

Louis Andriessen: *De Materie*

16 February 2008

Tonight's concert marks a culmination of not only an intense, six-week rehearsal process for the Symphonic Winds, but actually a prolonged, four-year investigation and exploration into the music and aesthetic of Louis Andriessen. In addition to performing two of the movements of *De Materie* on earlier concerts (*De Stijl* in February 2005 and *Hadewijch* in February 2007), the ensemble has also given the American premieres of Andriessen's *Hymne to the memory of Darius Milhaud* (March 2006) and *Symphonies of the Netherlands* (May 2007), presented several performances of his *M is for Man, Music, and Mozart* (most recently in December 2006), recorded for eventual release his *Passeggiata* (with Jennifer Ashe as soprano soloist and Teng Jian Khoo as violin soloist), and led a mixed faculty-student performance of his *Workers Union* (September 2007). While *De Materie* is unquestionably one of Andriessen's most significant musical and philosophical creations, it is also one of his most demanding; likely because of its uncompromising level of difficulty and unflinching austerity, it has only been performed once in its entirety in the United States: a 2004 performance given in New York City by the Asko and Schoenberg Ensembles, conducted by Reinbert de Leeuw—Dutch musicians who have worked intimately with Louis for over 30 years and who had premiered and recorded *De Materie*. We are proud to be offering the FIRST performance of *De Materie* in the United States by a collegiate ensemble and by an ensemble of non-Dutch musicians!

about....*Louis Andriessen*

Louis Andriessen (b. 1939, in Utrecht, Holland) is, without question, the most significant living Dutch composer; by most accounts, he is one of the most eminent and influential composers in all of Europe, if not the world. His music blurs the boundaries between “high” and “low” arts, not just in his choice of instruments (often dominated by wind, brass, pianos, and electric guitars), but in his musical language, which combines a jazz/rock aesthetic with post-WWII intellectualism. Following an extended collaboration with Peter Greenaway which resulted in a score for the film *M is for Man, Music, Mozart* (1991) and two operas—the controversial *ROSA: Death of a Composer* (1994) and the post-modern lyric *Writing to Vermeer* (1998)—Andriessen has recently completed his third opera, *La Commedia*, which will be premiered this June in Amsterdam.

When asked how he became a composer, Louis will usually answer: “I merely joined my father's business.” The Andriessen family boasts generations of musicians, beginning with Louis's great-grandfather Cornelis (1816-1893), a choir conductor and music teacher, and his grandfather Nicolaas (1845-1913), a prominent Dutch organist. Louis grew up hearing the music that was admired by his father Hendrik (1892-1981) and brother Juriaan (1925-1996), both composers and his first two teachers. As Louis recalled, his father “favored a French classicist approach to music. Music was extremely important as an objective beauty, and we should therefore realize that we are not important. It is the music that is important. That means that almost any French composer was better than any German Romantic composer. He also liked Stravinsky a lot....” Juriaan was influential in introducing Louis to American jazz of the 1940s and 50s, especially the music of Count Basie and Stan Kenton. As Andriessen readily admits: “I must say that what was the most influential on my music, when I look back now, was the big-band culture: the writing, settings, arrangements, the harmonies of large groups of brass instruments. It all came from Stan Kenton, Dizzy Gillespie, and others.” Additional influences on the development of his unique compositional style were Kees van Baaren at the Royal Conservatory of The Hague, and Luciano Berio, with whom he studied for two years; Andriessen also professes an admiration of Maurice Ravel, whom he believes to be the first truly avant-garde composer; for Bach, whose keyboard works he still practices daily; for Olivier Messiaen, with whom he “shares a fascination of harmony;” and for Stravinsky, who is his guru. Beginning in the 1970s, Andriessen began to accept minimalism as an important influence, incorporating aspects into his style for both political and aesthetic reasons. Andriessen, however, does not believe his music

sounds much like American minimalism: "It has not the cosmic sound of those pieces which Reich and Glass wrote at the same time. What is different from my music is that in America there is not enough angst! I'm much more aggressive, I would say." As K. Robert Schwarz, author of *Minimalists* (1996) writes: "Louis Andriessen.... achieved the most startling synthesis of all, forging a unique language informed as much by European modernism as American minimalism.... Andriessen remains very much a European modernist, and so [his] scores possess a gritty dissonance and a spiky chromaticism that speaks as much of Stravinsky, Messiaen, and Ligeti as of Reich."

Andriessen describes his musical style: "From Stravinsky to Steve Reich, from the gamelan to Miles Davis and Stan Kenton, this is all part of my musical language. But one thing is clear: I almost completely shied away from the nineteenth century [Romanticism]." He takes as the ultimate compliment the indictment made by Dutch playwright Karst Woudstra: "That Andriessen is a bloody classicist!" As the epitome of the Hague School (which is characterized as writing loud, aggressive, rhythmically energetic music devoid of all neo-Romantic sentiment), he has developed a musical language marked by extremes of ritual and masquerade, of monumentality and intimacy, of formal rigor and intuitive empiricism. In recent years, though, Andriessen has begun to write more overtly expressive, charmingly lyric music, such as his *La Passione* and *Passaggiata*, written for the performance artist Cristina Zavalloni; while he has spent the better part of his life writing hard-edged, "objective" music, Louis ironically remarked in 2002: "now that I've reached sixty, it is time to enter the nineteenth century."

A self-professed Marxist and Catholic, Andriessen was very involved in socio-political movements in the 1960s and 70s in the Netherlands. He played an active role in the increasing politicization of the arts put into practice during the Holland Festival in 1969 with the collective work *Reconstructie*, a music-theatre morality based on Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and the life of Che Guevara, composed jointly with four other former students of Van Baaren. Later the same year Andriessen was involved in the infamous *Notenkrakersactie* ("Nutcracker"), the disruption of a concert of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, whose artistic policy the protesters regarded as reactionary. (Andriessen and his colleagues leapt onto the stage, papering the hall with leaflets while sounding noise-makers, during a performance of the Flute Concerto by Quantz, creating a minor riot.) This controversial act has since come to be seen as a turning-point in postwar Dutch musical life, as what has been termed the "ensemble culture" of Holland emerged.

For Andriessen it led to a near-permanent abandonment of the medium of the symphony orchestra and a revaluation of the "materials and methods of musical production." In 1971, together with his friend jazz saxophonist Willem Breuker, Andriessen assembled a band of nine musicians (three saxophones, three trumpets, and three trombones)—some of whom were jazz players, some of whom were classical players—who were committed explicitly to redefining the role of musical performance in socio-cultural terms; as Andriessen wrote at the time, the group was trying to "uncover the relationships between the conception of music (phase 1, the composer), the production of music (phase 2, the performing musicians), and the consumption of music (phase 3, the listeners) and to change them." These were musicians who were protesting the Vietnam War, capitalism, and the commodification of music; they believed that music could change the world (or at least be a part of the process), and so they sought to create musical experiences that would point to a different conception of society. Andriessen is fond of labeling the project of this group, the Orkest de Volharding, as "de-hierarchizing," music; in fact, he intended Volharding to be "an orchestra that vigorously and vociferously breaks with the division between 'high' and 'low' art"—or, in the words of Tira Gijs, to remove the "ludicrous discrepancy between the two forms of music, jazz and classical." For the ensemble, Andriessen wrote one of his most overtly political works—*Workers Union*. Scored for any group of loud instruments playing in rhythmic unison, but with each player improvising her/his individual pitches (according to a contour provided), *Workers Union* is Andriessen's attempt to create

an idealized sense of a socialist-democratic society. The sense of “collective unison” that emerges encapsulates Andriessen’s aesthetic of the 70s: no person in the ensemble holds more or privileged knowledge (i.e. no one has “special” access to a totality—a score—that other do not) or has a more “important” (a melody, instead of an accompaniment) role than the others; for Andriessen, the contributions of each member in the ensemble had to be individual, personal, and equally integral to the successful realization of the work. Andriessen then articulated his beliefs of the political and social power of music in his *De Staat* (1976), drawing texts from Plato’s *The Republic*.

During the 1980s and 90s, however, Andriessen’s aesthetic focus gravitated away from the raucous and polemical works of the preceding decade to the exploration of philosophical and conceptual themes. He has explored, in relation to music, subjects including time, velocity, and mortality in works for large ensemble: *De Tijd* (1981), *De Snelheid* (1983), and *Trilogy of The Last Day* (1996-97); without question, though, his most significant work of this period is his exploration of the relationships between objective and subjective realities, between physical matter and spiritual/intellectual existence in his non-linear, non-dramatic, non-operatic opera *De Materie* (1985-1989).

about...*De Materie*

The dialectical synthesis of extremes—high art versus low art, reason versus instinct, constructivism versus spontaneity, doctrine versus entertainment, concert hall versus theatre—that characterize Andriessen’s entire compositional output are explicitly thematized in *De Materie*, in which the relationship between matter and spirit is examined from four discrete perspectives. Andriessen’s pursuit was inspired by Marx, who believed that the spirit of man was determined by social forces, writing: “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness.” Andriessen, an anarchist who studied Marxism, states that in *De Materie*: “I try to show that it is somewhat more complicated than Marx had thought. I won’t say that the spirit can change matter, but it can be very influential on the organization of the psyche... The mind really does have a significant influence on your material being, on your attitude towards the world and on your position in the world.” Matter as a philosophical concept and a Marxist, artistic, and scientific notion, inspired Andriessen to write four musical essays that he views as musical analogues to Brecht’s *Galileo*, which he describes as “an exemplary combination of spirituality and matter and that’s what I was after. I wanted to show, in four different ways, how the mind, the person, deals with tangible surroundings.” Why four? Because in Christian numerology, the number four represents all things earthly—or literally, physical *matter*, and so hence the title *De Materie*. In fact, the use of Christian numerology is one of the many concepts—including the use of a harmonic language derived from one chord (which synthesizes tonic and dominant, thus creating the dialectical situation of *a chord that needs to be resolved, but is already resolved*), the use of models to create forms, tempos and rhythmic relationships, etc.—which help to instill coherence in the entire work.

Elmer Schönberger (co-author with Andriessen of a book about Stravinsky entitled *Apollonian Clockwork*) has provided the following succinct synopsis of *De Materie*:

The dramaturgy is that of a *tableau vivant*, peopled by (mainly Dutch) historical figures; they sing their own historical words thereby continually throwing new light on the subjects. These figures are united by their scientific, religious, artistic, and political idealism, as well as their common willingness to pay the price exacted by their ideals. In part 1, Gorklaeus, the early seventeenth-century philosopher who died at a young age, reinstates the ancient Greek theory of atomism. In part 2, Hadewijch, the thirteenth-century poetess from Brabant, sings the praises of the *unio mystica* in music rooted in a rational compositional architecture based on the proportions of a cathedral dating from the same century. Both part 2 and part 3 (“De Stijl”) suggest that despite its title *De Materie* is mainly concerned with the limits of rationality. In “De Stijl,” whose form and instrumentation were modeled on Mondrian’s *Composition with Red, Yellow, and Blue*, the emphasis is on the metaphysical inspiration of Neo-Plasticism. Finally part 4 once again

takes up the theme of science—this time personified by Marie Curie—but also the themes of love and death as expressed by the Dutch symbolist poet Willem Kloos.

Offering different perspectives on the relationship between matter and spirit by examining topics ranging from ship-building to mysticism and from boogie-woogie to theosophy, the four sections of the “non-narrative music-theater piece” (perhaps better interpreted as a massive four-movement symphony) was premiered on 1 June 1989 at the Holland Festival in a production directed by Robert Wilson (director of *Einstein on the Beach*, among other works), whose ritualized, non-narrative approach to theater provided an ideal counterpoint to Andriessen’s music. A review in the Guardian of the premiere performance announced “...there’s no doubt that *De Materie* is Andriessen’s finest work to date, and one of the most significant scores produced by a European composer in the last 20 years.”

about... *Part 1*

The opening of De Materie is as startling as anything in contemporary music—a fortissimo repeated chord slowly, irregularly accelerates until it takes on a machine-like inevitability and the work is launched.

The Guardian

Beethoven began his Seventh Symphony by dropping several momentous chords on top of a lyrically-arpaggiated melody; for Beethoven, these four loud chords function as structural pillars, anchoring his melody, conveying import and gravity to his introductory gesture, and calling to mind images of timeless beauty—in fact, Gunther Schuller remarks that the beginning of Beethoven’s Seventh is the aural equivalent to the Parthenon. What then, of Andriessen’s opening salvo—not four simple triads, but rather 144 unrelenting, ruthless hammer strikes of sound? Andriessen is not erecting a temple—he is taking down walls with a sledgehammer.

Of the four sections of *De Materie*, Part I is the most single-mindedly concerned with science and the physicality of matter; as such, it is entirely in 4/4—the number for all things earthly. The main protagonist in this movement is David van Goorle (1591-1612)—known as Gorlaeus—who was a Dutch scientist, and in the seventeenth century, one of the first early modern atomists. As Andriessen remarks, Gorlaeus was an “extraordinarily interesting boy who died very young and of whom virtually nothing is known;” on his tombstone in the church of Cornjum, he is mourned as an “erudite and very intelligent young man.” It is thought that his last work, *Exercitationes philosophicae*, printed posthumously in 1620, influenced Descartes, among others. Louis hopes, though, that Gorlaeus will be unknown to his audiences, so that his words will seem as outlandish as they must have been to his contemporaries.

Before he died at the age of 21, Gorlaeus had already written two books; the second (*Idea Physicae*) has been called a sort of *tractatus logicus*. In this book, Gorlaeus frequently challenged many of the Aristotelian theories of the day. As Louis comments:

This tampering with Aristotelian laws of nature was anti-Catholic and for this reason it interested me; I also wanted to reflect the revolutionary ferment in the Netherlands at that time. The Catholics had accepted anti-Aristotelianism since Aquinas but not the atomic physics of people such as Democritus. The first generation of nuclear physicists—Beckman, Gorlaeus, and others (predominantly in Holland)—used Democritus’ atomic theory in their examination of matter.... At the time that nuclear physics—now proved to be the correct theory of matter—was being developed in the Netherlands, we also slung out the Spanish, and that, as you know, was pretty difficult.

By expounding a conception of atomic physics, Gorlaeus was arguing that physical matter could not be reduced to something non-physical; as he impetuously asserts: “It is completely unreasonable that a body, which of itself is finite, should consist of infinite parts.... [A] body consists of indivisible small parts.” For *De Materie*, Andriessen had sections from Gorlaeus’s *Idea Physicae* translated from Latin to

Dutch, and then to 16th-17th-century Dutch as he “wanted Gorlaeus to sing as he would have talked in the cafes in Leiden in 1605-1606 where, under the influence (I hope) of the local beer, he had stood and proclaimed his theories—risking being knocked down in the process.” When Gorlaeus appears in the piece (at the “golden section” of the piece, roughly 15 minutes into the 25-minute movement), it is as if he were conjured up—the mind out of the flesh—by frenzied English horn, synthesizer, and tam-tam sixteenth notes (the only time we hear an extended passage at the level of rhythmic subdivision). Semitones—the smallest interval in Western music theory—at the beginning of Gorlaeus’s entrance stand for “smallest particles” that comprise his theory of atomic principles, although his first utterance then continue to outline Andriessen’s dialectical chord. (Interestingly, Andriessen also makes the analogous rhythmic comment a few moments later; when the choir responds, in a discussion of particles being divided down to the smallest level, they present the text in a rhythmic *accelerando* that culminates in triplets—perhaps undermining Gorlaeus’s contention that it is matter, not spirit that is of the core, indivisible essence.)

In counterpoint to this argument, Louis presents two other texts: two fragments from the *Acte van Verlatighe* [The Act of Abjuration] and sections from the handbook *Scheeps-bouw en bestier* (Shipbuilding and Management) by Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717). While Gorlaeus’s texts are set lyrically—perhaps even operatically—the chorus declaims their texts in a very disjunct, accented manner, reminiscent of the opening hammer strikes. As Yayoi Uno Everett remarks, although the choir plays a central role in the recitation of two of the three texts, “the rapid-fire articulation makes [the texts] virtually incomprehensible,” and so it is nearly impossible to decipher the text—like a medieval riddle, historical references and quotations remain to a large extent hidden.

Louis describes this movement in one word: *revolution*. As he explains: “My musical metaphor for the eruption of intellectual, and also physical, violence was shipbuilding. From the first moment I know that it was good.” And so the “hammering” of the orchestra can, on a literal level seem to represent the actual physical hammering of shipbuilders in the Amsterdam harbor, while on a more metaphorical level, symbolize the tearing-down of indefensible philosophical or political constructs. An interesting juxtaposition occurs as the choir sings passages from Witsen’s book that offer first a complete explanation of how to build a ship and then an exhaustive catalogue of every tool that is needed in the process: while they sing Witsen’s words of construction, small piece by small piece, Gorlaeus is simultaneously speaking of finding the core essence in the smallest, indivisible material objects. Parallel to the creation of the ship, Andriessen also sets text from the first official document where the Dutch withdrew allegiance to the Spanish king in 1581, which in Louis’s mind, marks the date that the Netherlands became a democratic republic (predating the US Declaration of Independence by almost 200 years!). Again, correlations and resonances can be inferred between Gorlaeus’s atomistic theory of matter, the concept of combining physical objects in the creation of larger entities such as ships, and Andriessen’s principles of political and musical democracy. Louis, though, does not try to answer—either in music or in word—these questions of fundamental identity versus physical matter, but rather is content to simply allow the three texts to sit side-by-side, so that each listener is left to ponder these philosophical conundrums.

With this movement, though, Andriessen is also paying homage to Bach. The form of Part I is based on the proportions of the Eb-prelude from the first book of Bach’s *Well-Tempered Clavier*, which Andriessen analyzes as a toccata (literally, “hammering piece”) and *ricercare*. Just as Bach used the by-then-somewhat-archaic form of the toccata (developed in Italy and the Netherlands in the 16th century by organists and harpsichordists such as Frescobaldi and Sweelinck) as the basis for his piece, Andriessen decided to “orient myself towards someone who himself used an archaic form. I reverted back to 1630 with someone who, in 1720, also reverted to it. This seemed to me to be a good idea.” The opening 144 [itself a mystic combination of numbers: $(3 \times 4)^2$] beats correspond to the opening toccata section of the prelude—and so Andriessen refers to this

section of the piece as the “gigantic magnified toccata-playing hammer.” When the choir enters singing the Act of Abjuration, this corresponds to the place in prelude where the *ricercare* starts. Since Andriessen believes that Bach used a major mode variation of the *L'homme armé* melody, he uses the tune as a counterpoint to the chorus recitation—although the tune is played in a highly deconstructed manner by the strings and horns, and so is barely recognizable; the appearance of familiar quotations provides a momentary glimpse into the intuitive and whimsical side of Andriessen’s creative impulse and as he remarks, these literal fragments are “the gem[s] on the surface pointing to the geology of what lies beneath.”

about... *Hadewijch* (part II)

What is impressive about Hadewijch is its real sense of musical depth and substance... its wonderfully coloured and subtly varied harmonic chimings, and a kind of long-drawn diatonic melodic innocence...

Musical Times

Hadewijch is concerned with mysticism, or the spirit materialized in the body. (Andrew Weeks in his *German Mysticism from Hildegard of Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein* defines mysticism as “divinely inspired knowledge of divine truth.”) The text is the Seventh Vision of Hadewijch (hă`dvkh), a 13th-century Dutch mystic, expressing her passionate vision, spiritual and physically erotic, of union with Him. It is this controversial nature of Hadewijch’s vision—expressing the most elevated spiritual experiences in explicitly physical and sensuous terms—that attracted Andriessen to this text. While Hadewijch is thought to have written music (although, sadly, none is extant), Andriessen did not set out to write a piece that “sounds” like thirteenth-century music; as he remarks: “At the end of the day, I am not a historian, but a composer who sometimes dives into history to make it real and to make connections which create some sense of ownership.”

While we know conclusively almost next to nothing about Hadewijch, we do know that she was not a nun, but rather a Beguine—that is, she was one of the devout women of her day who chose to lead a life of apostolic poverty and contemplation without taking vows as nuns. (The movement came into being toward the end of the twelfth century, in the larger towns of Flanders, southern Germany, and northern France—Antwerp, Cologne, Strasbourg, and Bruges. Originating largely among women of noble and patrician families, they opted for an intentional religious life while apparently rejecting not only the narrow life of “the lady in the castle,” but the strict obligations of the nun in the cloister.) It is believed that for a time she headed a small contemplative group of likeminded women, and that her voluminous writings—arranged as Letters, Poems in Stanzas, Visions, Poems in Couplets, and thought to be dated 1220-1240—were for the instruction of her charges. Paul Mommaers regards Hadewijch as “undoubtedly the most important exponent of love mysticism and one of the loftiest figures in the Western mystical tradition,” while Barbara Newman calls her “the greatest mystical poet of the thirteenth century.” Hadewijch’s descriptions of experiencing the in-being in God belong to the most convincing and daring that mystical literature has to offer. As Mommaers continues: “God is such that he allows himself to be possessed in an incredibly intimate manner. But you can seldom find a mystical author who—at the same time—throws such light on God’s transcendence as Hadewijch does.”

Hadewijch must have come from a wealthy family: she had a wide knowledge of literature and theological treatises in several languages, including Latin and French; in a time when studying was a luxury only exceptionally granted to women, her familiarity with chivalry and courtly love, and the refinement of character she invariably displays, permit little doubt that she belonged to the higher class. Her poems themselves are proof that she had mastered the troubadours’ art; Hadewijch used the poetry of courtly love to express the emotional tensions of the longing for God, showing an unflinching mastery of all its techniques. In addition, the striking feature of her prose writing is its artistry—she has a sense of literary structure, of emphasis and subordination in the development of

her thoughts, and she has a rich vocabulary that gives both variety and a wide range in choosing the precise word. While the mystical texts (visions) are expressed poetically rather than systematically, they are still deeply theological. Of Hadewijch's fourteen visions, Mother Columbia Hart, O.S.B. writes that they:

...are distinguished from the rest by their lofty seriousness, power of imagery, and metaphysical-mystical meaning. Her visions have something of the apocalyptic character of those of Hildegard, but Hildegard's vast complexity of images and moral reflections bring us the teachings of a prophetess, whereas Hadewijch's intensity and the deep impact of each phase of a vision as she tells it offer us an entrance point into her contemplative experience.

Elizabeth Dreyer (author of *Passionate Spirituality: Hildegard of Bingen and Hadewijch of Brabant*) agrees with the distinction Hart makes between Hadewijch's and Hildegard's visions, asserting that "Hadewijch's descriptions of her encounters with God and with Love are boldly erotic. Her poetry reflects an intensity of passionate experience. Hildegard, on the other hand, tends toward the cerebral. Her elaborate and powerful images are described and explained allegorically with an eye toward understanding." Speaking of his decision to set Hadewijch's Seventh Vision (set in the original 13th-century Dutch—which even he did not understand without expert assistance!—to communicate the unintelligibility of trying to comprehend God), Andriessen writes:

The essence of my choice to set one of Hadewijch's Visions to music is that these two elements—courtly love and divine love—are not in conflict with one another.... The seventh vision, which I have set in its entirety to music, is an account of a development from physicality to spirituality by way of a few meetings which very much resemble erotic encounters.... I regard this combination of religious or mystic ecstasy and eroticism not as a contradiction, but, in essence, as the expression of the same sort of feeling.

The slow movement of the four-movement symphony form, *Hadewijch* begins with an incrementally-ascending *cantus* which combines an octatonic scale (traditionally used by nineteenth-century composers to signify "other-worldliness") with the musical analogue of Bach's name (Bb-A-C-B). (Interestingly, while Andriessen harmonizes this melody primarily with instances of "his" tonic/dominant-dialectical chord and quartal sets, when the BACH part of the melody emerges, he frequently converts the quartal harmonies into tonal suspensions—perhaps giving a nod to the great tonal master.) Underscoring Hadewijch's desire, the ballade dominates much of the first half of the movement, being developed rhythmically (often cutting across and obscuring the 3/4 meter, while at other times accentuating this structure), contrapuntally (including canonic presentations), and harmonically (as most of the chordal creations in this movement emerge from stacked and superimposed instantiations of the opening sequence of harmonies); at times, Hadewijch's yearning for union with God is manifested so strongly at the physical level that she experiences severe pain as if her bones are about to break. When she expresses her wish for an intense carnal experience "to know and taste him through and through," the trumpet strategically doubles the vocal part.

In addition, the composition is "built upon" the structure of the Reims Cathedral in France, as if Hadewijch was walking through the cathedral to the altar (and, in almost Berliozian fashion, one can "hear" Hadewijch ascend the stairs of the altar, after passing the twelfth pillar, at the moment of the *mystic union*); as Andriessen writes: "The intervals of time between the chords of the pianos, tuned percussion [including pitched gongs] and guitars, which ring through the canvas at set points, have the same proportional relationship as the distance in space between the cathedral's pillars"—as Hadewijch passes a pillar, sounds of granite interrupt the ethereal harmonies. In a lecture reprinted in *The Art of Stealing Time*, Andriessen continues, commenting on the intellectual rigor with which the piece was built:

The large measure of formalism which forms the basis of *De Materie* does not in itself offer any guarantee that the work will be beautiful. I don't want to say 'on the contrary' because that isn't true either. I believe that, in art, there is a need for some sort of organization; organization is, in fact, the friend of chaos and chaos is an essential characteristic of art. A work like *De Materie* in particular is put together quite strictly and yet it often sounds as though it has been hurled onto the canvas in a joyous, Karl Appel-ish sort of way. Appel did, of course, take a quick look to see where the mess would land before he allegedly threw the paint onto the canvas. There was no question of his "just making a mess."

Further levels of symbolism include his use of Christian numerology: since *Hadewijch* is concerned with the spiritual dimension, the movement is largely built from three-note chords (which eventually expand to six- and nine-pitch chords), set in triple meter (3/4) and generally subdivided into triplets (in feel, the movement is in triple compound meter); then, during moments of the *mystic union* (the melding of the physical with the spiritual), Andriessen juxtaposes and alternates meters of 4 and 3—the earthly combined with the spiritual. In addition, the notes of Hadewijch's intimate final song are identical to the same notes which begin *De Stijl*, which in Andriessen's words is "gruesome and ironic, to connect the holiest moment of *Hadewijch* with a "common" theme)—although here the "common" theme employs a *Piccardy third*. Even the instrumentation choices seem symbolic; as Schönberger writes: "Illustrative of the inclusive character of the work, in which the "upper" and the "lower" strata of class-ridden musical society are inextricably intermeshed, are the growling triplets of the bass and contrabass clarinets which roam the hallowed sound of Hadewijch's vision like stray dogs in the church interiors of old Dutch paintings"—a music of grotesque, "animalian sounds," perhaps analogous to the monstrous gargoyles of medieval cathedrals, and which reinforces that houses of worship, rather than being austere and silent, often resounded with crude and busy sounds. As Hadewijch proceeds through the cathedral, her physicality is at first emphasized, but this layer of earthly sounds gradual disappears during the course of the work, indicating the mystic's transition from the physical into the spiritual sphere—by the work's end, Hadewijch is in ecstasy, oblivious to the external world. Everett asserts:

Just as the "toccata" chords convey the spirit of revolution in Part I of *De Materie*, the ballade melody conveys the intensity of Hadewijch's love for God, which depends on opposing states of pleasure vs. pain, joy vs. sorrow, and union vs. separation. By employing various contrapuntal procedures to alter the ballade melody, Andriessen manages to keep the rhythm of the instrumental and vocal lines organic and fluid. The stability of the "pillar" chords that support the structural framework is continually offset by the instability in the rhythmic flow of the ballade melody; the colliding impulses within Hadewijch are embodied in this tension between matter and spirit, between the physical and spiritual manifestation of love.

about...*De Stijl* (part III)

De Stijl is a snarling, clotted, brilliant piece of work...all musical lines are warped, twisting continually between the pure geometries of conceptual music and the abrupt graffiti of jazz.

Globe and Mail

De Stijl ("The Style") was written for an unprecedented combination of the Volharding and Hoketus ensembles (the two ensembles Louis formed) and first performed at the 1985 new music festival *Kaalslag* ("Demolition"); the piece fit in nicely with Andriessen's plans "to establish the Terrifying Orchestra of the Twenty-first century:" an ensemble that could dialectically synthesize the stated philosophical preference for wind instruments of his guru Stravinsky—

My *Octour* is a musical object. The object has a form and that form is influenced by the musical matter with which it is composed. The differences of matter determine the differences of form. One does not do the same with marble that does with stone. My *Octour* is made for an ensemble of wind instruments. Wind instruments seem to me to be more apt to render a certain rigidity of the form I had in mind than other instruments.... The suppleness of the string instruments can lend itself to more subtle nuances and can serve better the individual sensibility of the executant in works built on an 'emotive' basis. My *Octour* is

not an 'emotive' work, but a musical composition based on objective elements which are sufficient in themselves.

—with his own love of non-orchestral instruments: "I have always used instruments in my work which, from their birth, have been regarded as not good enough for 'real' music: saxophone, guitar, keyboards, bass guitar, whatever you like, as long as it is *dirty stuff*." Although originally conceived as an independent work, *De Stijl* ultimately became the third movement of *De Materie*.

De Stijl views the relationship between matter and spirit from an artistic perspective, specifically that of the Dutch abstract painter Piet Mondrian (1872-1944), one of the most profound, austere, influential artists of the twentieth century. In the words of Mondrian protégé Harry Holtzman: "It is impossible to imagine twentieth-century painting, sculpture, and architecture without Mondrian's oeuvre." During World War I, Mondrian stayed with the composer Van Domselaer and his wife at Laren, an artist's colony near Amsterdam. There he met two other individuals who greatly impacted his artistic development: the artist Theo van Doesburg, with whom he created the influential art journal *De Stijl*, and the theosophist mathematician Schoenmaekers, who greatly influenced his artistic ideals. (Although a strict Christian, Mondrian became a member of the Dutch Theosophical Society in 1909.) In *De Stijl*, Mondrian published many articles and essays detailing his new abstract, non-objective style, which he called "Neo-Plasticism," a name derived from the writings of Helena Blavatsky, one of the modern founders of Theosophy. The technique restricted the use of shapes purely to rectangles and with a limited color palette of the three primary colors (red, yellow, and blue) and what Mondrian believed to be the opposite of color—black, white and grey. Holtzman describes Mondrian's Neo-Plastic style as the "complete annihilation of the dominance of subject matter [that] begins to conspicuously reveal the plastic structure, the elements of the painting itself—the interaction of the planes and color, their movement, harmony, and rhythm." Mondrian's minimal style of abstraction can be seen in relation to his study of Theosophy, in his quest for the "Absolute": in trying to eradicate all elements of the subjective—the transient, and the personal—Mondrian found that the only materials left to express his universalist ideals were severely abstracted. While Mondrian's works may appear cold and calculated, they are actually the result of what he called "pure intuition." As David Sylvester writes:

Mondrian wanted the infinite, and shape is finite. A straight line is infinitely extendable, and the open-ended space between two parallel straight lines is infinitely extendable. A Mondrian abstract is the most compact imaginable pictorial harmony, the most self-sufficient of painted surfaces. At the same time it stretches far beyond its borders so that it seems a fragment of a larger cosmos or so that, getting a kind of feedback from the space which it rules beyond its boundaries, it acquires a second, illusory, scale by which the distances between points on the canvas seem measurable in miles.

Perhaps, though, Mondrian's unique artistic vision can be best articulated in his own words:

I construct lines and combinations of color on a flat picture plane with the aim of deliberately depicting a *general sense of beauty* as far as is possible. Nature (or what I see) inspires me, gives me, as it does virtually every painter, the emotion from which the urge derives to create something. But I want to approach truth as closely as possible, and thus I abstract everything until I come to the essence (always the external essence) of things...I believe this can be achieved through horizontal and vertical lines, constructed in a *conscious* but *non-calculated* way and guided by a large degree of intuition, and reduced to rhythm and harmony...To a more perceptive person, there is nothing vague about this, it is only vague to a trivial person looking at nature. (From a letter to art critic H.P. Bremmer [1914])

In order to approach the spiritual in art, one employs reality as little as possible...This explains logically why primary forms are employed. Since these forms are abstract, an abstract art comes into being. Art must transcend reality—Art must transcend humanity. Otherwise it would be of no value to man. This transcendent character appears *vague* and dreamy to the materialist, but for the spiritual person it is precisely positive and clear.... The principle of this art is not the negation of matter, but love of matter,

viewed in the most intense manner and expressed in form in the artistic creation.” (From a sketchbook [1914])

Everybody knows that painting and sculpture are concerned with the expression of the essence of art and not with the representation that cloaks it. But not everyone is convinced that the essence can be plastically expressed exclusively through line, color, form, and their mutual relationships, thus without particular subject matter...The essence of art expresses or evokes our emotions of beauty. It is universal and lies outside our subjective vision. The more that subjective vision is excluded, the purer the expression of art. All true art arises intuitively from the universal. The essence of art is the plastic expression of life, which is equally indescribable in its richness and fullness. (From “Art without Subject Matter” [1938])

In *De Stijl*, Andriessen is exploring the murky metaphysical roots behind Mondrian’s modernism—and perhaps most surprising, Mondrian’s love of jazz, specifically boogie-woogie dance music. (In 1926, learning that the Charleston might be legally banned in Holland because of its “sensuality,” Mondrian wrote from Paris: “If the ban on the Charleston is enforced, it will be a reason for me never to return.” In addition, Mondrian’s last two works were named “Broadway Boogie-Woogie” and “Victory Boogie-Woogie.”) Andriessen writes: “Mondrian’s peculiar love for wildness coupled with his innate sobriety is reflected in my piece *De Stijl* in the boogie woogie which is a passacaglia.” Like both boogie-woogie music and Baroque passacaglias, *De Stijl* is built on an obsessively repeated *basso ostinato* (what Andriessen calls both a funky “disco bass” and a “contemporary reinterpretation of boogie-woogie”). This bass line (which strongly articulates G-blues) dictates almost the entire course of the movement; it may be rhythmically displaced, it may become the subject for sequentially-, proportionally-, and rhythmically-canonically imitation (often at fiendishly dense temporal intervals), it may migrate to the upper voices, it may be modified quasi-atonally, it may even disappear periodically—regardless of contrapuntal manipulation, however, its metric structure, based on a 12-bar blues pattern, is omnipresent. (Andriessen has re-interpreted the classic 12-bar blues—48 beats, grouped in 12 measures of 4/4 time—into his own tricky, syncopated 48-beat bass line—8 measures of 3/4 followed by 6 measures of 4/4.)

Set above this disco bass, however, are two of the least likely texts to have been set to music: Dr. Schoenmaeker’s theories on “The Perfectly Straight Line” and Van Domselaer-Middlekoop’s touching-but-quirky reminiscences of Mondrian. Between the two, a full portrait of Mondrian emerges. We see the pseudo-scientific basis for his fascination with straight lines and what he took as “proof” of the inherent perfection of the “cross figure” (a confirmation of his Christian beliefs); alongside this theosophical treatise, though, we see Mondrian as his avant-garde friends saw him, his love of dancing (the physical) contrasted with his love of the spiritual. In all, the plurality of musical references create a labyrinth on the surface; as Everett remarks: “The austere juxtaposition of long-drawn-out chorale sections with light-hearted funk bass, boogie-woogie, and big-band music creates particularly striking effects.... The movement allows for seemingly incompatible musical elements to flow into one another with ease.” In fact, perhaps this montage form, which integrates seemingly incompatible stylistic genres, might be a metaphor for entire piece—the reconciliation of seemingly opposing realities might be the underlying project of all of *De Materie*.

Despite what Schwarz calls its “impudent surface,” *De Stijl* is strictly structured. Andriessen took Mondrian’s *Composition with Red, Yellow, and Blue* (1927) and, by translating its geometric proportions into metrical terms, derived the large-scale form of the music. In a 1999 interview, Andriessen said:

De Stijl is structurally based on a painting of his which I found in the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam; a poster of it still hangs in my study. I measured the circumference of the painting—2400 millimeters—and decided to use the same number of quarter-notes in my piece. The structure of *De Stijl* is entirely based on the painting: I could even say that I painted my own Mondrian in music. This is how it works. The painting consists of five elements: three colors (yellow, red, blue), the black lines, and the grey squares.

After reading the painting from top to bottom and from left to right, I made a sketch of all these elements and divided the orchestra into five groups, which were assigned to the various colors, lines, and squares. I did not forget the dancing, of course. An important part of the music is the equivalent of the black lines provided by the long bass line, which is a reference to certain types of pop music and to boogie-woogie. [In a different lecture, Andriessen commented that the trumpets and voices represent the red, saxophones yellow, trombones blue, and the grey being the “surprise element”—although, he added, “these relationships between colours and instrument groups should be taken with a substantial pinch of salt because I allocate sounds to colours quite arbitrarily.”]

Andriessen admits, however, that the “true spirit of the piece,” as with all of *De Materie*, is actually J.S. Bach; Andriessen regards *De Stijl* not only as a passacaglia, but as a chorale fantasy. Throughout the piece, Andriessen often utilizes the B-A-C-H motive (B-flat, A, C, B-natural) to highlight key formal nodes. Interesting is the parallel that Andriessen draws: the motive functions as the aural equivalent of the “the cross figure,” so valued to Mondrian. As author Maja Trochimczyk, writes: “This motive of the cross plays a fundamental role in...*De Stijl*, [which] explores the contradictions between Mondrian’s Christian beliefs and his less spiritual inclinations. Here, the B-A-C-H motive’s appearance alongside a boogie-woogie melody emphasizes the ‘mind-body’ contradiction between Mondrian’s strict Christian beliefs and his love of dancing, condemned by his Calvinist faith.” (The other “cross” motive that Andriessen employs are a three-pitch chromatic cluster plus one extra pitch, for example C-C#-D-G; Andriessen believes that the cluster can serve as the top of a “T,” while the relationship to the fourth pitch constitutes the length of the T. Andriessen reinforces this notion by instructing that a laser-“T” be created—to make the concept not just aural, but also visual.) While in part II of *De Materie* (*Hadewijch*), the opposition between the material/physical and the spiritual is questioned, in *De Stijl*, this opposition is highlighted through Andriessen’s use of Christian numerology, particularly the connotations of the number 3 with all things spiritual/godly and the number 4 with all things earthly (literally, *materie*). For example *De Stijl* is built with the superimposition of three-pitch harmonies (generally in the three flutes) contrasted with four-pitch harmonies (voices/trumpets/synthesizer), while the metric structure is a combination of 3/4 and 4/4, but still features many 4:3 cross-rhythms—at numerous levels, the juxtaposition of 3 and 4 is central to *De Stijl*.

While the beginning of *De Stijl* is foreshadowed by the end of *Hadewijch*, the great outburst at the end of *De Stijl* is also related to other parts of *De Materie*. Although Andriessen composed *De Stijl* before any of the other parts, in the context of the entire *De Materie*, it turns out to be a fairly emotional recollection of the harmonies from *Hadewijch* that accompanied the incarnation of God, as well as a bridge to the tolling-bell chords of part IV. As in many works by Stravinsky, *De Stijl* ends with an apotheosis—in recalling *Hadewijch* to serve this function, Andriessen seems to resolve the mind-body opposition, at least for the moment, on the side of the spiritual.

Dry analysis, however, can’t convey the contagious exuberance of De Stijl. Your feet move to the unrelenting, granitic force of the bass and the truly nasty crashes of percussion; your head nods along with the blasts of brass and winds; your spirit soars with the ethereal vocal parts. Sure, the timbres are abrasive, the dynamics loud, the effect unremittingly harsh. But this is music with roots in the power of pop, the repetition of minimalism, the linearity of Stravinsky, and the formalism of Bach—none of which cares much about coddling the ears.

K. Robert Schwarz

People often say that the piece sounds like nothing Mondrian. From this we can derive a wonderful fact: evidently people have an idea how Mondrian should sound in music. All the same, I can really see that.

Andriessen

about...*Part IV*

The relentlessness with which this musical monolith pursues its course is an image of the inevitability of death, characterized as an instrumental chorale whose individual chords are rotated across the orchestral texture—drawn gradually closer together in an impressive climax.

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Andriessen initially conceived of the last movement as something about ‘the wonder of music;’ in fact he had even held a sort of vision of a great, late-Romantic exegesis. However, at the suggestion of Robert Wilson (who he had invited to collaborate on the recommendation of Jan van Vlijmen, director of the Nederlandse Opera, who would produce the premiere), Louis instead decided to incorporate, along with excerpts from two sonnets by the Dutch symbolist poet Willem Kloos (1859-1938), texts of the Polish-French scientist Marie Curie (1867-1934) who won the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1903 (with her husband Pierre) and the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1911; while this broke the “rule” that everything in *De Materie* should happen within the culture of the Netherlands, Andriessen thought this was okay because he “always makes rules and then breaks them.” By the end of *De Materie*, the content of the text has shifted from material accounts of shipbuilding and atomic theory to the spiritual domain of human suffering. While part IV once again takes up a theme of science—this time personified by Curie—it is the themes of love and death as expressed by Kloos, and which reside just below the surface of Curie’s texts (a combination of her Nobel Prize-winning speech and fragments from a diary she kept after her husband Pierre died in 1906) that come to the fore. As Everett observes: “The ecstatic words [of Kloos’ sonnets] fit wonderfully well with Curie’s writings: their theme—how love overcomes death—though very general, is no less profound for that. This theme is perhaps at the heart of the last part. It was also a specific topic of the time in which the piece is set, as it was for the artist at the end of the nineteenth century.”

Like Ravel’s *Bolero*, part IV is a concept piece that deals with the idea of escalation. While *Bolero* is primarily concerned with intensification of tone color and volume, part IV is more concerned with the increase of the perception of speed (even though the tempo never increases). Like a Noh theatre performance (which shows the “other side of reality”), no tension is created as very few “events” happen. Time seems to stop and we are drawn to the clock-like ordering offered by the ringing instruments of the orchestra. In fact, within the vast suspense of silence, everything becomes possible, and anything could happen. Out of the endless ritual, a slow, hoquet-like chordal oscillation (reminiscent of the harmonic alternation of the beginning of Part II of *Le sacre du printemps*) develops which is comparable to the slow-breathing of some large creature, and that may be elevated into an expressive metaphor for life itself. What eventually emerges from the pealing bells of the pianos and percussion is a monumental, pavane-like final dance in which reference is made both to the spirit and, occasionally, to the letter of the solemn, beautiful *Pavane for Piano* of 1927 written by the composer’s father Hendrik Andriessen (1892-1981) for his eldest daughter to choreograph. So, like the preceding movements that, too, were based on pre-existent forms (toccata, ballade, passacaglia), the final movement is in the form of a pavane, a 16th-century dance.

In keeping with the solemnity of Kloos’s sonnets, Andriessen sets the text largely for unison choir, allowing the male half to sing the first two stanzas alone (balancing, somewhat, the female chorus from *De Stijl*). When the choir fades into silence—with the words “United with you, journeying with you to eternity”—the pavane melody also stops, as does eventually all of the music, leaving Marie Curie alone to express her thoughts and feelings. The “void” created by the absence of the pavane melody curiously parallels Curie’s emotional “void” and this correspondence heightens the dramatic effect: the irreparable separation between spirit and matter brought on by death.

In the end, though, the two-hour *De Materie* contains no narrative, is ultimately not dramatic, and preaches no message—it does not tell a story, nor is there a specific “point.” It may help us call into question how rigid the boundaries between the material and immaterial realms really are. It may give us pause to re-consider notions of objective existence and subjective experience. And it may afford a glimpse into the “other side of reality.”