

festivals. It's got quite a long life yet. That's the future of The Bow Project. Are there any more questions?

Q: Is this bow project focussed mostly on unadl and Nofinism's work?

MB: It is. You know as I explained earlier. It was my response to the Magogo project that's going on elsewhere with Professor Khumalo. He's done an opera and a whole song cycle. The arrangements, the accompaniments for his transcriptions were done by Peter Katzow and orchestrated by Katzow. So this was my response to that. When I first came to the Eastern Cape in 1998 – I used to live here although I don't live here anymore – one of the first concerts I went to was a concert by Nofinism and the women from Lady Ferie. It was in the Monument and rather unusually it was organised by the Grahamstown Music Society who normally have pianists and singers and cellists. And needless to say there were only about ten people in the Monument because there was no Chopin or Beethoven on the programme. Andrew Tracey introduced the concert and I was absolutely knocked out by this music. There were a lot of pieces with overtone singing. Since then I've been fascinated by the music and I thought 'let's do our own project; and since this festival is based in the Eastern Cape, let's use Eastern Cape music.' Then a few days before the festival last year, before this same concert, Nofinism died, and at that point it seemed that this was a little bit of a tribute to her art. So it will always be focussed on Nofinism.

Reader's Response

Of Sleeping White Men: Analytic Silence in the Critical Reception of Kevin Volans

Marin Scherzinger

In his various statements and writings, South African composer Kevin Volans addresses his musical compositions to predicaments across two intersecting political arenas. On the one hand, he argues that his early music was meant to effect a "reconciliation" between African and European aesthetics, (through connecting what was deemed culturally separate). On a local level, then, the composer regards the music as his "small contribution to the struggle against apartheid" (cited in "White Man Sleeps" at kevinvolans.com). On the other hand, Volans' early music was meant to call into question the industrialised standardisation of Western culture in general: its obsession with (what the composer calls) an "objectified and reified" sound that ultimately would end "in a nightmare of alienation" (in "Of White Africans and White Elephants" on kevinvolans.com). On a general level, that is, the composer argues that the processes

capitalist modernisation have had a largely negative impact on African music, seeking either to domesticate it ("to Westernise African music"), or to exotise it (give it "local colour"), (in "White Man Sleeps" on kevinvolans.com). Instead, Volans sought to "gently set up an African colonisation of Western music and instruments" as if to "introduce a computer virus into the heart of Western contemporary music" (in "White Man Sleeps" on kevinvolans.com). The principal mechanism used to achieve this reversal in his early works was quotation and paraphrase.

It is easy to dismiss Volans' claims to be effecting a genuine reconciliation between separate aesthetic domains: it is still easier to dismiss his idea of a "reverse colonisation" of the West in any robust, practical sense of the words. Indeed, most of the academic commentary on Volans (both here and abroad) has not only dismissed Volans' aspirations, but also raised to a higher degree the critique of Volans' entire project, concluding it a political and aesthetic failure on both local and global terrains. Locally speaking, that is, far from effecting reconciliation, Volans is accused of appropriation, and, globally speaking, far from reversing the colonial moment, Volans is accused of marching in step with the very demands of late capital. Jürgen Bräuninger, for example, makes both arguments: On a local level, he questions whether it is legitimate to "sell" such music "as original composition" (*South African Journal of Musicology* 1998, 6), and then suggests that the music is at bottom a form of "exploitation in a modern guise" (6). The legitimacy of these questions rhetorically supports the crux of Bräuninger's argumentative leap to follow, namely, that there is no "artistic value in re-orchestrating the (fabra, paraphe, and bow) pieces" on grounds that the originals are diminished thereby. Volans' earliest harpsichord works, for example, reduce away the buzzing inharmonics of the mbrar, while movements from the early string quartets evacuate the crucial dance steps and the ubuntu-like philosophy of the original paraphe music upon which it is based (6). Bräuninger's conclusion is tied to his critique on a global terrain: Volans' sequential quotation and paraphrase method creates "less meaning" than vertical relationships could, sounding like "strolls ... from one super-market shelf to the next ... the art music equivalent of MTV" (9). For Bräuninger, Volans' early work is a case of stolen goods, blandly combined in a pastiche of postmodern blurring, and ultimately becoming the very airport art it sought to critique.

This kind of disapproval is echoed in later commentary as well. In a review of a recent recording of Volans' string quartets, Chris Walton maintains that Volans' "plagiarism" "smacks of using the act of transcription as an excuse for erasing any moral claims of copyright on the part of the original author" (see *NewMusicSA Bulletin* 2002/2, 23). Here Walton is not, as one might expect, referring to the actual African source materials that allegedly ground Volans' compositional endeavour. Instead, Walton recalls a moment of infighting in the 1980s to support his point, when members of the "South African music establishment" accused Volans of "cultural banditry" (22).

On this matter, Walton's verdict is strident and clear: "Cultural banditry"? If this means appropriating without authorial permission the music of others and re-using it under one's own name to one's own aesthetic ends, then the attack is not without substance" (23). Likewise, on Volans' claim that a "folk tune played by a symphony orchestra is no longer a folk tune", the writer retorts: "Oh yes it is! This smacks of using the act of transcription as an excuse for erasing any moral claims of copyright on the part of the original author. In other words: if I take something, then it becomes my property, because I have stripped it of its original significance in making it mine" (italics Walton's, 23). Walton finds this to be a "circular argument", out of which he chooses to read "starkly neo-colonialist implications" (23).

As it is with Bräuninger, Walton goes on to affine the music's commercial success with the very market-driven "local colour" Volans had set out to resist: "The (South) Africa that [the quartet] evoke ... is the Africa of today's Jo'burg Airport lounge with its ethnic tourist shops: beautifully crafted, masterfully packaged, thoroughly enjoyable, but sanitised and somewhat bland" (23). Once again, an apparently "political" argument leapingly buttresses the case for a debased aesthetic. Unlike Bräuninger, Walton finally modifies his critique in a puzzling *non sequitur*: Volans' music, it seems, reminds him less of Africa than it does of Anglo-saxon minimalism after all. This is a noteworthy turnaround for an argument scrupulously invested in the notion that a folk tune, no matter its instrumentation or context, remains a folk tune. And it is this later argumentative edifice that supports Walton's genuine aesthetic judgments: while not his personal preference "Volans' music is finely wrought ... his craftsmanship is first-rate ... the fact that its minimalistic patterns are never overdone is proof to me of Volans' innate sense of formal rhythm", and so on (24). With minimalism sliding into the argument's central reference point (Walton mentions Nyman as a representative instance), Volans' music is paradoxically redeemed.

Argumentative pastiche aside, however, the moralising conclusions of these writers are quite censorious. As an easy rejoinder, one might ask whether the paraphrase-composition of Justinian Tamasza, Dumisaani Maraire, and Bongani Mdoana, and other elite Africans, is also a case of stealing? By what inscription, one might continue? What about Hovh, Berio, Brahms, Mahler, Stravinsky, Bartók, Berio, Foss, Schnittke, Ligeti? Or, one might question why the legalist-political failure implies an aesthetic failure. In what respect, precisely, that is, are the Africanised paraphrases diminished, sanitised, bland? More seriously, one might ask (using, say, Walter Benjamin's distinction between "aestheticising politics" and "politicising aesthetics") how the music's both complicit with and resistant to the ideological demands of neo-colonial capitalism. Far from illuminating the dialectical tensions within this body of work, what we find in the critical reception of Kevin Volans' oeuvre today is an ideological culture of critique, as unrestrained as it is morally assured.

It is worth noting that the American academic reception of Volans, with some notable exceptions, bears almost identical ideological traits to those described above. In a 1995 article, for example, Timothy Taylor concerns himself with the question of how we can talk about music and politics using the work of Volans as a test case. He notes that music critics at large seem to have effectively weeded politics out of music, and claims that when this happens, "audiences" of all kinds are effaced in the binary, implicit "meanings of all kinds" are left out (see *Perspectives of New Music* Vol 33 1995, 505). Taylor aims, first, to "deconstruct" this separation (which he identifies with the late eighteenth-century emergence of aesthetic autonomy) and, second, to provide "a theoretical model for looking at music" (505) with Volans' music as an example. Broadly speaking, for Taylor music is irreducibly social, and believing it to be otherwise – autonomous, say – a site of desire. He quotes Adorno: "form [colated here with autonomy] can only be the form of a content" (507) while "listening involves listeners" and not only such "objective form" (italics Taylor's, 508). The better to reveal the content of these plural perceptions, then, Taylor recommends "the ethnographic (is the next area to be explored" in our discipline (508); a terrain in which readers and listeners can ultimately "read into the music whatever they want."

On the topic of Volans himself, Taylor positions his method in a newly outmoded way. Resisting an argument that he sees as "the fashion these days", Taylor says that he is going to take seriously Volans' *Intentions*, because, far from being irrelevant, "they inevitably shape the way [his] works are received" (504) via disseminating views in talk shows, interviews and in magazines. The argument goes something like this: In the interviews of the late 1980s, Volans, drawn to the "formal asymmetry" of African music, "reconcil[is] African music and Western music" (511) in his compositions, and thus Volans uses African music in his work, "to show his engagement with this music and to make his political point" (512). However, the argument continues, there has been a change in intention in the interviews of the early 1990s because Volans now seems to partake in the "particular, particulate, notion of self that does not appear to have arisen in societies that are not capitalist" (italics Taylor's, 516). As a result, "his composit[er] individuality overrides everything African" (517) and, in logical step with his changed intentions, "Volans now disavows the social and political considerations" of his work (518). So now Volans talks about his music in far more formal terms: "For example, Volans' characterisation of the first dance of his *White Man Sleeps* has shifted from alluding about a conceitina player in Lesotho, whose performance inspired this movement, to a telling about an exercise in writing a movement with only two chords. Taylor describes the social trends that accompany Volans' emptying his own works of everything except formal values" (524). Under Thatcher/Reagan, he argues, "looking at art as empty of politics became more acceptable" (525). Taylor seems to imply that the interpretative reception of Volans' music (once?) frepleat "with overt political meanings" (526) is

depoliticised under Thatcher-Reaganism. And Volans is (overly?) party to this "retrogressive formalism" (525) because the "resurgence and universalisation of bourgeois European values in the 1930s has made it comfortable for [Volans] to have this 'universal' belief [Adorno's alleged aesthetic autonomy], and a 'universal' identity instead of a more local one". It is in this latter interpretation of Volans' intentions that Taylor accuses Volans of stealing music from other people.

For all their differences, these accounts share a common confidence that *extra-musical* matters are adequate to the task of musical judgement. Brünhinger draws actual musical sound closer to the substratum of his critique than do Walton or Taylor, but, even here, this sound is barely audible. Thus we hear about failures of reconstruction and the loss of musico-philosophical content, but only in the most general sense. There is one revealing moment, however: at bottom, it seems, Brünhinger prizes "vertical relationships" over sequential quotation and paraphrase (on grounds that the latter create "less meaning" than do the former). While creating the conditions for undermining a certain brand of postmodernism, this kind of critique is not substantial. What are 'vertical relationships'? Are they harmonic? Under what conditions can (any) music have no vertical relationships? Why are these relationships more "meaningful" producing than other ones? What kind of meaning is envisaged here? The questions go on and on. One surprising symptom of lending pride of place to vertical relationships is that it recapitulates the hierarchic European (and American) value of harmony (over rhythm) that is in strong tension with Brünhinger's apparent respect for African culture. Noteworthy too is the way the argument recapitulates the very strolling pastichism ("from one idea to the next") that is the object of Brünhinger's musical criticism. The strictly musical moment remains uninterrogated; assumed, it appears merely as an unwarranted postmodern fragment. Unlike the carefully substantiated ethico-political argument in Brünhinger's text, music's vertical relationships are better simply because they are. And thus the author's aesthetic stance resonates, ultimately, in the tones of political disapproval alone.

As for the substance of Walton's order of values, this is clearly grounded in aesthetics of an abashedly universalist sort (even if this fact is not demonstrably known by the author). For while we find a denunciation toward a context-driven theory of art ("is there a single composer of quality who is not marked by some degree by where he comes from?") and a protest against a context-free one ("There is surely no place on earth where one might be able to pretend a complete absence of knowledge of one's place in it?"), the argumentative weight Walton ascribes to this heterogeneity is not at all clear. It may be that geography is constitutive of musical creativity in Walton's understanding, but the author seems to prefer art that keeps such a "sense of place" in the closet. Walton dislikes Volans' "exotic African" titles (like *White Man Sleeps*) because, he claims, they are designed as a "selling-point", a position that opens space

for a latent critique of a "marketing machine" (*NewklisticsA Bulletin* 2002/3, 23). Why the striking three-word title "White Man Sleeps" – a translation of an African dance step – is merely exotic is not up for discussion in Walton's text. Nor is the fascinating aesthetic, historical and conceptual imaginary at work in these three words given any thought. Nor does Walton explain why "highlights of Porgy/Bess" (a title he rhetorically conjures as a substitute for the exotic African one) is either less exotic or more interesting on non-exotic terms (be they aesthetic, historical, conceptual, or whatever). Of course, Walton's argument against Volans' apparently foregrounding "local colour" creates the conditions of its own undermining because his deliberately uninteresting rhetorical substitutes, advanced to clinch the point about the pressures of the market, are equally (actually, more) local. Potgoleter/ust! The point is that only a diminished view of African aesthetics would limit the conceptual dimensions of the words "White Man Sleeps" to the logic of exoticism. Instead of nothing what the composer deeply admires, the thoughtful play in these words, the critic simply offers an injunction: One need not wear one's "passport on one's sleeve" (a "tag of origin") to reflect geographical locale, claims Walton; it is ultimately the "quality of the ends" that counts (italics mine, 24).

This last point reveals the latent aesthetic universalism as the ultimate principle of value in Walton's thinking. For an author seemingly concerned about the politics of neo-colonialism, this (not self-evidently progressive position) is an ironic turn. But the greater contradiction of course lies elsewhere. For an account that elevates musical quality to an aprioristic position, there is a remarkable absence of musical discussion. Apart from occasional remarks (the music is "finely-wrought" and has a captivating "urgency"; it resembles "minimalist Anglo-Saxon speak" and so on) most statements of value are *extra- or non-musical*. (As an aside, it is noteworthy that the author opposes Volans' resemblance to minimalism (at this point of his review) with Volans' resemblance to African music, apparently unaware of minimalism's great debt to African music). The point is, one might expect detailed discussions of musical content following from an overaching interest in musical quality. *Analysis*, concrete musical engagement, surely a minimal task attending any coherent claim to musical quality (in its universalist moment), is withheld or deferred in this writing; it is present as a key argumentative plank, but functions only as a rhetorical figure. The musical content of Volans' music is unable to impose itself upon the critical imaginary. The music is silenced.

This deafness to the actual music is as true for Walton as it is for Taylor. Taylor's article is particularly guilty of this absence because he does not even identify the actual music he accuses Volans of stealing. The article is further complicated by an allegiance to a crude psychological model of "intentions" that becomes the primary site of the music's "politics". Taylor is disturbed by what he considers to be Volans' formalistic representation of

African music. His suspicion of Volans' aesthetic claims about his own music carries interesting overtones of desire. Believing African music to be, at bottom, functionalist and "nonformal", Taylor wants its appearance in the context of a Western medium to articulate (a kind of postmodern) critique of formalism in America (*Perspectives of New Music* Vol 33 1995, 511). Failing that, it becomes "conservative". Of course the case of Volans' use of African music is ironic in the light of this form/function dichotomy because the composer's explicit interest in "formal asymmetry" (or what Taylor mistakenly thinks of as the "nonformal" as such seems to owe more to the influence of Morton Feldman and painters like Philip Guston than it does to African principles of composition. In his description of his "The Songlines" Quartet, for example, Volans explains that "in an effort to get away from form and into the material [Phillip Guston] stood close up to the canvas, working quickly and not stepping back to look until the work was finished. In the main body of this piece ... I juxtaposed very different kinds of music in the order that they occurred to me, not thinking ahead, and allowing the material to unfold at its own pace" (notes to *The Songlines*, 1994 CD recording, 3). The irony is that the form Volans is getting away from in this quartet is precisely African form, and, on principles that are in alignment with modern Western artistic ideals, I do not think we should trivialise the perplexing prevalence of this kind of false binary ossified by cultural geography: the fantastic opposition between a formalised north Atlantic and a *functionalised* Africa. Here is the argument: The form/function dichotomy has become a commonplace capable of spawning a host of subsidiary myths. For example, in his article "Musical Structure and Human Movement", John Bailey argues that the perceptual focus on musical structure is an exclusively Western idea that cannot be readily applied to non-Western music (see *Musical Structure and Cognition*, edited by P. Howell, J. Cross and R. West, 1985, 237-258). Using the kalimba music of southern Africa as an example, Bailey identifies the physical patterns of fingering (instead of the sounding forms) as central to the organisation of the music. Like Gerhard Kubik, who asserts that whereas "in Western music the movements of a musician playing his instrument generally have meanings only in terms of the sonic result, in African music patterns of music are in themselves a source of pleasure, regardless of whether they come to the in sound in their entirety, partly or not at all", Bailey emphasises the kinesthetic dimensions of African kalimba music above the formal-perceptual ones (1985, 241).

But does this distinction successfully divide musical-cultural contents? On the one hand, it is odd to suggest that hearing the formal organisation of a Western piece of music can be figured apart from a kinesthetic dimension: that hearing a formal gesture on the violin, say, is not also hearing physical work done by a performer. As Suzanne Cusick and Andrew Mead have argued, a kind of "kinaesthetic empathy" in which listeners identify with a sound as an embodiment of physical work done, is a central factor in the experience of

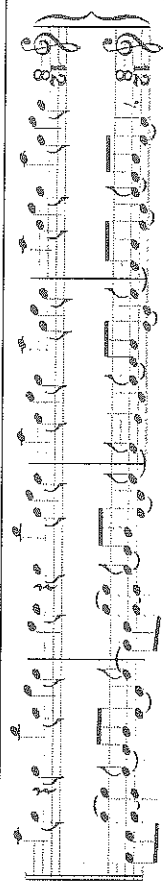
Western music (see Andrew Mead's 'Bodily Hearing: Physiological Metaphors and Musical Understanding', in *Journal of Music Theory*, 1999, 13). In addition to examples that bring the mode of production of sound into explicit formal play (like the backstage oboes or horns in symphonies by Berlioz or Mahler), even the music of one of the West's ostensibly most formalistically-minded composers, Anton Webern, is saturated with extreme expressive directions, portelli, harmonics, rhythmic complexities, difficult bowings, sudden dynamic changes and angular voice-leading that cannot but invoke a kinesthetic hearing and sometimes even obscure the formal microforms and symmetries that generate the pitch-structure. This is not to say that formal considerations are necessarily antithetical to kinesthetic ones. In 'Bodily Hearing', for instance, Mead demonstrates how the physical hand-crossings in the second movement of Webern's *Variations for Piano*, Op 27, play a structural role in articulating the principal motivic returns, which appear in addition to the canonic unfolding (1999, 13). In this way, the physical movements involved in performing the work indicate an aspect of the music's structure.

The point of this example, taken from the heart of Western music, is that it may have served John Bailey's idea that physical considerations and not simply sounding forms matter to the organisation of music equally well. As Andrew Mead notes,

Music, in large part, is indeed something we do ... That the mind can be ravished by the patterns we perceive in sounds I would never deny. But how we perceive those sounds, and how we make those sounds, cannot help but carry part of the message ... The study of music has its own rewards, but it is good to remind oneself occasionally that music's path to the mind is inevitably through the body (1999, 15).

On the other hand, it is also odd to suggest that the kinesthetic dimension of an African piece of music can be figured apart from any formal organisation. Consider the example of a simple kushaura (treading part) in Shona mbira *dza vadhimu* (music) in, Example 1 (below) from Ute Chigamba's repertoire; notice how the anomalous absence of a bass note on the eighth pulse of the third and fourth measures coincides with the doubling of D in the right hand. If kinesthetic considerations were logically prior, we would not expect the doubling in the right hand and we would expect the left hand to play some or other note on those silent pulses. Now, the lower note D cannot be found on either of the two left-hand manuals of the mbira. But, in order to maintain the integrity of the harmonic motion (indicated below in dyads) and the registral integrity of the bass line, it is played by the right hand instead. (I should note here that the experience of irregularity in executing this passage is minimal) In effect, then, a physical fingering pattern is broken to accommodate a formal consideration of the music.

The general idea that kinesthetic and not formal



Example 1: Kushaura of Ngozi Yemuroora by Tite Chigamba (transcription: Martin Scherzinger)

considerations are to the fore in African music while formal and not-kinaesthetic ones prevail in Western music strikes me as false. Indeed, mbira performers frequently report a sense of complete disorientation when they perform pieces on instruments with a different tuning layout. (see Paul Berliner's *Soul of Mbiru*, 1973, 70-71). This would be unlikely if fingering patterns were as primary as Bailey suggests. Short-hand cultural oppositions of this sort cannot be sustained in the face of rigorous comparative work. Nor can they be sustained in the face of carefully crafted creative work, of which Kevin Volans' work is an exemplary example.

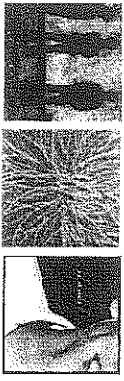
The political imagination at work in Volans' use of African musical sources in the context of a Western instrumentarium is one of its highest achievements. While seemingly aestheticising the source material and thus denying its concrete history, the music also puts into urgent question and doubt various racialising commonplaces about African music. tethered to questions recently raised by African musicologists (Kofi Agawu, Akin Euba, Zebana Kongo, and others) about common (but false) Africanist 'topoi' generally held in the West, Volans music issues social thought in its very sounding forms. And Volans was twenty years ahead of African writers today include the alleged primacy of rhythm and timbre in African music (over, say, melody and harmony) no less than the apparently functionalist (instead of contemplative) and kinaesthetic (instead of formal) essence of African music. The point is that Volans' music - effectively translating the sounds and patterns of African music in a new idiom - draws attention to values in the original African music that uniquely menace such invented topoi. And this kind of progressive imagination is open to actual listening experiences: it is open to a critical reception that is acutely attuned to the music's inner workings. It is in the recesses of its sound, finally, that the music's political ambitions are fully understood. And yet, the critical reception of Volans' music has been delectably quiet about the sound of the actual work. Does this culture of silence surrounding Volans' work - so obviously extraordinary, vivid, inventive - perhaps answer to another ideological need?

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Reviews

Open Record: At the Fringes of the Global Music Scene

Grant O'Keefe



Benguela Sui (*Open Record Open 04*), Eikeleen Ek is Legio (*Open Record Open 01*), Brendon Bussy Diesel Geiger (*Open Record Open 03*). Available online at www.openrecord.com.

Improvising their Benguela's latest album *Sui* opens with sounds rather than music: metaic rumbblings, insistent clunking, groanings and breath - a sort of primordial soup of sonic matter. Gradually, something more tangible even faintly recognisable, emerges: a high-pitched wail in an arching melodic line - a first cry of sorts. It's joined by other wail-sounds, descending in register - deeper, 'parental' responses - until, in the contrapuntal wailing that results, one hears a chorus of whales. Which I think is the point. Because what I've inadequately attempted to describe is the haunting soundscape of Southern Right, the opening track on the album. It's a compelling piece that becomes increasingly danceable: the deep wails, fashioned on Brydon Bolton's electric bass, transmute into a funkish groove. *Sui* is one of the first batch of albums released on Open Record, the Cape-based 're/field' label born in 2003. It's difficult to categorise the music coming out of Open Record. There's composed music that belongs to the contemporary art music tradition, such as Derek Gripper's solo acoustic guitar offering, *Blomdawns*. Benguela's 'post-rock' free improvisation, and underground electronics. So it's more an attitude, a position - 'left of (read: not mainstream)' - than 'type of' that characterises the stable. In an industry where labels are often branded by genre this openness is needed in South Africa: a potential platform for 'new music'. In the broadest sense whatever its provenance. Well, so the press would have it. Much has been written, most of it celebratory, about Open Record. But I'm more interested in exploring the aesthetic success of its products.

I'm going to focus on three albums, all of which reference the metagene of electronic. *Sui*, Brendon Bussy's *Diesel Geiger*, and Eikeleen's *Ek is Legio*. What's interesting about them is how they go about sounding out a sense of place. Not concerned, for example, with art music's and opera's desperate will to Africanise, or with the demands for contemporary hip-hop to South Africanise, these musicians nevertheless seem to essay a specific sense of place, one that is often local rather than national. Thus Benguela, named after the Atlantic current, formed and based in Cape Town, breathe life into *Sui* from the inspiration of Cape sea life. As I've mentioned, the singing of southern right whales, imaginatively mimicked in the electric bass's scraped bowings, morphs into the material on which Southern Right is built. It's this use of locality, not simply presented but composed into the music and out of which the music is composed, which localises the work.

For Benguela, 'flow' is a key aesthetic of their music, one that they take from their namesake current - their claim, not mine. This both works and doesn't on *Sui*. How one translates the idea of flow in musical practice is of course open-ended. Individual tracks on *Sui* do it doubly: at the micro-level the music moves through cyclically looped motifs often timbrally manipulated, on the larger level many of the tracks move across an extended arch-shape: the drum 'r' bass-ism 'Speed Queen' (a great track album as a whole flows. *Sui* was recorded live in front of a small audience, and, as a free improv group, one might have expected Benguela to be more open - 'flowing' - about form. I certainly wondered about Jeremy Daniel's praise of *Sui*'s "sort-of-open-ended formula" (*Star Tonight*, 2 October 2003), because each of the tracks not only tightly controls the material but is a discrete, individual piece, an 'album' aesthetic that tends to mitigate against large-scale flow across the improvisations, compare the continuous soundscapes spun by an ensemble like AMM. It's as if there's a lack of confidence in Benguela's ability to spin the material out, to think really long. Perhaps it's a latent rock aesthetic - the musicians have popular music backgrounds - that stops the admittedly extended pieces from becoming non-comforting, in the realm of 'music'. Indeed, it's when Benguela sounds too rock-like that *Sui* is least satisfying. When the instruments, especially percussion (Gross Campbell) and guitar (Alex Bussy), are played as rock instruments their sound is closed off, I wanted the trio to think more consistently beyond their instruments as instruments, to think of them as sound sources, again, something the personnel of AMM have perfected.

Sui opens itself up in another way. One of a double CD, its companion, *Chop Sui*, is a collection of remixes of the *Sui* material by local and international artists. And it's sometimes more interesting to hear what the remixes do. For one, they often live up to the times microphone and sampler sonarities of *Sui*: listen to DJ Opperman's 'remix' of 'Shunt Dynamo'. As is standard for electronic remixes, *Sui* provides the melodic and rhythmic material and *Chop*

Sui the variations on this, especially playing around with texture and timbre. My favourite dropouts are two. South African electronic auteur Felix Labiano's 'Beating Round the Bush', well, beats about the bush by turns wittily, 'dark', and hinting at funkness. And the remix by German-based Burnt Friedman and the Nu Dub Players, a cheeky reworking punctuated by acoustic brass is an electro-funk gem.

More so than *Sui*'s seafluence, *Diesel Geiger*'s sense of place is established through referencing local environment - the acoustecology. Sometimes brief samples stand by themselves, but it's more interesting when the sounds, primarily aural snippets of Durus and the Mother City, provide the germ for the music. Thus rhythmic patterns in the delicately wrought opening track, 'Palm Wandsplad', originate from a tree frog sampled in Kirstenbosch. The frogs' repeated chirps on a single pitch, immediately imitated by a mandolin's repeated pluckings, provide the pattern that travels throughout the track on assorted electronic sounds: a low tremor, gentle staccato spray of machine noise, an echo. The piece is a kind of timbral passacaglia in which these patterns play out over a continually repeated eight-bar harmonic progression. Human sounds - street culture - are also lifted from the city acoustecology. In 'Work', the spoken voice of a Cape Town street preacher is cut up and rhythmised to a hammer drill, a gritty industrial intro to the contrasting calm of the body of the track that gently tolls with orientalisised strings. At the end, the preacher reappears to deliver his sermon. Formal structure at the level of the track is mirrored at album-level. The frogs (or something that sounds like them) return at the end of the album, as does the barber about tattoos, sampled on a train journey and first heard early in the album. The completion of this conversation, like that of the sermon in 'Work', brings *Diesel Geiger* full circle. It's an old (nineteenth-century European) compositional aesthetic, grounded in the leas of organicism and unity, and supposedly consigned to history by postmodernism. But its deployment, here, in acoustecology is now grounded in the sonic stuff of 'real' nature. Electronic music is of course the medium par excellence for exploring and exploiting acoustecologies, which potentially both 'places' - localises - it and provides material to unify the endless sonic possibilities that electronic music may play with. It's an aesthetic that's too absent from Eikeleen's *Ek is Legio*.

Together with *Chop Sui*, *Ek is Legio* is the most conventionally electronic of the three albums, though there's plenty of non-digital material. Bussy calls *Diesel Geiger* "electronic" because of the prominence of *Ek is Legio*'s normally treated acoustic material, and to an extent this could be said of *Ek is Legio*. The electronic world of the latter is specifically that of electronic dance music, whence it often takes its beats and breaks, and some tracks (parts of 'Organika', 'Eikelelele') get into a really good groove. Drum 'n' bass in particular serves as a reference point. Much like *Diesel Geiger*'s unified through string sounds - Bussy plays the violin (*Geiger* after all - so *Ek is Legio* moves between drum 'n' bass and a generic