## Mihai Popean - Concept Analysis 2

Case study: Anthony Braxton, Composition # 163.

[...] So it's three by three, three by three, three by three. But not just linear; it's also..... three by three, three by three, three by three, and also each unit in itself is three by three, three by three, three by three. That really explains the formal components of Tri-Centric... (Braxton in Jurek 1996).

This concept analysis was initially designed to be discussed under under a larger umbrella comprised of *multiculturalism, improvisation and occultism* in Composition #163 by Anthony Braxton. However, a more comprehensive direction for analysis is the approach from the *multiculturalism, philosophy and architectural design* angle as a basis for developing a pertinent analytical model.

Composer, performer, theorist, writer, saxophonist, clarinetist, flautist, pianist and philosopher, Anthony Braxton was born on June 4, 1945 in Chicago, Illinois. A prolific American composer of highly complex works, producing over 100 music albums since 1960, Anthony Braxton's writings are only available from *Frog Peak Music*. These are made-on-demand special editions prepared by the composer himself.

*Frog Peak Music* is a label organized and run by artist composers "dedicated to publishing and producing experimental and unusual works by its member artists, and is committed to the idea of availability over promotion. Frog Peak Music is a not-for-profit organization in which member artists determine the form and content of their own work" (Frog Peak Music 2018).

Braxton's most utilized instruments are flute; the sopranino, soprano, C-Melody, F alto, E-flat alto, baritone, bass, and contrabass saxophones; and the E-flat, B-flat, and contrabass clarinets. Critic Chris Kelsey notes in *All Music Guide* that: "Although Braxton exhibited a genuine – if highly idiosyncratic – ability to play older forms (influenced especially by saxophonists Warne Marsh, John Coltrane, Paul Desmond, and Eric Dolphy), he was never really accepted by the jazz establishment, due to his manifest infatuation with the practices of such non-jazz artists as John Cage and Karlheinz Stockhausen. Many of the mainstream's most popular musicians (Wynton Marsalis among them) insisted that Braxton's music was not jazz at all" (Barnyard 2018).

Anthony Braxton received the genius grant (Beardsley 2018) for a total of \$300,000 from the McArthur Foundation (Wesleyan 2008) that allowed him to finance some large-scale projects he'd long envisioned, including an opera. He counts over 370 difficult to classify compositions in his output, deemed as *creative music*. He claimed that he is not a jazz musician despite a jazz-inspired overall soundscape. However, what sets him apart is that he is highly theoretical and strongly mystically influenced.

Since mid-to-late 1980s, his titles incorporate drawings, illustrations and life-like images of inanimate objects, namely train cars. Sometimes the letters are identifiable as the initials of Braxton's friends and musical colleagues or have an obvious relation to the music but in many cases the diagram-titles remain inscrutable. Braxton has pointedly refused to explain their significance, claiming that he himself is still discovering their meaning.



Braxton eventually settled on a system of opus-numbers to make referring to these pieces simpler and earlier pieces had opus numbers added retrospectively to them (Gurthartz 2016). His writings include the *Triaxium Writings* Volumes 1-3, Composition Notes Volumes A-E (Compositions 1-119) as well as various essays published on his website.

Essential traits of Braxton's music are connected to the fact that he is working in a band, prefers oral work and physical contact, and is performance oriented, undertakes the role of solo and improvisation in band music, uses concepts related to the lead sheet as a manner of transmitting musical information and uses expansion through improvisation at every level of musical elaboration including pitch, harmony, formal and improvisation itself.

An enduring influence on Braxton due to the many similarities between the way Stockhausen approached his music and different compositional periods and Braxton's creative output, Stockhausen was preoccupied not only with creating music but with doing so under the umbrella of a great vision, an all-encompassing idiom which he explored in his music and talked about in various occasions where he stated that "I view my entire life, my entire work, in such a way as to ask myself, 'How, as you become older, do you set about integrating everything that previously happened?'" (Heffley 1996, 218).

Braxton's early career compositions were attempts to write bebop music, in the army. Braxton was interested in finding fresh harmonic sequences and, at AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) in Chicago, he began to generate compositional paradigms from the improvisatory experiences he had in the *language musics*; the *formula musics* would emerge from those efforts. Of course, the influence of Stockhausen may be seen as obvious if one makes a parallel with Stockhausen's *formula composition*, for the first time ever presented in *Mantra*, a composition written in 1970.

Scored for two ring-modulated pianos (each player is also equipped with crotales and wood blocks), the piece represents a turning-point in Stockhausen's music, being the first instance of the formula composition technique (though the technique was already foreshadowed in the withdrawn *Formel* some two decades previously). This technique involves the projection and expansion of a melody-formula, or complex of two or three melodies. In *Mantra*, the double-melody formula is stated at the outset of the piece. Braxton followed through with his own version.

I understood that this was going to be a complex direction, and yet, for me, it would be the only way; [...] I wanted to be part of those musics, which were the musics of curiosity, the musics of motivation (Heffley 2018, 14).

Braxton created his conceptual field of symbolic architecture of semantic specificity named *Braxton House*, based on his desire to be unique, a background system based on symbolism and its connections with the occult systems of knowledge which encapsulate meaning into complex systems of gradual disclosure as the composer explains stating that the "Braxton House is an attempt to build something for myself to respond to the challenge of the third millennia." Although this comment and the associated image presented below quietly disappeared from current Google searches, it was available in 2008 along with a physical address for what at that time was called the Braxton House on 175 Fifth Avenue #2261 New York, NY 10010. The same appears on Braxton's CD cover to Sextet Istanbul 1996 produced by AllMusic and reviewed by Thom Jurek:





Did Braxton envision a physical construct based on his ideas just as Stockhausen built his house in Kürten on the basis of his own ideas? More research may establish if this connection can also be added to the list.

Braxton's conceptual directions are derived from relationships established between particular aspects of symbols believed to carry meaning beyond their surface appearance. Braxton discusses these aspects in the *The Third-Millennial Interview*:

My project has always been, one, an individual thing; two, it's always been a tri-centric thing; and three, it's always been an occult position (Heffley 2001, 125; 2018, 15).

Similar to Stockhausen, Braxton was keen on getting away from and redefining older concepts relating to music composition, performance and thinking, eventually proposing the need for his own *tri-centric view* as he expressed in an interview portraying the music of Anthony Braxton 12+1tet, 9 Compositions (Iridium) 2006: "Take a chance, if everything works, is probably not right..." (Restructures 2007, 5'45").

It is unquestionable that Stockhausen was a significant source of inspiration for Braxton, who was already coming from an experimental background.

Braxton gravitated toward twentieth-century American and German composers (Ives through Partch through Cage, and Schönberg through Stockhausen) for his inspiration, expanding his ground in this newly-broadened jazz-improvisational field to their direction. The result has been a body of work designed both in the European classical tradition - scores to be conducted and interpreted and performed in concert--that also features improvisatory (personally expressive) and musically experimental (chance, sound sculptural spects)" (Heffely 2000, 1). Any analysis of Braxton's music should then start with his longdeveloped system of music making behind which there is another layer of semantic importance based on a yet another layer of symbolic representation.

Braxton's system uses 12 constructs, to which 12 identities are associated. This is manifest in the structure of the Trillium opera cycle, where twelve primary characters are featured; the Tri-Centric philosophy based on the generating power of number three gives the opportunity of differentiating three aspects of every element of the system.

The concept of Tri-Centric has three partials: individual, group, synthesis. Mutable logics, stable logics, summation logics. Architecture, philosophy, and ritual / ceremonial. So it's three by three, three by three, three by three. But not just linear; it's also . . . three by three, three by three, three by three, and also each unit in itself is three by three, three by three, three by three, three by three. That really explains the formal components of Tri-Centric (Jurek 1996).

However, the intricacies of Braxton's system of inter-linked conceptual features is much more elaborated:

Every construct/identity can be viewed from a tri-partial perspective. The long sound, House Number One of Shala, contains three degrees: long sound (for the improviser); sustain sound logics (the second degree); long belief, or the belief, which is eternal (third degree) (Mixtery, p. 247). Braxton presents his own research in these terms: "I am seeking to uncover the 12 identities, the 12 forces, of my system. We're moving into the mythological realm now" (Martinelli 1996) This system contains what Braxton considered as a healthy degree of unknown: in his system of tri-partials, every performance must include the three times of past, present and future as well as the unknown, the known and the intuitive, in a strictly specified order. This allows nesting of old compositions into new (past), presenting new compositions (present) and allowing all of these strategies together to forecast new developments (future).

Considering further the tri-states of improvisation (unknown), composition (known) and intuitive, the combination of graphic titles and scores leads to spontaneous decisions confined within fixed parameters similar to controlled aleatorism or in a predetermined context.



Improvisations in the score itself are quite common ground for experimentation, a good example being the *camello preparato* instruction in the ICP Orchestra and A. Braxton video that can be accessed on youtube as *ICP Orchestra & Anthony Braxton - Met welbeleefde gro.*. *Pt.1* (anthdb45 2007):



As noted bellow, the score features a mixture of strandard musical notation with new elements of musical language:



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As such, any analytical attempt must find patterns within a structure in order to discuss design. In the case of Anthony Braxton, once the initial material is approached in a meaningful way, the rest of the discussion can focus on comparison and contrast with either his own works or other works. The most difficult segment here is finding a meaningful method to discern the inner-working patterns. As such, for the purpose of this book we will only focus on how to approach gaining insight into the inner structure of Braxton's Composition #163.

Aside from getting familiar with composer's philosophical ideas expounded in his writings, in order to draw pertinent conclusions, several types of analysis can be performed such as *Pitch* contour, *Rhythm* patterns and *Form* based on occurrence of elements that seem to have a certain importance in the rendition of the material:

- fermata
- shifting points (double arrows)
- score appearance (puzzle)

The diagram bellow showcases the approach to discerning the defining elements of the score in a clearly organized manner so as to have access to the inner-workings of musical parameter pattern formation and evolution.

Composition #163 is comprised of 59 pages, for unspecified instrumentation, featuring different layers of material in which the musical parameters are displaced following distinct patterns. The choice for the graphical organization of analytical material was to organize it in rows of ten pages each (1, 11, 21, 31, 41 and 51-59). This stage of the analysis focuses on five layers of musical material, namely the time signature, time divisions, graphical signs, pitches and score layout.

Time signatures include two kinds of units, respectively quarters and eights, with also two types of time divisions, respectively in 1 and in 2.

Graphical signs include shapes such as oval, circle, rectangle, square, house, a system of some sorts, down arrow and shifting arrow

while the pitch material is organized as staff pitches, non-staff pitches and what is deemed here as *figure*, meaning it contains both.

The score layout contains regular staffs, cut-staffs and blank portions, the instruments are not defined but numbered; however their displacement on both different pages and on the same page may vary.

LAYERS:	A. Braxto	on: Composition	n #163	
Time	12345678	3 9 1 2 3 3 <sup>3</sup> 9 1 2 3	6	
signature	4444444	44 888	8	
Time	3:1 3:2 5:1	5:2 6:1 6:2	7:1 10:2	
divisions				
Graphical	$\square \bigcirc$	$\bigcirc$		
Signs	( )	$\bigcirc$		
	Oval	Circle	Rectangle	Square
	$\square$		↓	<u>_</u>
		Ð		•
	House	System	Down	Shifting
		-	Arrow	Arrow
Pitches			(	
	≷ •⁄⊥+	Stari	f pitches	
		Sequ	lence non-stan	pitches
		Figu	lre	
		ND.18	{	6:2
				2 7.1.
			17	
Score	Regular			
	Shape cuts			
	Blank			

Since the organization of musical parameters on each page may be especially difficult to synthesize in revealing patterns for this type of musical work, each page is broken down in measures and beats, each with their associated time signature changes, as they occur.

The capital letters represent rehearsal marks as in the score while the black squares represent measures that are cut-off in the score. Furthermore, the arrows of two kinds represent their respective places on the different pages of the score.

As seen on the analysis chart, this approach offers a clear perspective of the overall contribution of each page in terms of musical material as well as the way the patterns of occurrence develop over time.

The shapes, while included in the chart, were not assigned to their respective measures, although that should be a next step for a thorough analytical inquiry.

Page		Α	В
1	3 <b>■</b> 2 3 4 1+4 4 4 4 4 4	24 324	32 234
	E1		F1
11	4_23_2	<sup>3</sup> 4 <sup>2</sup> 4 <sup>3</sup> 2 <sup>1</sup>	<sup>434</sup> <sup>2</sup>
21	I1		J1
	57365122	323_6_1+5	4342365
31	N1		01
	532	$3_{546}^{2}$	5343_4_
41	R1	R2	
	35 4?3	463 3632	3634 62
		88	8
51		S5	
	253_4_2	343_232	1+323_2
	253_4_2	343_232	1 + 3 2 3 2 2

This stage completed, the analysis is ready for the discussion of findings followed by a section containing conclusions as well as suggestions for further research.

For this particular analysis, further exploration of the Stockhausen-Braxton connection as well as Stockhausen's *intuitive music* could reveal more interesting details with analytical value as well as open new possibilities for further analysis.

Page		А	В	CI	C2			DI	D2	
-1	3 <b>■</b> 2 3 4 1+4 4 4 4 4 4	24 324	32/234	×232121	242414_	↓↓↓ <sup>1+2</sup> 8 <sup>2</sup>	↓ <sup>34</sup> - <sup>3</sup> -↓	↓ <sup>323_2</sup> 2	↓ <sup>4</sup> - <sup>3</sup>	_438 <b>5</b> 3 4
	EI		F1		GI ,		G2	, IH	H2	and the second second
Ш	4_23_2	3 ∎ 4 2 _ 4 3 2 1	4342	<b>■</b> 343_23	25 <b>6</b> 4 5	3 2 3 <sup>1+2 4</sup>	31_23_2	3,12,1√92■	$3_{-4}^{27583}$	2_71
21	II		JI	J2			LI		MI	M2
	57365122 4	3 2 3 _ 6 _ 1+5	4342365	3232∎_	73652 <sub></sub> 1+1 8	43_5752	$3_{-4_{-3}+657}$	3_13121	323_24	232531+1 8
31	NI		01		P1	P2		Q1	02	,
	532	3546	5343_4_	1_2_32_	323	43 2 5752	75432	7423 5	24 542	3 🖌 2+3 7
41	R1	R2		SI		S2	S3		× 11	S4
	35 423	463 3632 88	3634_62 8	75_32_3_	42	3	1+8 4	12_4356	$\frac{3}{8}^{4}$	3
51		S5		II			IN	VI		END @ 59
	253_4_2	343_232	1+323_2	?32764	_3423	3432	3_2+4_23	5235385	423438	
a.										
LAYERS:					3	RIRI IOGR APH	Ā			
Time signat	ure 123456	78912 1236 4444 8888				Braxton, Anthon Braxton Anthon	iy - Tri-Axium Wri w - Composition M	tings Volumes 1-3	- 1985	



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Anthony Braxton - Composition #163, Score - Composer manuscript