey our own social realities in reference to our actions and we expect that others do this too. Not only do we survey actions but we survey physical and social aspects of the contexts in which we act (Giddens, 1984, pp. 3–5). Very crudely then, we are all social agents with the potential for action. As we enact that potential in time and space through social interaction we continuously survey our actions and their results and are working from the premise that everyone else does so. In addition to the activity of ourselves and those around us we consider the physical and social aspects of the contexts in which we operate and through action we intentionally or unintentionally re-create continuity and structure.

Pierre Bourdieu, well known for his theory of *habitus*, which I will come to, has illuminated, as pointed out in Anthony King's 'Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A Practical Critique of the Habitus' (2000), the idea of practical action by social agents, what King calls 'practical theory'. King picks up on Bourdieu's idea of individuals being *virtuosic social agents* (Bourdieu, 1986). Social agents, at this point in Bourdieu's thinking, are not dominated by abstract, objective

social principles, as can be seen in Giddens structuration theory and Bourdieu's own habitus. Rather, because they understand their social realities, their *scripts* – note the similarity with Cook, they are able to make changes, improvise and elaborate on the script. In this 'practical theory' judgment falls not on how well an individual follows pre-extant rules, but on how appropriate an agent's actions are perceived by those with whom he/she acts, in a negotiation based on shared or 'mutual' knowledge. This is subjective judgment in a temporary manner, not something eternally fixed. It is these temporary negotiations that allow for "'fuzziness'" – change. Since individuals are embedded in society from birth and everything they learn comes from other social agents, all actions are social actions. Bringing this together we can conceptualize our actions as part of a repertoire operational in a cultural horizon. The borders of the horizon are 'fuzzy' and as our life careers progress the horizon in which we work moves, it is not objective and fixed (King, 2000, pp. 419–421). For composers the progression of life careers is all important for stylistic characteristics. Each individual is going to have, to a lesser or greater degree, a unique life career of social interaction. From birth no two people will have the same set of social interactions as any other person. This affects our repertoire of social actions and makes each fuzzy horizon unique.

Turning now to Bourdieu's notion of habitus – simply put it is all those things that make up an individual's social world from socio-economic reality to beliefs to dispositions of all sorts which comprise shared knowledge between individuals in a wider social context. Bourdieu claims:

'The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce the habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representation' (1990, p. 53, quoted from King, 2000, p. 423).

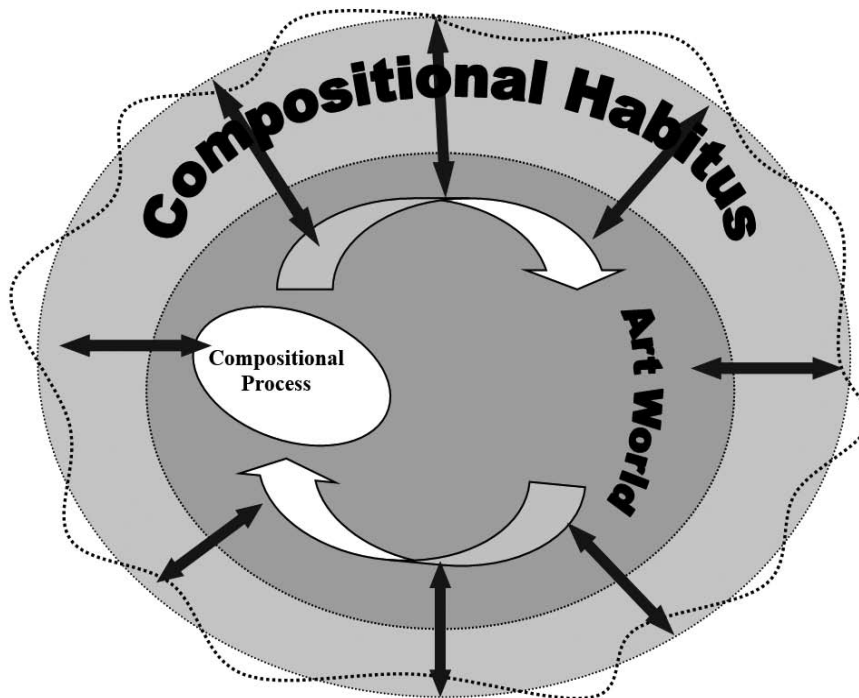
However, as King and other theorists have noted, if habitus is considered to be a fixed set of pre-extant 'structuring structures' imposed on individuals, where agents are acting according to a very defined manner of social interaction, social change, which we know exists, cannot happen and a large part of the subjective nature of social interaction included in virtuosic action in temporal space gives way to mechanical objectivity (King, 2000, p. 427). The habitus, which again provides a framework for action, must maintain the idea of 'fuzziness' from the 'practical theory'. If we come to an understanding that as individuals rooted in society from birth conditioned by our experiences, we can come to the idea that as we move through our life's career our habitus, or horizon, has the potential with each social interaction to shift or expand. I would go further and say that embedded in the notion of habitus is the desire to transform it, to elaborate, to improvise – a *transformational imperative*. Giving due diligence to social theorists I suggest we look at Bourdieu's notion of habitus in a smaller context. For our purposes here I will theorize with the notion of a micro-habitus – the *compositional habitus*. Within the world of western art music composers the *compositional habitus* is individually distinct via unique career paths but including shared knowledge, constituted from tonality, various formulaic constructs, performing traditions, etc., all of which are learned experientially by composers as they expand the fuzzy horizons of their particular compositional habitus through a *transformational imperative*. The compositional habitus is in no way fixed or, in light of structuration theory, part of a functional dualism.

Bourdieu's habitus links very well with Howard Becker's idea of 'Art Worlds' (1982). Becker defines an art world as '[t]he network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for' (1982, p. x). There is obviously a strong similarity and some might say *habitus* and *art world* are synonymous. Both speak of social interaction, of shared knowledge, of conventional means. However, I see them as partially distinct, at least for conceptual purposes distinct. The compositional habitus is something larger than an art world, something that a composer always lives inside and develops intentionally and unintentionally. An art world on the other hand can be physically left behind. For example, composers working in Berlin in the 1920s left their art worlds – with their institutions and interconnections – behind when they fled the Third Reich. They established new art worlds in New York, Los Angeles, Palestine, etc. Of course, there is the residual experience of those art worlds which now form part of their compositional habitus. What seems clear is the symbiotic nature of this conceptual distinctness where art worlds require the interaction of habitus whilst maintenance and expansion of habitus requires the active context of

art worlds. An art world then is a social system created through the interaction of habituses, enacted in real time and space, and only existing when enacted, ever changing with each new social interaction in relation to a constant cycle of action and context surveying where such reflexivity impacts on future actions where composers develop their skill – Bourdieuan virtuosic social agency. Giddens would call this monitoring, Bourdieu the negotiation of virtuoso social agents, Becker the encoding of conventions through repetition of interaction.

Therefore, composers have a compositional habitus, determined by their training and musical experience, in which they elaborate and improvise as they continuously expand their horizon through interaction in art worlds enacted in time and space. The habitus is a framework and repertoire for action – potentiality, the art world provides the context for action. I am conceptualizing a duality here that in effect does not tangibly exist. The compositional habitus and art world are of each other, within each other and from each other. Through this interaction composers both construct and re-construct musical reality. Through a transformational imperative horizons are expanding, but at the same time they reassert stylistic characteristics within their own art worlds. Even in the absence of physical musicians or audiences the composer can still be seen to be musicking, albeit with a virtual audience – socially interacting, just as Cook has suggested musicking for performers is social interaction.

We can contextualize the work of composers then in a cyclic process of work within an art world derived from a compositional habitus which also informs the compositional habitus as the work progresses. Over time as composers potentially move from one art world to another they maintain parts of previous art worlds as encoded experience. The work itself, the musicking to create a script, can then be conceptually conceived as a process occurring within an art world and dependent upon it and the compositional habitus:



We can now look at the micro process in this system, the actual act of composing – the compositional process. Over the last couple of years I have conducted interviews with various composers on their compositional process. I will draw upon three of these here.

Gayle Young works extensively with microtonal music with interest in the aberration of the mathematical relationship of the harmonic series. One of her primary focuses is the generation of unfamiliar sound levels. In response to this interest she has created new instruments which employ

microtonal scales. These new instruments afford Gayle the ability to easily step outside the bounds of western tonality. I asked Gayle to describe how she perceives her compositional process. She begins with improvisation. Ideas appear providing an aural perception of how a piece might sound. From these ideas Ms. Young looks for possible patterns laying out various possibilities. To negotiate these possibilities Gayle often employs mathematics, graphing pitches she has produced with her new instruments and setting up patterns of numbers to represent these pitches. These patterns are then used as the basis for forming a complete work. Accordingly, Gayle said the more experience you have in a medium, the faster and more efficient this process becomes (Young, 2004).

Dr. Andra McCartney, a soundscape artist describes her work as follows:

'I make multimedia soundscapes, working with my own location recordings to create websites, CD ROMs, tape works and performances that are evocative of my experiences of places, and their sonic and socio-political resonances. I like to use moving microphones, digital filters and multitrack composition to focus attention on intricate subtleties and sonic undercurrents in everyday life.' (www.andrasound.org)

One of Andra's main projects is entitled "Journée Sonores: Canal de Lachine", a project based on changes in the soundscape of the Lachine canal – Quebec, Canada, throughout an urban renewal. Andra and her colleagues make recordings along the canal. With these recordings they condense the "sonic images" following the sonic changes of the environment. The intent is to turn individuals' attention to the soundscapes in which they live. These sonic images differ from visual representations as they highlight the interplay of sounds emanating from disparate sources such as cars, boats, construction sites and people.

I asked Andra to describe the process she uses to create projects like "Journée Sonores: Canal de Lachine". The first step is to record her experience of a location, which she mediates by her own presence and sonic interest. She often records a location multiple times. Once recordings are complete she listens to them at least two times, taking note of intriguing sounds. Andra asks questions like "How do I want to organize this material? Linearly? Spatially? With a live performance element?" (McCartney, 2004). She then moves to practical considerations like how long the piece will be. McCartney then selects excerpts from the material using chance procedures with a six or twelve sided dice. She then incorporates the sounds she really enjoyed, assuming they weren't chosen through chance procedures. Using her sound editing software she employs pitch shifting and panning features bringing out specific sounds, especially harmonics, attempting to create a sense of movement. During this process Andra chooses small sections of recorded sound, usually no more than two seconds, and shifts them down in octaves, organizing the sounds into a stair-like formation with the lowest pitch on the bottom. Using material gleaned from pitch shifting and organizing she constructs a composition tightly formed as a unified whole. For her the form of a piece needs to be intelligible to the audience for aesthetic comprehensibility and to carry her socio-ecological messages (McCartney, 2004).

Dr. Clark Ross, a more 'traditional' composer is primarily engaged with commissioned works. His activity is highly mediated by the instrumentation and artists for whom/which he is writing. Quite often he works in varying degrees of correspondence with the artist(s) while composing. In the beginning stages he uses three generative strategies. The first is improvisatory, either at the piano or the computer. The second, much less in his control, is happenstance. Either a musical idea "pops" into his head, or in hearing music he grasps another direction in which it could have gone. The third he calls "catalogue shopping"; actively listening to a lot of music looking for things of interest. Of the three the first aspect, improvising, is his primary means of beginning the compositional process (Ross, 2006).

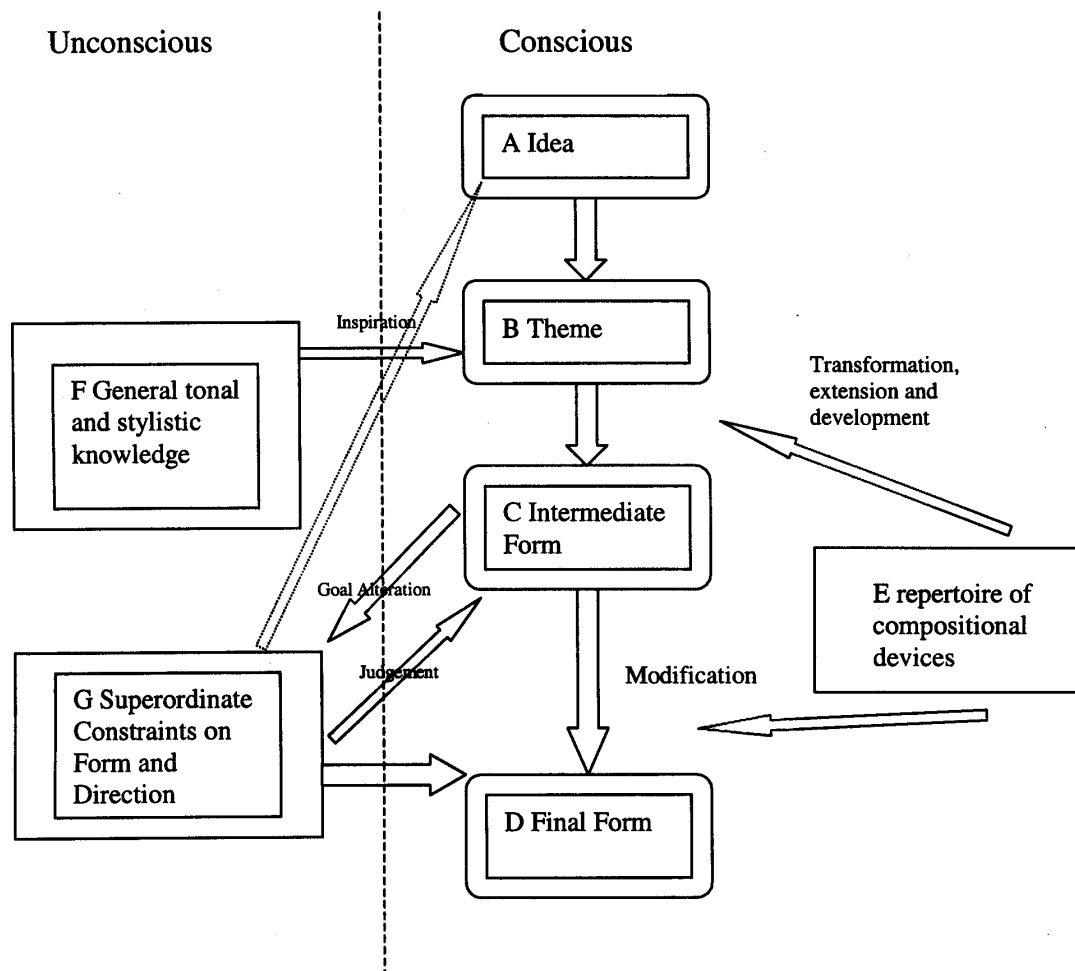
In my interview with Clark he described part of his process for writing *Last Dance*, a solo work for pianist Kristina Szutor. Over a three to four week period he worked from improvisation to more definite ideas, bringing the results to Dr. Szutor. After looking at the material Kristina felt it wasn't for her. Again he spent three to four weeks working from improvising to more definite ideas. Consulting Kristina for the second time she expressed the same feeling, what he had written wasn't for her. This exchange occurred three or four times before he wrote something she did like. In the end, he decided on a simple step-wise progression in context of a tango, familiar material which contrasted the 'head music' he had previously presented. Clark noted this elucidated an

element of the process he sometime employs, "I borrow elements from a style that is familiar to us all. In this case it was tango plus it was the descending step-wise from a minor chord; a minor, G major, F major, e" (Ross, 2006). He said that at one time he would avoid this type of writing because it felt less original and would be criticized. However, he now likes to write using familiar material taking it in unexpected directions. Once deciding on the tango he found the first section was finished in about 24 hours and was "an easy thing to keep going" (Ross, 2006). In the ensuing work, after the establishment of an initial idea, Dr. Ross spends time listening to the material, understanding it, looking for some intuitive direction in the music. If things are slow in this more intuitive stage he will turn to more arbitrary techniques dipping into his toolkit of compositional devices. In the end final decisions come down to what he would like to hear and what performers would like to play, and hopefully what audiences would like to experience.

Relating back to our discussion on art worlds and compositional habitus Gayle Young is very much focused on the transformational imperative as she develops new instruments to create unfamiliar, or unheard, sound levels. We also see elements of a strong compositional habitus in the heuristics of micro-tonal instruments, mathematical graphing of pitches and formulaic means of collating them. These are all part of her repertoire found within her habitus. She engages these with her art worlds performing on her new instruments bringing the new sounds to her audiences. At the same time her art world provides the means for maintaining and furthering her habitus in a very tangible way with the provision of materials to make new instruments and the funding received from performances and royalties, but also less tangibly in audience reactions. Similarly we see Andra employing compositional habitus specific heuristics of multiple recordings, distinction of interesting sounds, use of chance procedures, construction of geometric forms and sound editing software. All this serves an art world interaction based on creating a socio-ecological message. Clark Ross very clearly interacts with his art worlds as he interacts with those that commission works from him as well as the virtual audience also seen in the minds of Young and McCartney. He does this in a very procedurally directed way with defined generative processes – improvisation, happenstance, catalogue shopping – and with a set of knowledge in technical means of composition and instrument capability. What is clear from all three is the very definite social interaction in their work as well as a very definite procedure in how they do this – a cycle. They substantiate the ideas of compositional habitus and art world but also point to a discernible process by which these two are met – a procedural compositional process.

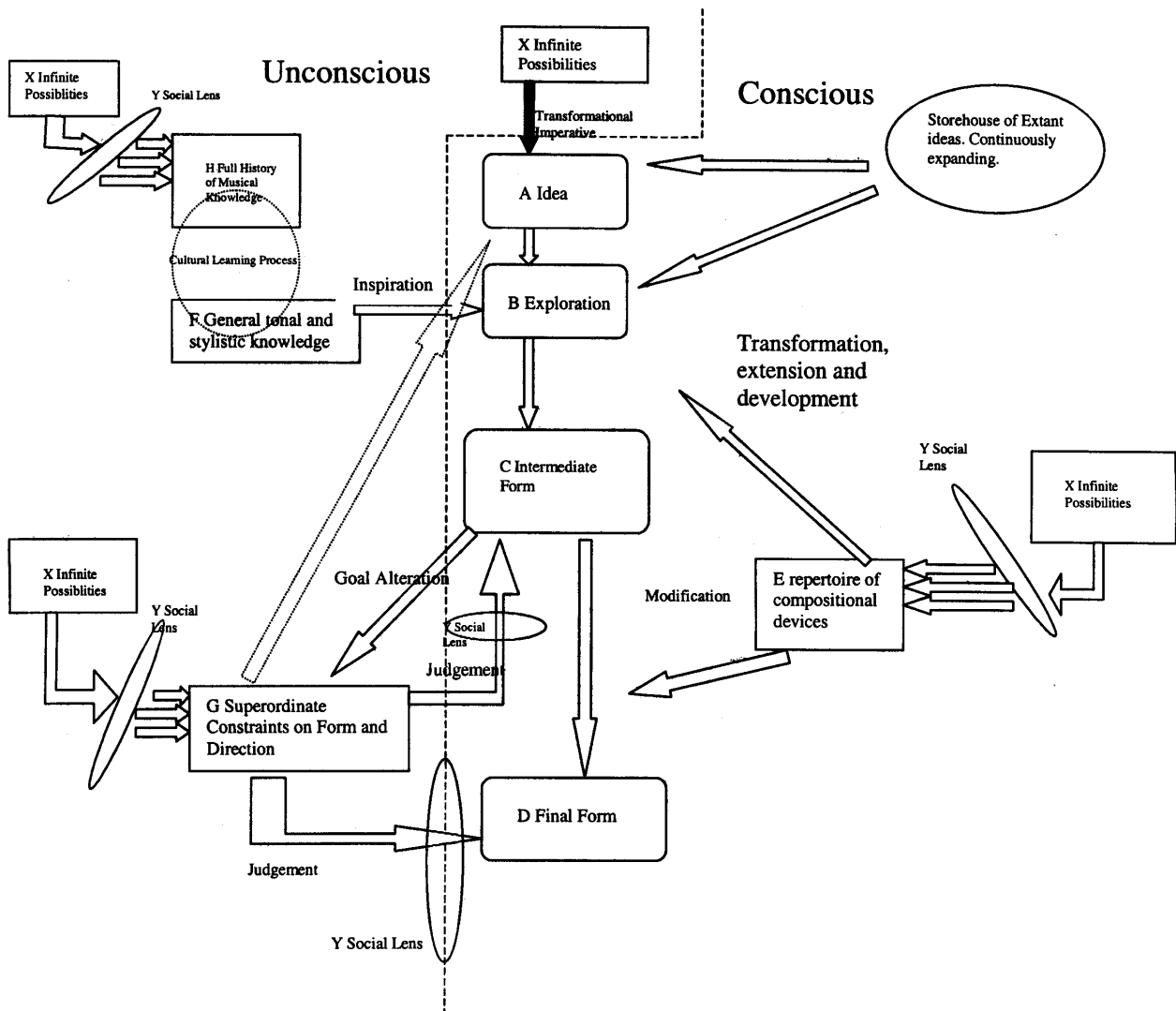
Summary of Individual Composition Process		
Gayle Young	Andra McCartney	Clark Ross
1. Generate new ideas • Create new instruments • Improvisation	1. Generate material through recording	1. Generative processes • Improvisation • Happenstance • Catalogue Shopping
2. Look for patterns in new material	2. Look for interesting sounds	2. Listen to material to understand it from different angles
3. Mathematically graph pitches	3. Use editing software to pitch shift, pan, create sound staircase	3. Look for intuitive directions or employ arbitrary techniques from compositional toolkit
4. Collate material into unified whole	4. Arrange sounds in a unified whole to create socio-ecological message	4. Create final work according to what he would like to hear, performers would like to play and audience would like to experience

Immediately striking similarities emerge. There is initially the generation of an idea, then a search for usable elements, followed by a period of manipulation according to compositional techniques with a final stage of unification. John Sloboda in *The Musical Mind: The Cognitive Psychology of Music* (1985) developed a model that reflects much of what has been seen here. To create his model he followed four means of inquiry; examination of creation through a composer's sketches – examination of composers' discussions on compositional process – examination of a composer at work – examination of the process of improvisation (pp. 102–103). The following is a reconstruction of his model:



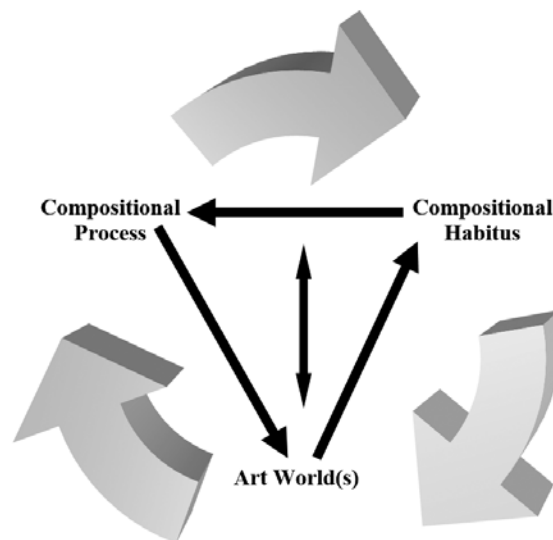
In this model he has divided the process into two levels; the conscious – what the composer can report accurately on, and the unconscious – that which the composer cannot report accurately on. The four primary steps of Idea, Theme, Intermediate Form and Final Form resonate with the four major steps outlined by Young, McCartney and Ross. In Sloboda's diagram Right angle boxes represent knowledge and structure found in the long term memory of composers, while curved boxes show transitory elements that occur in the composer's mind. The long term memory elements have been built up over time by the composer and can be used to solve new compositional problems. The curved boxes recognize elements change as compositional tools are used to solve problems. The square boxes show the repertoire that characterize the *solution generating* processes – our heuristics of the compositional habitus, while the curved boxes show the work of the *verifying* processes, our monitoring and social negotiation (Sloboda, 1985, pp. 118–119). I would like to expand on this model to better incorporate the idea of social agency and action. For example, the right angle boxes in Sloboda's diagram do not fully contextualize the constant changing in relation to social interaction of composers' knowledge. In effect, the model is more

like a snapshot of a composer at one given moment in time. The expansion I propose incorporates the life-career aspect of a compositional habitus as the actor's social experience grows and changes. Primarily I would like to add in the idea of social lenses which filter for the composer an infinite number of sonic possibilities at any stage in the compositional process. The social lenses, which represent social interaction, are both constraining – as they effectively rule out certain possibilities, and enabling – as they give a context or framework in which the composer can act. The process then as I see it looks more like this:



Following this diagram, ideas (A) come into the conscious state unconsciously or come consciously when taken from the storehouse of extant musical ideas. The idea is then turned into an exploration based on some sort of generative sonic idea – (B) which will reflect the general tonal – referring to tone not system, and stylistic knowledge of the composer (F). (F) is in a constant state of flux in relation to the development of the history of musical knowledge (H), and the composer's growing experience with (H). Furthermore, (H) constantly changes in respect to (X) channeled through (Y), the social lens which mediates what is acceptable and musical at any given point in history. A theme (B) then becomes an intermediate form (C) which may go through any number of permutations as influenced by (G) and (E). Note that (G) and (E) are developed by filtering (X) through the social lense (Y) and are in a constant state of flux. Final form (D) is developed through judgment and modification which constantly passes through (Y).

This process too is cyclic. Over time a composer engages in this process each and every time he/she musicks. There is an overarching plan involved in how a composer works from idea to final form and that there is a tendency to follow this cycle with each new musicking experience. Over time as the experiential data of the composer builds the cycle itself augments and spirals in different directions. This all happens in the practical context of an art world. The experience of the composer in an art world, or indeed in many art worlds, as he/she cycles through the compositional process continuously relates back to the compositional habitus through reflexive social action. The habitus then changes over time and continuously informs the compositional process through reflexive action. For conceptual means we can separate out these three elements and show how they are involved in a continuous cycle, but also how they interrelate and are completely symbiotic, and in reality, inseparable:



Over time, with the augmentation of the habitus through social interaction encoded through reflexive analysis, a composer both reconstructs the social reality around him/herself, as well as improvises and elaborates to create novelty and originality. The composer creates both continuity and disparity.

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Santrauka

Komponavimas kaip sąlytis su muzika: kompozitoriaus socialinės realybės atkūrimas

Remiantis romantinės epochos diskursu, galima daryti išvadą, kad kūrybinis procesas vakarietiškoje profesionalioje muzikoje yra persunktas misticizmo. Šis mitas atsieja muziką nuo socialinės realybės, kurioje ji gyvuoja ir tarpsta. Pagal naujos pakraipos Ch. Smallo sąlyčio su muzika teoriją ir N. Cooko veikimo ir suvokimo tyrinėjimus, į naują komponavimo proceso modelį, atitinkantį J. Slobodos muzikinį-psichologinį požiūrį, įtraukiamas ir socialinis diskursas. Taip pat neatsiejami yra struktūravimo teorija (A. Giddens) ir *habitus* konceptas (P. Bourdieu), nagrinėjantys, kaip kompozitoriai atkuria ir transformuoja socialinę tikrovę.

Naudojant tokią komponavimo proceso diagramą, tyrinėjimų objektu tampa šio proceso socialinė prigimtis, taip pat ir tai, kaip kompozitoriai, atspindėdami savo meninį pasaulį, komponavimo technomis grindžia ciklinį plėtojimą. Žvelgiant pro socialinę prizmę, spirališkai besikaitaliojanti komponavimo praktikų prigimtis nušviečia sudėtingą socialinį kompozitoriaus kaip tarpininko vaidmenį ir kartu išsklaido visą mistiką.