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Fausto's Romitelli's *Professor Bad Trip*, *Lesson I*

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Mathew Arrellin

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Abstract

Fausto Romitelli (1963-2004), one of the most inventive composers of his generation, created a musical language that draws inspiration from a multifaceted array of sources, including the technological landscape of daily life, the visual arts, poetry, literature, and philosophy. Furthermore, from early in his career, Romitelli incorporated elements in his music from many styles and genres, including from what are often separated as art-music and popular music.

This dissertation analyzes the first movement of Romitelli's *Professor Bad Trip* as a demonstrative example of the unification of the composer's musical philosophy and compositional aesthetic. A comparative study of the composer's known poetic sources—namely the writings and drawings of Henri Michaux, the self-portraits from the 1970s by Francis Bacon, and the work of visual artist Gianluca Lerici (a.k.a. Prof. Bad Trip)—is conducted in order to understand the ways in which these creators' works shaped Romitelli's music, especially in the temporal domain. The final section of the dissertation is dedicated to an analysis of the formal and rhythmic structures of *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I* and the ways in which musical cells are mutated during the developmental section of the piece.

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A Josymar y Mateo. Los amo.

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Introduction

Fausto Romitelli (1963-2004), one of the most inventive composers of his generation, created a musical language that draws inspiration from a multifaceted array of sources, including the technological landscape of daily life, the visual arts, poetry, literature, and philosophy. Furthermore, from early in his career, Romitelli incorporated elements in his music from many styles and genres, including from what are often separated as art-music and popular music. This abundance of inputs in Romitelli's creative practice reflects the desire he maintained to objectify and represent the complexities and enigmas of his lived experience through a network of sonic metaphors, and in his mature works this resulted in a hyper-saturated musical surface. In his words:

> "For me, to compose is to objectify something that is in me, and which, through the medium of sound, becomes a representation. Now it is essential in my opinion that, for expressive reasons, the representation of what I want to say be as direct as possible: it must therefore necessarily pass through a type of sound to which we are accustomed in our daily life. I want to get as close as possible to the experience, to express myself in a way that is analogous to it. Only through this type of sound experience can a symbolic horizon emerge that comes close to what I want to say."[1]

Furthermore:

> "The lived object is abstracted in a schema, that is to say, in a system of relations-oppositions which is held in an internal cohesion, and which is defined by a series of relevant features corresponding to pure musical qualities: mimesis and abstraction coincide. If therefore the interpretation of a musical object means to understand by intuition the relation of similarity between the sensation produced by the perception of the object and the sensation provoked by an experience of our past, the intuition corresponds then to the revelation of a common essence. Thus, metaphor is not an ornament, but the necessary instrument for a restitution,

[1] Fausto Romitelli and Eric Denut, "Produire un Ecart: Entretien avec Fausto Romitelli," In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 165.

> through style, of the vision of essences, because it is the stylistic equivalent of the psychological experience of involuntary memory, which alone makes it possible, by bringing together two sensations separated in time, to release their common essence by the miracle of an analogy. Metaphor is thus a tool of knowledge: reality is dematerialized, and the object of experience, by being incarnated in the musical sign, becomes pure difference. Abstraction redefines reality as malleable matter; matter, "suffered" in life, is on the other hand "acted" in writing. In such a way, in a work, the vicissitudes of the form, its trajectory in time, constitute the framework of a dramaturgy where the structural isomorphism with situations of the lived produces an intense participation, an identification at the organic level with the system of expectations and relaxations of the musical discourse."[2]

It is helpful to understand the trajectory of his compositional training in order to trace how Romitelli developed the vocabulary necessary to achieve this "symbolic horizon" in his music. In the late 1980s, Romitelli began his studies with Franco Donatoni at the Scuola Civica in Milan, adopting certain serialist compositional tools, particularly the use of rows as harmonic scaffolding and the creation of harmonic collections and scales based on repeating or symmetrical intervallic patterns.[3] In 1991, he relocated to Paris to continue his investigation of sound, and he began to develop his musical language in the composition courses at IRCAM under the guidance of the composers of L'Itineraire: Hugue Dufourt, Tristan Murail, Gérard Grisey, and Michael Levinas. His music from this period is marked by a rigorous approach to the generation of sound, where the computer played a much more prominent role as a virtual assistant for the pre-compositional process. His first major work from that time, *Natura morta*

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[2] Fausto Romitelli, "Resonances," In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli*, ed. by Alessandro Arbo (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 128. For further reading on metaphors, and particularly sensory metaphors, see *Metaphors We Live By* by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[3] In Alessandro Olto's analysis of *EnTrance*, he exposes the ways in which these techniques are deployed throughout the work. Alessandro Olto, "Between Spectrum and Musical Discourse: Computer Assisted Composition and New Musical Thoughts in *Entrance* by Fausto Romitelli," In *Sounds, Voices, and Codes from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Luca Cossettini and Angelo Orcalli (Udine, Italy: Mirage, 2017), 419-452.

con fiamme (1991), also featured the first attempt to merge the worlds of the acoustic of the string quartet and the electronic, with pre-recorded tracks of the quartet filtered and manipulated through Csound. Beginning in 1993, Romitelli was a Composer in Research at IRCAM, and this residency culminated in 1995 with the creation of his work *EnTrance* for soprano, ensemble, and electronics.[4]

In addition to adopting the technique of instrumental synthesis developed by spectral composers, especially Grisey, and studying Ligeti's timbral research of the sixties, Romitelli maintained a receptiveness to a variety of musical styles that motivated him to incorporate noise, inharmonic spectra, and distortion from a variety of sonic landscapes, particularly the experiments with sound in psychedelic music, art rock, progressive rock, avant-garde techno, and so on. The use of analog electronic instruments like the electric guitar, bass and the synthesizer from so-called "popular" music was an extension of this receptivity and resulted in a stylistic hybrid, often leading critics to misclassify him as a "rock" composer, but he insisted that this aspect of the music was only one component of his work.[5] To focus on it alone would be to lose sight of the greater poetics and greater artistry to which he aspired.

In his seminal cycle of works *Professor Bad Trip: Lessons I, II,* and *III* (1998-2000), the composer's poetics reached an apex, in which many different streams of thought intersected to synthesize what is perhaps the most striking of his works. At every opportunity, Romitelli attributed the inspiration for the work to the writings and drawings of Henri Michaux, especially

[4] For a complete list of works by Romitelli, see the Appendix.
[5] "But my interest in rock is only one side of a more general interest in synthesis, instrumental fusion, and more generally the idea of creating very granular, very distorted sounds, of giving birth to a telluric, violent musical material." Fausto Romitelli, "Produire un Ecart: Entretien avec Fausto Romitelli," In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 167.

the book *Infinite Turbulence*, which was created while under the influence of the hallucinogenic drug mescaline.[6] He also credited Francis Bacon's series of triptychs from the 1970s as being of particular importance.[7] The investigation of both of these artists' works is illuminating when analyzing *Professor Bad Trip*, but one important association which Romitelli seemed to have kept to himself, at least in written program notes and interviews, but which seems to be widely known amongst researchers and advocates of his music, is that the Professor Bad Trip moniker belonged to another Italian from Romitelli's generation: the visual artist Gianluca Lerici (1963-2006), aka Prof. Bad Trip. Despite this, no serious investigation has previously been carried out to unpack the substantial parallels between the works of Romitelli and Lerici.

In my reading of the work, I find that the degree of influence that each of the aforementioned artists shifts depending on which dimension of the piece one looks at. For example, at the highest level of organization, one finds parallels with Bacon's symmetrical triptych structures: three movements as well as each *Lesson* containing three larger sections.[8] An additional similarity to Bacon's works found in Romitelli's music is the use of repetitions of familiar shapes and gestures to guide the listener through a gradual process of distortion, in which different components of the object rise and fall in and out of focus and relief. Gianluca Lerici's influence extends to the broadest aesthetic framework. In an effort to decrypt the title of the *Professor Bad Trip* cycle and its association to Lerici, I will draw connections to the most significant correlations between the two artists, namely the fact that they were both influenced by

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[6] Fausto Romitelli, "*Professor Bad Trip*: Présentation," In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli*, ed. by Alessandro Arbo (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 135-137.
[7] Ibid.
[8] See Nicholas Moroz's analysis of the formal layouts of each movement of the *Professor Bad Trip* cycle in his article "Hacking the Hallucinatory: Investigating Fausto Romitelli's Compositional Process through Sketch Studies of *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*," *Sources and Research from the Institute of Music* 5, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (2020): 59-84.

a variety of overlapping themes, such as an underlying counterculture spirit, the role and impact of technology in their lives (and how they assimilated it in their work), psychedelic music and visual culture, and drug culture. Many of these themes coalesce in the form of cyberpunk culture, which initially began in the 1980s as a subgenre of science fiction but has evolved to encapsulate a much broader scope of visual and popular culture. I would argue that the main tenets of cyberpunk as understood by scholars today can likewise apply to Lerici's visual art and Romitelli's musical aesthetic, which I will elaborate on further below. Lastly, the rhetorical structures found in Michaux's *Infinite Turbulence* bear striking similarities to the rhythmic devices found in *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*. A rich understanding of Romitelli and his music can be achieved by studying each of these creators individually in relation to the composer.

I will then shift my focus to the temporal dimension of the work. Limiting the scope of my analytical research to this domain in Romitelli's work has proven to be particularly enlightening when reading it in conjunction with the aforementioned artists. Therefore, in this text, I will conduct a comparative analysis of the works of Francis Bacon, Henri Michaux, and Gianluca Lerici and use this as a lens to analyze the temporal progressions present in *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*. Additionally, having studied at IRCAM with the composers of L'Itineraire in his formative years (Hugue Dufourt, Tristan Murail, Gérard Grisey, and Michael Levinas) Grisey proved to be a valuable guide for the younger composer. I will identify parallels between the first movement of *Vortex Temporum* and Romitelli's *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I* using terminology derived from Grisey's article on musical time "Tempus ex Machina."[9] This will provide a base framework for deciphering the ways in which the composer assimilated a rhythmic language to

[9] Gerard Grisey, "Tempus ex Machina: a composer's reflections on musical time," *Contemporary Music Review* 2 (1987): 239-275.

carry out the task of creating a musical interpretation, or representation, of his reading of Michaux's books on mescaline. A holistic interpretation of the work filtered through an understanding of the diverse array of influences is necessary in order to shine a light on how the rhythmic layer of the music behaves.

Francis Bacon

> "The [*Professor Bad Trip*] trilogy is shamelessly inspired by Francis Bacon's triptychs, especially the substantial series of *Three Studies for a Self-Portrait* from the 70s; there is no narrative function, but there is, on the other hand, a clear, alternating, disturbed but recognizable symmetrical structure; each successive journey generates a series of feedbacks, interferences and short-circuits with the previous ones; the same material is worked three times in a kind of enigmatic and violent ritual."[10]

In the work of Francis Bacon (1909-1992), the subject matter is almost exclusively the head and the body throughout the artist's entire career. The distorted modulations that occur across his diptychs and triptychs shine a light on the ineffable kaleidoscopes of the constantly shifting emotions of his subjects. The distortions he created seem to track this ephemeral force in real time, and the resulting forms expose the deeper convolutions and flaws of the human condition. This is augmented in his polyptychs, where the repetitions that occur across each portrait work to unravel the mysteries beneath the flesh, and as Romitelli said, "the same material is worked [multiple] times in a kind of enigmatic and violent ritual."[11]

Despite often making use of polyptychs, which had been implemented in Western visual culture since the Middle Ages to evoke a particular narrative, such as in the various depictions of the crucifixion of Christ, Bacon adamantly avoided and undermined this

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[10] Fausto Romitelli, "*Professor Bad Trip*: Présentation," 136-137.
[11] Ibid.

convention.[12] In Rina Arya's *Painting in a Godless World,* the author argues that "Bacon's triptychs are not like religious triptychs because he does not delineate a narrative reading that involves a cumulative sense of meaning from panel to panel… The continuity of backgrounds in Bacon's paintings is not matched by a narrative continuity of interaction between the figures."[13] In an interview with David Sylvester, Bacon spoke about why he was attracted to triptychs in particular:

> "I see images in a series. And I support I could go on long beyond the triptych and do five or six together, but I find the triptych is a more balanced unit."[14]

In Bacon's triptychs, he frequently made use of symmetrical structures or broken "mirror" images, such as in his work *Three Studies of Henrietta Moraes, 1969*. He spoke about this with Sylvester, saying that "in the triptychs, I get them rather like police records, looking side face, front face, and then side face from the other side." The center portrait functions as the axis of symmetry, the fulcrum point at which the gaze of the viewer drifts to the left or to the right.

Figure 1: Francis Bacon, Three Studies of Henrietta Moraes, 1969

[12] See Rina Arya, *Painting in a Godless World* (Surrey, England: Lund Humphries, 2012).
[13] Ibid, 108.
[14] David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, 2nd ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1980): 98.

In the interviews with Sylvester, Bacon also frequently mentioned his fascination with the motion-sequence photography of Eadweard Muybridge. He even speculated that "the thing of doing series may possibly have come from looking at those books of Muybridge with the stages of movement sown in separate photographs."[15] However, rather than create a discernable sequence of events as is the case with Muybridge, the results are inscrutable superimpositions of disparate and suspended motions, "as if they were revolving around their own axis."[16] The "movement… in Bacon's pictures… [turns] back on itself and revolves around a hidden center of gravity."[17] In other words, Bacon felt that movement and energy were so crucial to a person's identity that he tried to capture this temporal reality of his subjects in his work. In the article from 2015 "Bacon and Bergson on Time and Motion," Rina Arya drew parallels between Bacon's temporal explorations in his portraits with French philosopher Henri Bergson's theories on the perception and the experience of time. Channeling Bergson, the author argued that in Bacon's work, time is heterogeneous, where past and present are contemporaneous.[18] The images, paradoxically locked into multiple coexisting states of flux, feature a severe distortion of the subjects. This temporal flux was paired with Bacon's preoccupation to explore the undercurrents of the human psyche, with "[the artist's] kind of exhilarated despair," and the paint was subjected to what Bacon referred to as a "violence" or

[15] David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, 37.
[16] Rina Arya, "Bacon and Bergson on Time and Motion," quoting Wieland Schmied, *Visual Culture in Britain* (2015): 70.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Rina Arya, "Bacon and Bergson on Time and Motion," 72.

"injury," which was intended to create a strong, visceral response from the nervous system.[19]

Figure 2: Francis Bacon, Three Studies for a Portrait of Lucian Freud, 1965

It is striking that Bacon was intuitively working in this way without any concrete knowledge of the neurological effects his paintings would have on the viewer. In an attempt to understand why multiple generations of critics and scholars alike have continued to use adjectives like "disturbing," "violent," "unsettling," and so on to refer to the artist's work, neuroaestheticians Semir Zeki and Tomohiro Ishizu studied the ways in which the brain reacts to certain kinds of images, using Bacon's paintings as the focal point.[20] They discovered that, because faces and bodies are more neurologically privileged than man-made objects, a distortion of the face or the body would trigger prolonged activity in the dorsolateral prefontal cortex (DLPFC) and "this activation is resistant to prolonged viewing of violated faces for up to one month," and that "viewing abnormal faces for that period does not decrease activity in that cortex but actually enhances it."[21] By contrast, they found that viewing distorted images of man-made objects resulted in a gradual decrease in activity in the DLPFC as the viewer would adapt to it as

[19] David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, 94.
[20] Semir Zeki and Tomohiro Ishizu, "The 'Visual Shock' of Francis Bacon: An Essay in Neuroesthetics," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7 (2013): 1-15.
[21] Ibid, 12.

a new reality over time. The authors found that "departures" from normal configurations of facial and bodily features stimulated negative emotional responses through "a strong activation of sub-cortical structures such as the amygdala and the insula," which could happen "even when subjects are 'unaware' of the stimulus."

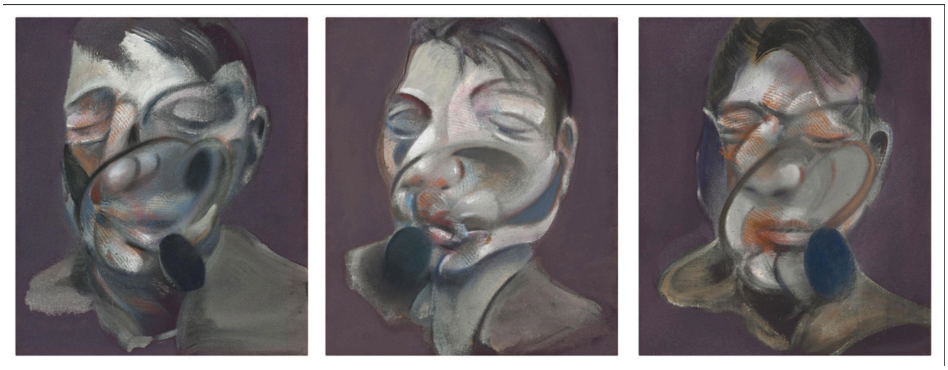

Figure 3: Francis Bacon, Three Studies for a Self-Portrait, 1974

By studying these images, one can identify many parallels with Romitelli's personal aesthetic goals and his musical realization of them in the *Professor Bad Trip* trilogy. For example, neither were concerned with creating narrative structures in their work but both of them made use of polyptychs. In Romitelli's case, there is obviously a longstanding musical convention to write large-scale works in multiple movements. However, there isn't a conventional relationship between the movements (i.e. fast-slow-fast), and the three movements all begin with roughly the same energy, slowly growing and evolving towards a climax in similar ways. Repetitive cycles of materials are gradually developed and accelerated throughout each of the three movements. One might argue that Romitelli was conducting his own "violent ritual" of the same material threetimes.[22] Additionally, there are internal tertiary forms throughout each of the

[22] Fausto Romitelli, "*Professor Bad Trip*: Présentation," 136-137.

Lessons,[23] as well as "interferences" and "short circuits" in the form (i.e. the guitar break in *Lesson I* or the cello cadenza in *Lesson II*), words the composer used to describe Bacon's self-portraits.[24]

On a smaller scale, imprecise repetitions of musical phrases, which are one of the most prominent features of Romitelli's writing, feature "altered and disturbed although recognizable" structures, as in the first section of *Lesson I* following the introduction.[25] Throughout the repetitive cycle, there are repeated sequences of timbral information at the outset of each iteration which are invariable: flute pizz./noisy flutter-tongue followed by bass clarinet slap tongue, then by subtle downward glissandi, and closed with some kind of resonance (often of repeated notes or gestures). Each iteration varies internally, but the outer edges of each phrase, defined by sound types (i.e. attack/resonance) and dynamics, tend to be discernible for the listener, just as the primary framing elements of the subjects in Bacon's portraits (i.e. proportions, colors, values) are fairly consistent despite severe internal distortions.

Another parallel is that both Bacon and Romitelli were interested in creating a strong response in their respective audiences, and they both made use of the concept of distortion to achieve this goal. Romitelli was devoted to the idea of once again positioning the body of the listener "at the center of the musical experience," straying from the academicized, cerebral experience of music, which he felt was unfruitful.[26] It

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[23] See Nicholas Moroz, "Hacking the Hallucinatory: Investigating Fausto Romitelli's Composition Process Through Sketch Studies of *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*," 63.
[24] Fausto Romitelli, "*Professor Bad Trip*: Présentation," 136-137.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Fausto Romitelli, "Produire un Ecart: Entretien avec Fausto Romitelli," 166

would be fascinating to see how much of the findings that Zeki and Ishizu found in regards to the experience of Bacon's work might be transposed to the experience of Romitelli's music. Because faces and bodies are neurologically privileged over man-made artifacts, distortions of them cause a powerful and prolonged neurological response. It bears the question of whether sound enjoys some neurological privilege, and if distortions of natural harmonic spectra and fusions with acoustic and electronic elements within the context of Romitelli's music might also trigger a similar response. This scientific research would be the gateway to understanding the composer's sentiment that "music is… above all perhaps the physiological reactions of the body… It doesn't matter whether music is understood by analysis or not: music must not be understood… today music must be violent and enigmatic."[27]

Gianluca Lerici, a.k.a. Prof. Bad Trip

> "These are the questionable teachings of Professor Bad Trip who, obviously, loves psychedelic and progressive rock and the avant-garde of the techno universe. I believe that popular music has changed our perception of sound and established new forms of communication. For a long time, the composers of learned music, the "early defenders of Part," refused any mixing with "commercial" music: the formalism and the avant-garde's a priori on the purity of the musical material neutralized, "caste" the sound; today, the necessity for the musicians of my generation to reject gratuitous abstraction and to search for a new perceptive efficiency has convinced some of us to draw on the sonic inventiveness, especially electro-acoustic, of popular music. The boundless energy, the violent and visionary impact, the relentless search for new sounds capable of opening the 'doors of perception': these aspects of the most innovative rock seem to join the concerns of expression of certain contemporary composers."[28]

[27] Ibid.
[28] Fausto Romitelli, "*Professor Bad Trip*: Présentation," 136.

In this program note, Romitelli provided the audience with a hint that reveals a deeper dimension of his musical philosophy, and while he mainly addressed the need to diversify the musical fabric of his work to escape from academicism, he also invoked the artwork of Gianluca Lerici, known professionally as Prof. Bad Trip, in his trilogy of works of the same name. Interestingly, Romitelli never spoke of Lerici in program notes, interviews, or writings, so it is striking that Lerici's art features many of the same themes that one finds in Romitelli's music. The numerous parallels between Lerici and Romitelli are worthy of substantial investigation, which would extend past the scope of the analysis at hand. That being said, I would at least like to address correlations between the artists' respective philosophies and artistic work to help decipher the lessons of Romitelli's *Professor Bad Trip* cycle. In the quoted passage above, Romitelli outlined the "teachings" of Professor Bad Trip. It is unclear whether in this program note, he was referring to Lerici or to a reimagined avatar for his own "lessons." Strong similarities that can be identified between the two creators' respective works include counterculture sentiments from the era—that is, a feeling of rebelliousness towards the ruling class, be it that of the contemporary music scene, the contemporary visual arts scene, the political context, etc.—the assimilation of technology, themes of psychedelia, and hallucination. Furthermore, just as Romitelli made use of noise and inharmonic spectra in his work, Lerici embraced the visual art equivalent of a kind of cultural and social noise, depicting the rejects of society, lowlifes, punks, thugs, and "cyberpunks." None of the aforementioned elements are mutually exclusive. In fact, if we focus specifically on cyberpunk culture when examining the two artists, we can unlock an understanding for a number of these overlaps.

Defining "cyberpunk" has been a challenge for writers and scholars almost since the beginning of its widespread use in the 1980s, and there are multiple conflicting

assessments of the word.[29] It was originally born as a subgenre of science fiction literature, although many of its original advocates and critics declared it "dead" once it entered the mainstream.[30] Nevertheless, there are some relatively consistent features of the subgenre. Andrew Butler succinctly summarized that "the technology provided the *cyber* part of the label; the street life of the stories and novels offered the *punk* part."[31] Bruce Sterling, in the preface to an anthology of cyberpunk works he compiled, stated that "certain central themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry—techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of the self."[32] Many of these themes will immediately trigger associations to Lerici's artwork, seen below.

Figure 4: Gianluca Lerici, CyberPunk, acrylic on canvas, 1998

[29] See the reprint of Brian McHale's, "Towards a Poetics of Cyberpunk," In *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives* (Routledge: New York and London, 2010): 3-28. Originally printed in 1992.
[30] See Andrew Butler, *Cyberpunk: The Pocket Essential* (Pocket Essentials: Harpenden, Herts, Great Britain, 2000), and Graham J. Murphy & Sherryl Vint, *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives* (New York/London: Routledge, 2010).
[31] Andrew Butler, *Cyberpunk: The Pocket Essential*, 9.
[32] Bruce Sterling, "Preface" in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. by Bruce Sterling (New York: Ace Books, 1986): 13-22.

It is important to note that cyberpunk literature was "a generational and 'school' phenomenon," with its own "manifestoes and literary polemics, group anthologies, fan magazines, panels at [science fiction] conventions, etc.," as Brian McHale asserted in his article "Towards a Poetics of Cyberpunk."[33] In the text, McHale made a number of observations about key features of the subgenre, including but not limited to a "motif complex," the presence of "microworlds," sprawling cities of "maximally intimate juxtapositions of maximally diverse and heterogeneous cultural materials" (for example in Blade Runner), and so forth.[34]

However, in the introduction to Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink's collection of essays *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture*, it is made clear that the word no longer refers exclusively to a literary subgenre, but encapsulates a much larger branch of visual culture, including film, television, video games, comics and graphic novels, magazines, and of course, visual art.[35] The authors observed that "…cyberpunk has evolved as more than simply a set of enshrined criteria that generates narrative maneuvers by rote" and has become "a cultural formation [which is] an historical articulation of textual practices with a variety of other cultural, social, economic, historical and political practice," and includes "interrogations of such notions as human, materiality, and real vs. simulation."[36] Furthermore, channeling Bruce Sterling's preface

[33] Brian McHale, "Towards a Poetics of Cyberpunk," In *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives* (Routledge: New York and London, 2010): 3-28. Originally printed in 1992.
[34] For a deeper understanding of these terms, see McHale's, "Towards a Poetics of Cyberpunk."
[35] Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink, "Introduction: The Visuality and Virtuality of Cyberpunk," In *Cyberpunk and Visual Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018): xx-xxvi.
[36] Ibid, xvi.

to *Mirrorshades* and Donna J. Haraway's *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*,[37] the authors stated:

> "The boundaries between external technologies and internal biologics have become more and more nebulous, perhaps even irrelevant. It is for these reasons the 'cyberpunk' tag gets simultaneously muddied and diversified… This current cultural moment is therefore 'characterized not by the replacement of the material with its simulation but rather one in which the material and the simulated are intertwined like a Möbius strip: they each have distinct identities, but we never inhabit a moment that is purely one or the other' (Vint 229)."[38]

I would argue that the term "cyberpunk" as described by the aforementioned authors can be adopted to study musical and sonic culture as well. After all, the "-punk" half of the word refers to a significant chapter of music and cultural history that influenced the literary subgenre to an enormous degree, ranging from the rebellion of youth culture to fashion to drug culture to nihilism, although this is largely unaddressed in scholarship on the topic.[39] For the purposes of this analysis, I will use the word cyberpunk as a tool to understand Romitelli's musical practice as a cultural formation created as a result of "metabolizing" the "impact of technologies, the impact of the 'media panorama' and of the new strategies of communication, and the influence of musics of the popular domain."[40] Through the lens of cyberpunk culture, we can already identify ways in which counter-culture themes, fusions between the real and the simulated, and

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[37] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).
[38] Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink, "Introduction: The Visuality and Virtuality of Cyberpunk," xxii-xxiii. Quoting Sherryl Vint's "Afterword: The World that Gibson Made," In *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 228-233.
[39] For more on the historical significance of the punk movement, see Brian Cogan's *Encyclopedia of Punk Music and ulture* (Westport, Connecticut/London, 2006), and *Hardcore, Punk, and Other Junk: Aggressive Sounds in Contemporary Music*, ed. by Eric James Abbey and Colin Helb (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2014).
[40] Fausto Romitelli, "Le Compositeur Comme Virus," In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli*, ed. by Alessandro Arbo (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 131-134.

the poetic approximation of an experience with hallucinatory drugs occupy the works of both Romitelli and Lerici. I will study each of these parallels below.

As seen in the image above, Lerici was clearly influenced by the cyberpunk genre. In an interview with Vittore Baroni, he addressed a variety of topics that interested him, and although he did not explicitly mention its most well-known authors, such as William Gibson or Bruce Sterling, his influences included but were not limited to "experimental literature, crazed, and pre-cyber" by William S. Burroughs, J. G. Ballard, and Philip K. Dick; the "dystopian literature" of George Orwell, Aldous Huxley, and Ray Bradbury; the "libertarian cinema" of Luis Buñuel and Stanley Kubrick; the "sci-fi-psycho cinema" of Ridley Scott, David Cronenberg, and John Carpenter; tribal art, Art Brut, Dadaism and Expressionism, and so on. There is a lot to unpack from this list of influences, but it is worth noting that Lerici adapted William S. Burroughs *Naked Lunch* into a graphic novel:

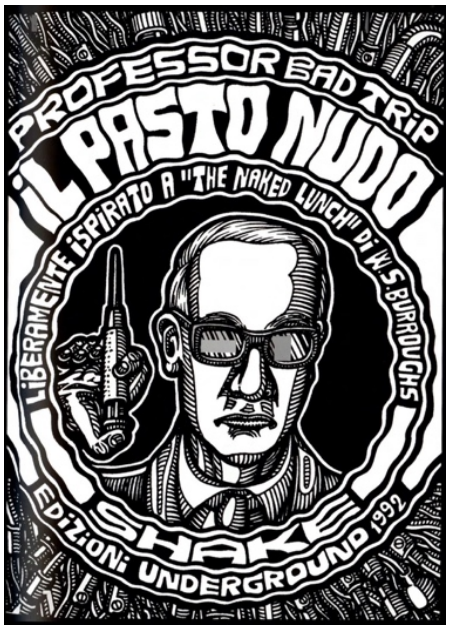

Figure 5: The cover of Lerici's adaptation of Naked Lunch *by William S. Burroughs*

Many connections from these creators can be made with the overall aesthetic of Lerici's artwork. Clear associations are Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Huxley's *A Brave New World* or his autobiographical *Doors of Perception* (which documents the author's experience with mescaline), the criminal degenerates of Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange*, Ridley Scott's cyberpunk classic *Blade Runner* (adapted from Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*), and the body horror of Scott's *Alien* or David Cronenberg's *The Fly*. Furthermore, many scholars and historians have addressed the correlations between punk culture and dadaism, such as the "rejection of prevailing norms" and "denouncement of beauty."[41]

Lerici's artwork was frequently featured in the counter-culture Italian magazine *Decoder*. The magazine, published in Italy by ShaKe Edizioni Underground, was born in the 1980s out of the founders' desire to create an alternative media communication method (i.e. taking media communication to the people, bypassing government-sponsored messaging), and to publish articles on controversial topics such as hacking, among many other things. Political and social strife had grappled Italy throughout the 60s and 70s, and the media conveyance of this reality, according to the founders, was suppressed and erased by government-sponsored entities.[42] The magazine sought to rectify this erasure, using often cryptically encoded topics, invoking the dystopian and cyberpunk genres of science fiction literature.

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[41] Jesse Prinz, "The Aesthetics of Punk Rock," *Philosophy Compass* 9 (2014): 583-593.
[42] The following documentary shows the history of Decoder according to its founders: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mY2JfGTbZOU

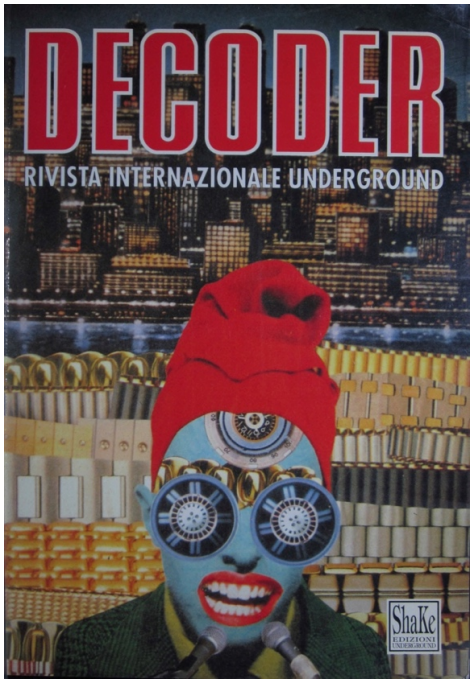

Figure 6: Cover for the 8th issue of Decoder *magazine*

Lerici was one of its resident artists, and his collages were frequently used as the cover art, such as in the 8th issue of the magazine run, seen above. Lerici interpreted many of the core topics of *Decoder*, for example in the comic book titled "The Modern Dance"[43] under the "Bad Trip Comix" label included in the 8th issue that features an independent hacker named "Mister K" (almost certainly a reference to the main protagonist of many of Franz Kafka's works) set in a not-so-distant dystopian future, where human beings are mutated with technology and androids roam the world freely. *Decoder* was quite a successful magazine throughout Italy. The founders frequently organized tours of many cities throughout the country to stimulate conversations with their audience. They also organized exhibitions of digital and virtual art by burgeoning artists experimenting with new mediums to synthesize hybrid forms. It is quite possible that Romitelli

[43] The comic can be seen here: https://archive.org/details/decoder-8/page/n47/mode/2up

was exposed to this underground scene at a young age, and at the very least, he was familiar with the artwork of Prof. Bad Trip.[44]

We can certainly understand Lerici's work, especially the work featured in *Decoder*, as counterculture. His position towards the ruling class of the visual arts domain was equally antagonistic. Lerici felt that the majority of what was perceived to be "valuable" in the art world existed in an aesthetic echo chamber, which reinforced the value systems that had been established by the primary institutions that invested in the art.[45] He articulated that these "public or private institutions, banks, industries, governments, etc., are not prone to buy or to promote works whose subjects are iconoclastic, radical, revolutionary and critical of their own contemporary society or are questioning in any way the status-quo of the current financial, cultural and political hierarchies," so naturally at the top of what he described as the iceberg of the art world, in the sun above the water, "there will be domesticated and just pseudo-modern authors, forever mocking some ex-avant-garde, which was dead and dismissed ages ago."[46] Beneath the water, counter-culture artists continually experiment in the comfort of obscurity, criticizing the ruling class, until the cycle repeats itself and they themselves become the ruling class when they are no longer considered "a threat" to society.[47]

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[44] It would be necessary to consult close friends and family of Romitelli to confirm whether he was exposed to *Decoder* and whether he showed interest in underground comics, particularly those of Lerici.
[45] Gianluca Lerici and Vittore Baroni, "Professor Bad Trip: Apocalyptic Interview (The Director's Cut)," In *A Saucerful of Colors: Gianluca Lerici*, ed. by Stefano Dazzi Dvořák and Marci Cirillo Pedri, (Carrara, Italy: Tabularasa Teké Gallery, 2016): 133.
[46] Gianluca Lerici and Vittore Baroni, "Professor Bad Trip: Apocalyptic Interview (The Director's Cut)," In *A Saucerful of Colors: Gianluca Lerici*, ed. by Stefano Dazzi Dvořák and Marci Cirillo Pedri, (Carrara, Italy: Tabularasa Teké Gallery, 2016): 133.
[47] Ibid.

Romitelli possessed similar attitudes towards the contemporary music scene, and while he wasn't quite as specific about composers or schools of thought as Grisey was towards serial music, Messiaen's rhythmic structures, the stochastic procedures of Xenakis, etc.,[48] Romitelli did go as far as to describe the concert music of his time as "'castrated' by formalism and by dogmas about the purity of musical material: a cerebral sound without body, without flesh or blood."[49] He described this kind of music as "claustrophobic,"[50] and he felt that the "problem with scholarly music is mainly its academicism," and that despite the "liberation" free from stylistic doctrines felt by his peers, he considered that "the situation [had] worsened," resulting in "an incredible amount of unnecessary music," which we may understand in the same terms as the aesthetic echo chamber that Lerici criticized.[51] In an interview with Véronique Brindeau, he described the political and cultural potency that attracted him to popular music:

> "What interests me in certain popular music, when they are not yet mediatized, is their violent opposition to power, which makes a kind of alternative to a prefabricated, false, stereotyped world. This utopian, alternative side interests me a lot. I believe that we need a counter-culture again, as was the case in the Sixties, and that today, an artist can once again have a role of opposition."[52]

Romitelli specifically cited that artists such as Jimi Hendrix, Velvet Underground, Pink Floyd, Nirvana, Brian Eno, and Aphex Twin were important to him.[53] What Romitelli valued about these kinds of artists was their ability to "communicate directly,"[54] or in other words, to trigger a

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[48] See Grisey's "Tempus Ex Machina: A Composer's Reflection on Musical time."
[49] From Interview with Danielle Cohen-Levinas, "Let's Attack Reality at its Root" In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 143-145.
[50] Interview with Omar Corlaix, "For A Visionary Practice," In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 151-155.
[51] Interview with Véronique Brindeau, In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 157-161.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Interview with Omar Corlaix in *Musica Falsa*, 2000
[54] Ibid, 159.

powerful response in the listener through their music. He specifically cited Nirvana who, even after becoming "media icons,"[55] still possessed a power and violent energy to accomplish this, something he felt was impossible in the "distant, cold" world of contemporary art music.[56] However, the composer was careful not to incorporate these elements to produce "pretty" results and instead attempted to integrate "the dirty, distorted, violent, visionary sound that popular music [had] sometimes been able to express" into his music.[57] He admitted that the dogmas of academic music were certainly a thing of the past, but was "wary of a McDonaldization of listening," or in other words, more digestible, pleasant music that could be easily "exported" or "globalized."[58] Naturally, contemporary music is quite a niche artform and not so much at risk of being globalized or capitalized upon, which Romitelli was conscious of, but he felt that his "music must be violent and enigmatic," to create a shock or strong physiological reaction that places "the body at the center of the musical experience."[59]

The second most prominent parallel between the artists' is the tensions between and fusions of the "real" and the simulated. In Lerici's piece *Half Human*, seen below, the subject seems to be in the painful process of integration (or disintegration) with a human-like mechanical apparatus. As has been observed above, this kind of imagery is typical of cyberpunk literature, and the terror in the subject's eyes points to a fusion that is horribly incompatible.

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[55] Interview with Véronique Brindeau, 159.
[56] Ibid.
[57] From Interveiw with Danielle Cohen-Levinas, "Let's Attack Reality at its Root," 143.
[58] From an Interview with Eric Denut, in *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 163-168.
[59] Ibid.

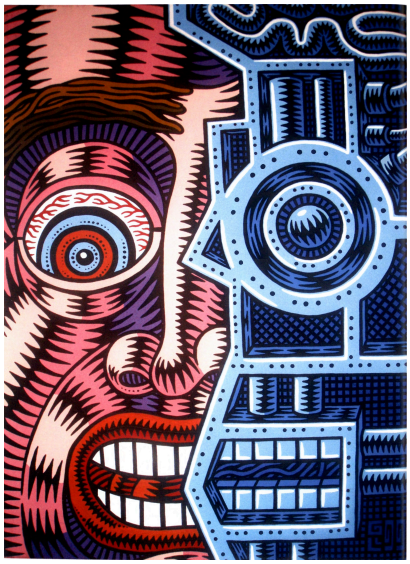

Figure 7: Gianluca Lerici, Half Human, acrylic on canvas, 1999

Romitelli's use of computer software, on the other hand, aimed to create hybridized electroacoustic sonorities where it is often difficult to distinguish between the acoustic and the electronic. In his earlier works, such as *Natura Morta con Fiamme*, the fusion between the string quartet and the electronics in the music is more analogous to *Half Human* in the sense that one can still identify the "human" and the "machine," but there already was a clear attempt in the compositional approach to try to erase or at least blur these boundaries. As he developed this technique throughout the nineties, with pieces such as *EnTrance* (1995), *Professor Bad Trip* (1998-2000), and eventually *An Index of Metals* (2003),[60] Romitelli began to merge these two worlds together more successfully.[61] At the outset of *Lesson I* from the Bad Trip cycle, for example, the violins are shaped with a clear attack and resonance, which is relayed across the

[60] See the Appendix for a full list of works by the composer.
[61] For more detailed analyses of Romitelli's harmonic techniques and how this pertains to the electronics in his works, see Nicholas Moroz's "Hacking the Hallucinatory" (for Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I) and Alessandro Olto's "Between Spectrum and Musical Discourse: Computer Assisted Composition and New Musical Thoughts in *EnTrance* by Fausto Romitelli," In *Sounds, Voices, and Codes from the Twentieth Century*, ed. Luca Cossettini and Angelo Orcalli (Udine, Italy: Mirage, 2017): 419-452.

strings, bass flute, and harmonicas and reinforced spatially by the electronics and the acoustic reverberation of the performance space. Subtle treatments of orchestration and envelope shaping help to mask what is real and what is simulated, and the final crescendo and outro of the last section of *Lesson I* expertly exemplify this amalgamation of forces. It is in a work such as this that we can understand Romitelli's music in the light that Murphy and Schmeink articulated about cyberpunk culture, where "the boundaries between external technologies and internal biologics have become more and more nebulous, perhaps even irrelevant."[62]

This rigorous approach to generating material helped Romitelli to achieve the impression of hallucination, which I consider to be the third parallel with Lerici's work. The aesthetic of hallucination and the often-disturbing imagery that occurs throughout Lerici's visual language functioned as a metaphor for his view of the social and political landscape of his and Romitelli's generation. In Lerici's work, the artist made use of thick lines and vibrant contrasting colors that approximate a trip, supported by the viewer's use of red/cyan 3D glasses. This was thematically reinforced by portrayals of semi-human subjects, aliens, robots, demons, cyclopes, cyberpunks, drugs, colorfully shocking collages (see Figure 8 below), or combinations of these. Obviously the term "bad trip" from Lerici's professional name refers to the dark side of the phase of the 1950s and 1960s and onward when people began experimenting with hallucinogens such as LSD and other mind-altering drugs, which certainly comes through in the artwork.[63] However for Lerici, the name Bad Trip also functioned as "a political slogan and the summary of what we

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[62] Graham J. Murphy and Lars Schmeink, "Introduction: The Visuality and Virtuality of Cyberpunk," xxii-xxiii. Quoting Sherryl Vint's "Afterword: The World that Gibson Made," In *Beyond Cyberpunk: New Critical Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010), 228-233.

[63] See Charles F. Levinthal, *Drugs, Behavior, and Modern Society* 8th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, 2014).

thought of the world: Reagan, Thatcher, the Cruise missiles, the yuppies, the unrestrained cathode ray tube lunacy, the will of the leading cultural classes to delete past movements' history, an attempt that threatened to leave us both without future and past: it was a 'bad trip' indeed!"[64]

Figure 8: Lerici's *Sick Face* (1992), collage, 21x30cm[65]

In interviews, Romitelli frequently referenced "the doors of perception," a phrase most likely borrowed from Aldous Huxley's autobiography of the same name, in which the writer documented his experience with mescaline.[66] It is a striking coincidence that Lerici also referenced Huxley as one of his inspirations (see above), though Romitelli was clearly partial to Michaux's writings on the same topic from a purely technical and linguistic standpoint, which I will elaborate on below.

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[64] Gianluca Lerici and Vittore Baroni, "Professor Bad Trip: Apocalyptic Interview (The Director's Cut)," In *A Saucerful of Colors: Gianluca Lerici*, ed. by Stefano Dazzi Dvořák and Marci Cirillo Pedri, (Carrara, Italy: Tabularasa Teké Gallery, 2016): 129-149.
[65] Gianluca Lerici, *A Saucerful of Colors: Gianluca Lerici*, ed. by Stefano Dazzi Dvořák and Marci Cirillo Pedri, (Carrara, Italy: Tabularasa Teké Gallery, 2016): 59.
[66] See Interview with Danielle Cohen-Levinas in "Let's Attack Reality at its Root" In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 143-145.

For Romitelli, "new technologies [had] opened the doors to the perception of the inharmonic universe," and they had provided composers of the time with "the instruments to explore this unheard-of sound world."[67] Therefore noise, distorted spectra, harmonic/rhythmic order and disorder, all formed a part of Romitelli's efforts to objectify and represent the sonic landscape of his daily life. He used technology as a tool for not just composing *with* sounds, but composing the sound itself from the ground up. During his time at IRCAM, he created a personal library of 1,927 lines of pure LISP code that would supplement and streamline the generative process prior to actually composing a musical work.[68] This code included many different techniques, from the most basic generation of pure or distorted spectra, to more complex procedures like the interpolation of two chords with a defined number of steps in between. It was an essential tool for the hybridization of the acoustic and electric, for the true integration of the harmonic with the inharmonic at the deepest level. For this reason, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish what is acoustic and what is electric in his mature music. This, for Romitelli, was the place to explore as a composer: the enigmatic timbral space between the real and the artificial, or even of the imagined. He asserted that "it is precisely the art of timbre which frees the sound from the aseptic mannerism of the pure combinatorial game to revalue it in all its material potentiality."[69] In this way, he had control over how much or how little distortion, noise, and so forth, would occupy the music at any given time, and gave him the freedom to construct audible trajectories of timbral consonance or dissonance to articulate his musical poetics.

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[67] Ibid.

[68] This was confirmed in a conversation I had with researcher Alessandro Olto, who is currently in the process of preserving Romitelli's code with the goal of it being accessible to composers and researchers of today.

[69] Fausto Romitelli, "Resonances," In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli*, ed. by Alessandro Arbo (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 128

While there are some very clear utilizations of standard combinatorial and spectral techniques in the composer's work (which one might perceive as a conformity to academicism),[70] particularly in *Professor Bad Trip*,[71] he made use of them only as tools to articulate more chaotic images inspired by the writings of Michaux. In a program note for *Professor Bad Trip*, Romitelli addressed this directly:

> "The investigation of the perceptive mechanisms of the hallucinatory states was the instrument to penetrate a universe irreducible to the claustrophobic formalism of contemporary academic music, the instrument of the escape far from the Arcadia of a cultivated sound, clean and well-dressed of intentions, but without body, neither flesh, nor blood; in the territories of the mescaline [...] education and good taste are absent. [...] What prevails in *Professor Bad Trip* is the hypnotic and ritualistic aspect, the taste for deformity and artificiality: obsessive repetitions, continuous and insistent accelerations of materials and time subjected to twists and distortions to the point of saturation, white noise, catastrophe, a constant drift towards chaos, named and already liquefied objects; an unbearable speed and density; aborted or interrupted journeys."[72]

To summarize the parallels uncovered between Romitelli and Lerici, it is clear that both artists felt a responsibility to forge a unique path, either away from or in opposition to the perceived status-quo in each of their respective fields. As an analytical tool, an understanding of cyberpunk culture can be a powerful crux for interpreting the ways in which many disparate strains of thought coalesce and behave in Romitelli's music and Lerici's artwork. Counterculture themes in Romitelli's music are embodied through the diversification of sonic and aesthetic influences from outside the academic context, particularly from the violence and directness of

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[70] See Alessandro Arbo, "EnTrance," In *Le Corps Électrique: Voyage Dans le Son de Fausto Romitelli*, ed. by Alessandro Arbo (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003): 17-50

[71] See Nicholas Moroz, "Hacking the Hallucinatory: Investigating Fausto Romitelli's Compositional Process through Sketch Studies of *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*," *Sources and Research from the Institute of Music* 5, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (2020): 59-84.

[72] Fausto Romitelli, "Professor Bad Trip: Présentation," 135.

punk rock and grunge music, the sonic experimentation of psychedelic music and avant-garde techno, the general inharmonic nature of everyday life, and especially the allusion to drugs as a way to "upset" traditional ways of thinking about material and composing.[73] In Lerici's case, this can be seen through his adoption of the rejects of society and the sociopolitical context of his artwork in the magazine *Decoder.* Additionally, both artists explored themes of the integration of the "real" or biological with the simulated (i.e. machines and digital technology). Both artists work features frequent references to bad trips and drug culture, where Romitelli's *Professor Bad Trip* cycle functions as a musical hallucination inspired by Henri Michaux's writings on the effects of mescaline as one example, and (in addition to the literal representation of drugs) Lerici's visual language approximates a hallucinogenic experience with bold colors meant to be viewed through red/cyan 3D glasses.

Henri Michaux

Romitelli explicitly cited the writings and drawings of Michaux in every program note or interview about the PBT cycle:

> "In Michaux's writings and drawings, I found correlations between the 'depraved perspectives' of mescaline and the sonic territories that have always fascinated me: the mechanics of appearance, transformation, and disappearance of visions and colors are very close to the forms of my auditory imagination. It seemed necessary to me, consequently, to work on the musical aspects related in the most direct way to the perception of the phenomena described by Michaux [...]."[74]

Upon studying Michaux's *Infinite Turbulence*, it becomes clear that Romitelli was being quite literal in the last statement of this passage.

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[73] Interview with Véronique Brindeau, 157.
[74] Fausto Romitelli, "Professor Bad Trip: Présentation," 135.

The first chapter of *Infinite Turbulence* addresses the effects of mescaline and its impact on the perceptual faculties of the subject. Michaux's prose here describes in absolute technical precision the nature of the drug. In the following passage, he narrates the granulated perception of the world, as if moments have been deconstructed at the atomic level so that they are no longer perceived in context:

> "The stream of concatenation, verbal pattern, meditation and day-dreaming is no more. Gone are the streams, and now there are only isolated drops which together formed streams, and words, and mass, and continuity.
>
> Acceleration.
>
> Repetition.
>
> Accentuation. At this time, impressions become truly consistent with their name: they are *imprints*, *impressed* within us, tenacious, adhesive, undetachable, exaggeratedly 'permanent.'
>
> Acceleration, repetition, agitation, accentuation, the reversal of all dreams, interruption: such are the effects of mescaline."[75]

One can observe how Michaux rhythmically and metrically approximates the stream of consciousness and the thoughts of a subject under the influence. He uses several rhetorical devices to manifest the sensation of a mescaline trip—which bear direct parallels to Romitelli's music—including rhythmic accelerations within the sentence structure, semantic oppositions that are coupled and repeated obsessively, repetitions of a single word or idea within a passage, and sequences of sentences which begin with the same word and gradually uncover different shades and hues of meaning as each dimension of the hallucinatory experience is examined.[76] I will

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[75] Henri Michaux, *Infinite Turbulence*, trans. by Michael Fineberg (London: Calder and Boyars, 1975): 10.

[76] For much deeper insights on the rhythmic nature of Michaux's writing in *Infinite Turbulence*, see Luc Courchesne, "Rythme et sujet. *L'infini turbulent* d'Henri Michaux" (M. A. thesis, University of Montreal, 2003).

focus my investigation primarily on these techniques in this analysis because they are the most transferrable conceptually for understanding Romitelli's "musical prose."[77]

In the quoted passage from *Infinite Turbulence* above, one can identify a rhythmic acceleration and deceleration occur at least twice. The first acceleration is most notable beginning with the second appearance of the word "streams," at which point two-word ideas perforate the continuity of the sentence, which climaxes in the following series of one-word lines: "Acceleration. Repetition. Accentuation…", and then features a deceleration to balance the rhythmic pressure created thus far, only to begin accelerating once more starting on the word "*imprints,*" which climaxes again with a recapitulation of the effects of mescaline: "acceleration, repetition, agitation, accentuation, the reversal of all dreams, interruption."

This temporal form or acceleration-deceleration occurs in this way many times throughout the first chapter of the book.[78] The rhythm of the sentence contracts and accelerates towards a middle axis and unfolds again, like an accordion, so that the metric structure is in constant flux. It is as if Michaux is stylistically "granulating" the experience of meaning by the reader, and through style, helps the reader inhabit the perceptual space of a hallucinating subject.

The second rhetorical device that appears frequently throughout Michaux's writing is the use of semantic oppositions, or "antagonisms," in his words.

> "An idea which occurs to you when you have been seized and held by this invisible mechanism, an idea which is in turn revealed and then obscured, which is then revealed again and which then undergoes a new eclipse, which then reappears and which is then once again annihilated, this idea is ineffective, tiring,

[77] For more on musical rhetoric, see Patrick Saint-Dizier, *Musical Rhetroic: Foundations and Annotation Schemes* (London: ISTE, 2014).
[78] Obviously reading a translation of the book distorts the original rhythm and acoustic "feeling" of the phonemes that Michaux used, but the syntax remains relatively unscathed.

> forgotten, unbearable, silly, frustrating more than anything else, and it puts the final touches to the gradual debasement of the mental functions making them appear ridiculous."[79]

These passages feature repeated symmetries of semiotic inversion (as well as temporal progressions), deployed to approximate the whiplash that the drug unleashes. This is followed by a rapid slew of adjectives and descriptors that function as another metric (and phonetic) acceleration for the reader.

Lastly, in this final quoted passage, Michaux makes use of multiple devices, in which accelerations, decelerations, antagonisms, and repetitions of words occur in a number of ways, both integrated into a stream of ideas and as the starting point of a sequence of phrases:

> "Even in prodigious movements such as those that are often seen suddenly as though under the effect of an unexpected gear-shift or of a chain reaction, movements undergoing sudden expansion, umbellate, in widening spectrums of lightning projectiles, these movements, however rapid and extraordinarily speeded-up they may be, must periodically be interrupted, must cease and come to a complete halt, in order suddenly to set off again having regained their initial momentum, then stop again in perfect calm, in order likewise to resume their impetus and reach maximum speed.
>
> Projectiles or not, in full flight or not, upon their trajectory or not, they are compelled to conform to the law of discontinuation and interruption.
>
> Here where there is no opposition, repetition occurs and is applied to the discontinuous which is never absent.
>
> Succession of smallnesses, for all things which last are transformed here into a succession of elements of almost no duration at all, isolated, detached, clear-cut.
>
> Repetition of the tiny shocks of a long sensation decomposed in this way.
>
> Repetition of every kind, obscuring recognition.

[79] Henri Michaux, *Infinite Turbulence*: 11.

Repetition unending, unwanted, resounding through one's head.

Repetition of the maddened metronome.

Repetition aggravating the already existing accentuation."[80]

The repetitions that dominate the last 5 lines of the passage create a predictable, or continuous time as Grisey would call it, in which the reader is able to project the start of the next sentence (both out of expectation and because of its visual prominence on the page), thus reducing the amount of time needed to read the sentence creating an experienced acceleration in tempo, in parallel with the subtraction of the average number of syllables per sentence.

It is in these passages of continuous time in *Infinite Turbulence* where one might find the most direct correlations to Romitelli's music. His music often features these kinds of repetitive ruminations, in which a phrase will be examined, re-examined, and repeated through a gradual process of development that spirals the momentum of the piece forward. These repetitions can be heard in pieces prior to *Professor Bad Trip*, but what makes the use of repetitions in the *PBT* cycle distinct (as well as almost every other piece written afterwards) is the rhythmic compartmentalization and linear progression that occurs, in modes of continuous or discontinuous (that is, predictable or unpredictable) time distributed in clear and audible trajectories.

Merging Michaux with Grisey

Romitelli, having been a student of Gérard Grisey at a critical moment of his artistic development, absorbed and metabolized many of the teachings of the older

[80] Henri Michaux, *Infinite Turbulence*: 12-13.

composer. Rhythmic progressions of continuous and discontinuous time lie at the core of Grisey's work *Tempus Ex Machina* (1979) for percussion sextet. In the piece, Grisey builds a tempo canon, beginning extremely slowly with the quiet pulsing of a bass drum, followed by silences of (initially) indeterminate durations—the early experiments in perceptual thresholds for predictable and unpredictable time. Each added entrance accelerates the entire sequence, and after the completion of the sixth and fastest iteration, the sextet converges and climaxes at the center of the piece with a looping snare drum relay. When the loop breaks, the attacks and their resonances gradually become elongated more and more and become further and further apart.

Another important work that was likely influential for Romitelli was *Vortex Temporum*. The *Professor Bad Trip* cycle possesses many striking similarities to *Vortex Temporum*, both in terms of harmonic and rhythmic structures. In *Vortex Temporum: I*, for example, the harmonic information is generated by multiplying the partials of certain harmonic series by a collection of distortion ratios (i.e. a stretched ratio of 1.046 and a compressed ratio of 0.954).[81] This harmonic information is then inserted into "temporal containers," or streams, which are distinguished from one another both by registral placement and by the rate of their successive arithmetic differences. For example, in the beginning of the piece, the first stream is arithmetically progressed by subtracting three 16th-notes every single time it repeats. The second stream that appears (distinguished by pulse pattern and register) is five 16th-notes shorter each time it's repeated, the next one is eight 16th-notes shorter, and the final one of the first section is thirteen 16th-notes shorter.

[81] Robert Hasegawa, "Gérard Grisey and the 'Nature' of Harmony," *Music Analysis* 28, no. 2/3 (July-October 2009): 354.

These particular subtraction factors were derived from the Fibonacci sequence, and the result of this sequence is an acceleration that unfolds exponentially (see Figure 9 below).

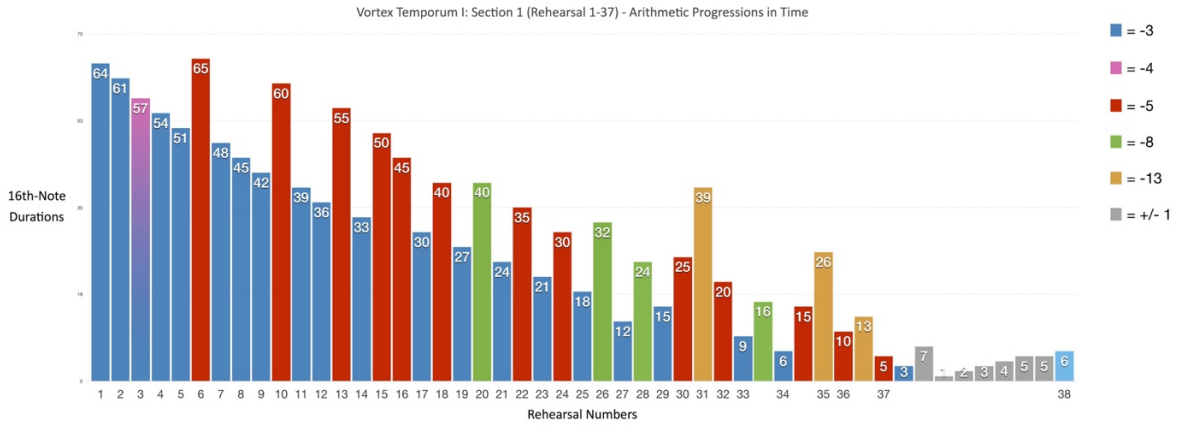

Figure 9: Temporal progressions in the first section of Vortex Temporum I

This is, of course, only a description of the first 3-minute section of a 40-minute piece, but this initial explosion of materials possesses an abundance of compositional techniques that Romitelli himself adopted in his work. In terms of harmony, Romitelli also implemented a system of creating inharmonic spectra by using distortion ratios. For example, between measures 7 and 67 of *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*, the following ratios are used on a low E2: 1.075, 1.305, 1.31, 1.42, 1.167, and 1.65.[82] This provided Romitelli with a variety of distorted E spectrums, from which he extracted harmonic content and distributed throughout the work.[83] On a superficial level, the use of arpeggiated figures and scales are devices Romitelli used quite frequently, although in this regard, it is likely informed just as much by his studies with Donatoni as with

[82] For an in-depth sketch-based analysis of *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*, see Nicholas Moroz, "Hacking the Hallucinatory: Investigating Fausto Romitelli's Compositional Process through Sketch Studies of *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*," *Sources and Research from the Institute of Music* 5, Fondazione Giorgio Cini (2020): 59-84.
[83] Ibid.

Grisey.[84] Much like Grisey, though, the rigorous creation of the harmonic content, generated using spectral techniques, simply becomes the palette from which temporal information will be explored, and this is most clear in his work from *Professor Bad Trip* onwards. However, as we shall see in the analysis below, Romitelli was much less concerned with perfect progressions determined by precise numerical schemes. Additionally, he was open to interruptions and divergences from the temporal trajectories that occurred. This is more in line with Michaux's description of "the law of interruption," (see above) which must occur to discontinue the rhythmic acceleration of a moving "projectile," an "obligatory shipwreck" born out of the impossibility to orient one's self.[85] Therefore, in summary, Romitelli adopted spectral techniques for generating harmonic spectra and building temporal progressions learned from Grisey to create musical structures that mirror the structures of Michaux's writings, in which the composer identified many parallels with his own artistic and research interests for sculpting a "hallucinogenic" sound.

Rhythmic Progressions in *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*

> "The calculation is there and it is rigorous, but it aims at organizing the excesses of a hypertrophic writing that is unleashed in hysterical outbursts, unbalanced situations, exaggeratedly predictable, even unpredictable." [86]

If we look back at Michaux's description of the effects of mescaline ("acceleration, repetition, agitation, accentuation, the reversal of all dreams,

[84] Ibid.
[85] Fausto Romitelli, "Pour une pratique visionnaire," In *Causeries sur la Musique: Entretien avec des Compositeurs*, interview with Danielle Cohen-Levinas (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999): 289-292.
[86] Fausto Romitelli, "Professor Bad Trip: Présentation," 135.

interruption")[87] in order to understand the form of *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*,[88] it becomes clear how Romitelli absorbed the writer's style, both in a technical sense (i.e. concrete rhythmic structures and formal proportions) and a poetic one (the effect/affect these tools have on the listener). In Figure 10 below, I outline the form of the piece (measured in chronometric time, i.e. seconds).[89] The proportional relations between consecutive sections convey Romitelli's formal thinking, which clearly prioritized large-scale accelerations and decelerations of the global proportions—that is, of bigger blocks to reflect the surface-level temporal progressions prominently featured in sections 1-4.

[81] Henri Michaux, *Infinite Turbulence:* 10

[88] It's important to note that there are two editions of the score that circulate, one which contains notated materials in the score for electronics and one that does not. I am using measure numbers that correspond to the former. The only difference between these scores, besides this inclusion, is the measure numbers. In the edition which includes notated materials for electronics, Romitelli counts repeated bars as distinct bars that contribute to the overall measure count. This results in higher measure numbers than those seen in the score without notated electronics for the same corresponding sections.

[89] I adopt here Grisey's nomenclature, as described in his article *Tempus ex machina*, where chronometric time is not real time but time represented by the score. Real time would result in slightly different numbers, although the proportions would remain relatively intact. Gérard Grisey, "Tempus ex Machina: A Composer's Reflections on Musical Time," *Contemporary Music Review* 2 (United Kingdom: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1987): 239-275.

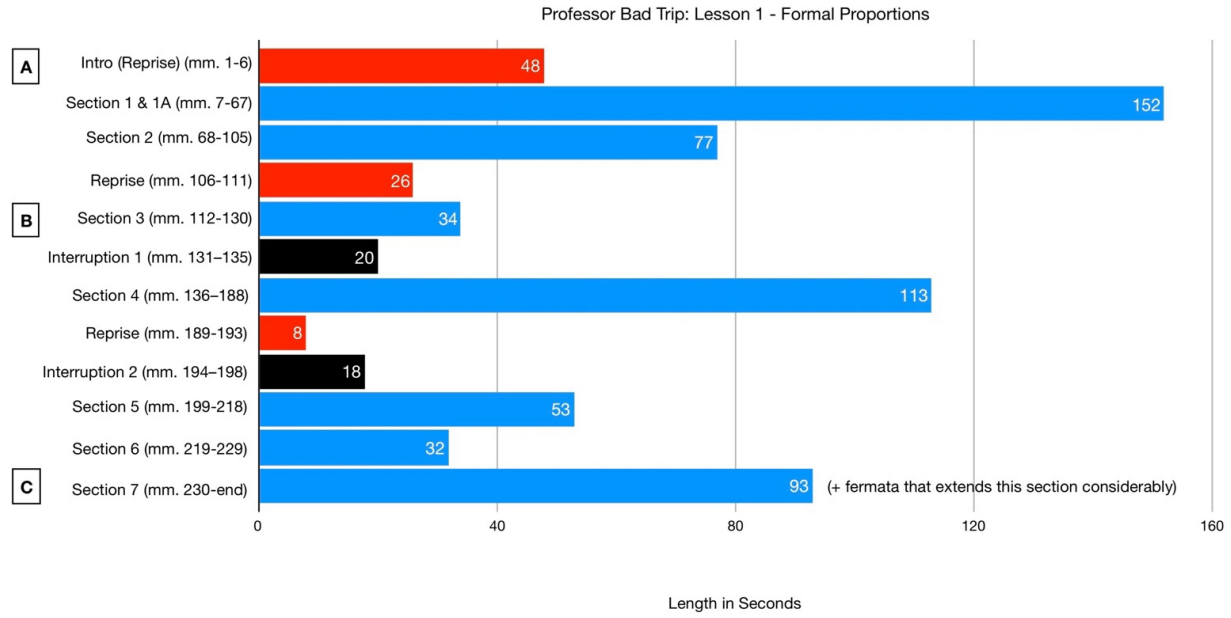

Figure 10: Formal proportions of Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I [90]

However, it is important to note that these larger accelerations of scale are more difficult to hear than their surface-level counterparts. This is primarily due to the fact that perceiving an integrated stream across interlocking alternations of similar and unsimilar large-scale events of varying proportions is extremely challenging for the listener, particularly as the proportions do not progress linearly.[91] The reprise materials come the closest. The preservation of similar timbral profiles, pitch content, and register, from each of the three iterations of the reprise materials may allow the listener to understand these events as related across large expanses of time. In this way, they behave as markers in the

[90] The letters A, B, and C refer to Romitelli's own indications in his sketches of the form. The red and black blocks in the chart represent reprise (re-presentations of the opening) and interruption (unexpected interjections) materials respectively.

[91] Bregman studies streaming and stream integration/segregation to a much more detailed degree in Chapter 2 of *Auditory Scene Analysis*. Streaming primarily happens when the alternation or change of events are close enough in frequency and time, as well as similar timbre, to be grouped into a single stream**.** The farther apart events get from one another, both in time and frequency, the less likely they are to integrate, and thus at the formal level when dealing with a variety of complex timbres and noise, hearing a global acceleration of these proportions is unlikely. Albert Bregman, "Chapter 2: Sequential Integration," In *Auditory Scene Analysis* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994): 47-211.

form. The other accelerations within sections 2, 3, and 4 will most likely be heard as temporally independent evolutions within the context of the piece.

I will focus the majority of my attention on these first four sections (mm. 1-198) in order to investigate the temporal relations that Romitelli articulates, as they are most directly linked to the rhetorical strategies one finds in the writings of Michaux. Michaux's syntactical rhythmic structures, as we recall, featured accelerations that energized a line and climaxed in short bursts of potently concentrated single-word sentences, followed by a deceleration. There are similar rhythmic patterns, with similar musical affects, in Romitelli's music. We can identify these elements in a clear sequence from the outset of the piece.

The introduction of the piece begins with a gesture of intense energy, in which a G5 in the strings slides up to a G#5 slowly, and then the energy gradually dissipates, while the rhythm (not the tempo) simultaneously decelerates. In measure 5, the rhythm reverses direction and begins to accelerate, transitioning gradually from half note G-G# glissandi to 16th-note G-G#'s, triggering the pressure point at which the music opens up registrally and orchestrationally in measure 7, pivoting to the new conditions in which the G-G# is modified and mutated even further (the beginning of the first long term acceleration). The passage from measures 1-6 has multiple roles in the piece. It functions first and foremost as a marker in the formal architecture of the work, with similar reprisals that are interspersed throughout (shown in red in Figure 10 above), but more importantly, it functions as an introduction to the main musical idea, in which a simple figure is temporally compressed with each repetition. This idea then becomes the

underlying principle of organization for a significant percentage of the ensuing material, both evidenced by the formal proportions already observed and the local rhythmic accelerations in sections 1-4. Prior to addressing these, I will first address how the reprise materials are audibly identified.

In *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*, the reprise sections illuminate the formal architecture of the piece via associations of clear similarities (i.e. timbre/register/rhythmic profile/etc.). The reprises are mostly defined by their harmonic and melodic content, as well as their orchestration (i.e. timbral identity). The prominent G-G# that occurs in the strings at the opening of the piece is preserved in measures 106-111 and in 189-193. Additionally, in 106-111, the clarinetist once again plays the same two notes on the harmonica to blend with the high harmonics of the strings, as in the beginning. There are some obvious differences in the first reprise (the flute vocalizations and the pianist playing the kazoo, as well as new glissandi and harmonic content in the strings), but the aforementioned primary elements float to the surface and are the most recognizable for the listener. The third reprise is much more compressed and features a dramatic acceleration that is transferred from the strings to the piano, making it the most different in terms of its timbral identity, but the G-G# in the strings, as well as the internal rhythmic proportions in which these pitches have been presented so far (i.e. long G, shorter G#), is preserved.

The first long-term rhythmic acceleration begins in measure 7 and continues until the end of measure 67. In the sketch materials for *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*, Romitelli referred to this as the *beta* section (β). In one of the critical sketches for the work (see below), in which

Romitelli mapped out the distribution of harmony, as well as the primary modes of behavior of the material (i.e. echo, distortion, FM, bell, or combinations of these), he also addressed durations, seen below the columns, in which these activities would be rhythmically compartmentalized.

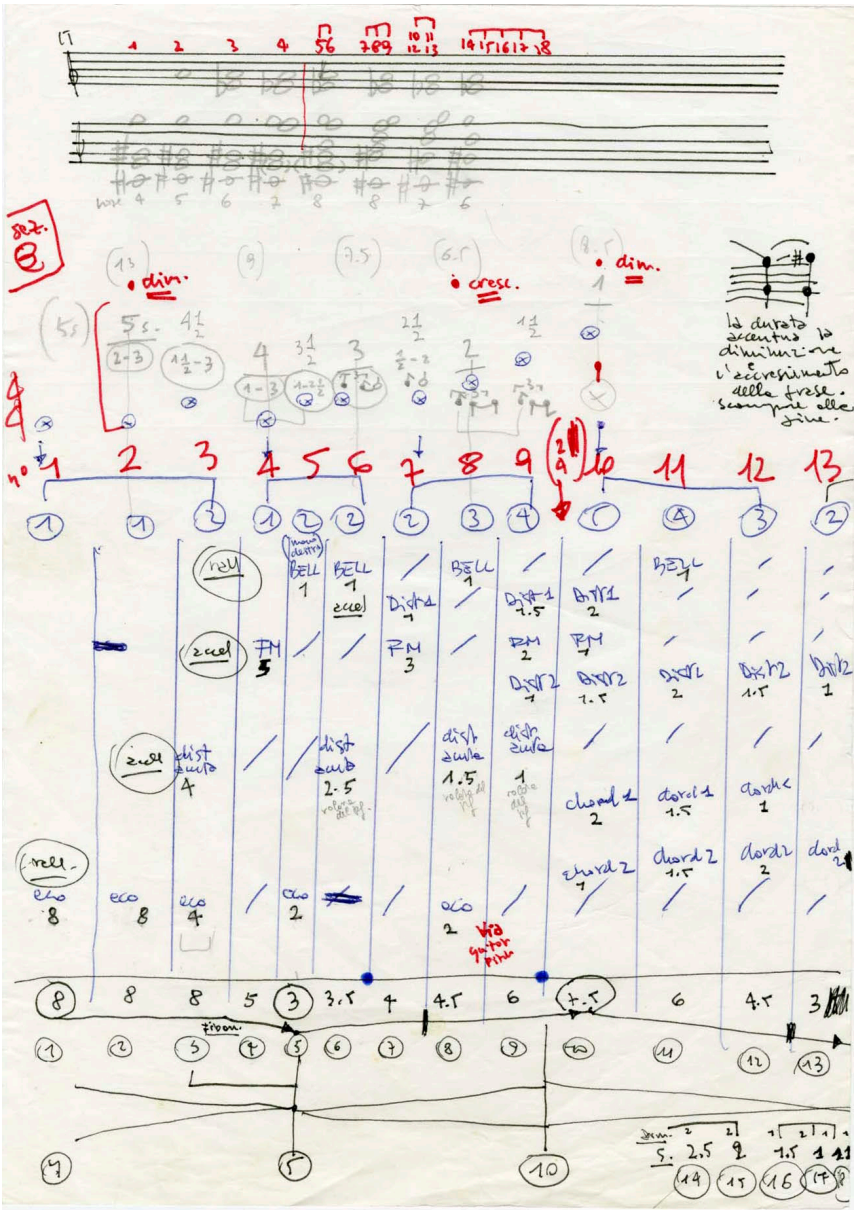

Figure 11: Romitelli's preliminary sketch of the beta section[92]

[92] Fausto Romitelli, *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I, schizzo*. Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Fondo

However, the composed durations, while at times fairly close to what he planned in this preliminary sketch, vary quite a bit, as evidenced by the comparison of the sketch with Table 1 below**.** For instance, the first durations indicated in Romitelli's sketch (the numbers below the blue columns) are 8, 8, 8, 5, 3, which seems to show an initial use of factors from the Fibonacci sequence, are not at all maintained in the actual score. The first twelve durations are all nearly doubled or more. The numbers in my analysis of the score can be compared to the sketch as follows (major differences in bold):

Phrase #	Sketch Duration	Score Duration
1	**8**	**15**
2	**8**	**15**
3	**8**	**14.0625**
4	**5**	**11.25**
5	**3**	**7.0588**
6	**3.5**	**7.0588**
7	**4**	**7.9412**
8	**4.5**	**8.333**
9	**6**	**7.499**
10	**7.5**	**5.6349**
11	**6**	**3.333**
12	**4.5**	**2.6388**
13	3	3.333
14	2.5	2.499
15	2	1.8749
16	1.5	1.4583
17	1	1.666
18	1	1.666
19	1 (sketch ends here)	1.666
20	n/a	etc.

Table 1: comparison of durational schemes between the sketch and the final score

Fausto Romitelli, https://www.cini.it/en/publications/archival-notes-sources-and-research-from-the-institute-of-music-5.

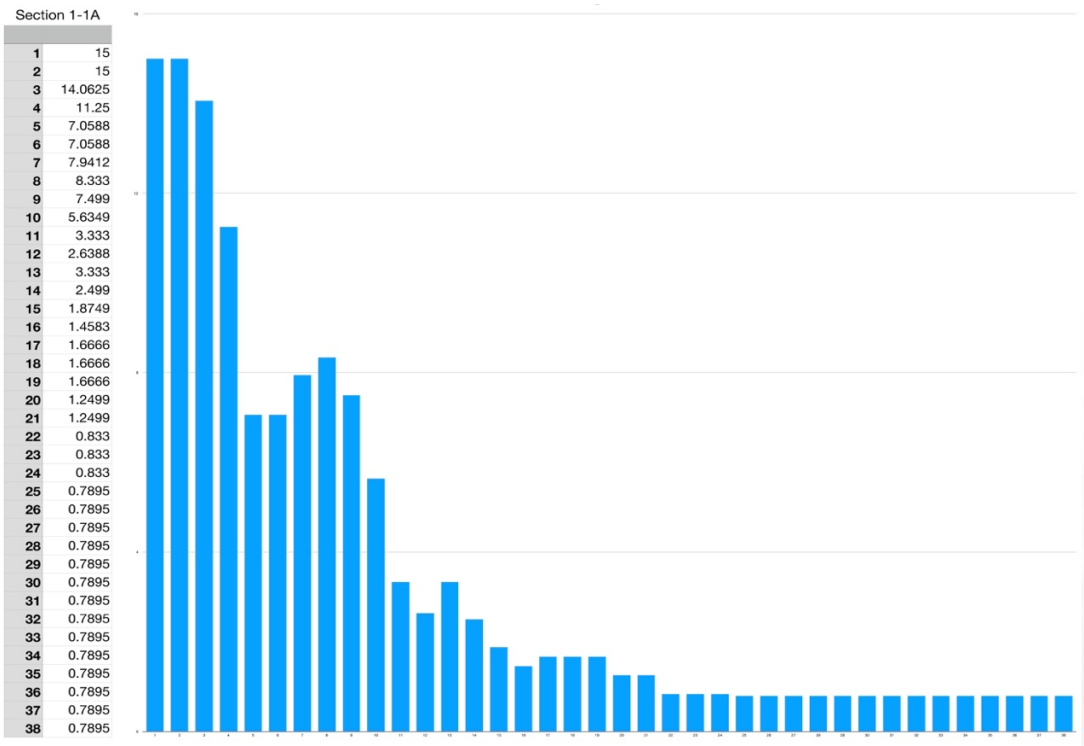

Figure 12: Rhythmic acceleration in the beta section, or sections 1 & 1A (mm. 7-67)[93]

As examined above, this section reflects Romitelli's acute sensitivity to his source material, Michaux's *Infinite Turbulence*. A metabolization and musical resynthesis of the poet's rhythmic tendencies is quite apparent. While it is true that other certain factors contribute to the "hallucinatory" experience, such as the harmonic language,[94] the orchestration and the "hypertrophic writing," the rhythmic progressions are what seem to be the most salient aspect of the mescaline trip, according to Michaux, in which the continuity of reality itself seems to be granulated, where moments are no longer grouped as unified experiences but rather as sequences of isolated drops of time, accelerated more

[93] Because of the frequent tempo changes which become gradually faster throughout this section, I calculated durations once again in seconds in order to maintain the clarity of the progression. The math for this is quite simple. The duration of a beat = (60,000/tempo)/1,000. Therefore, a 10-beat phrase in quarter-note = 64 would equal 9.375 seconds.

[94] See Moroz, "Hacking the Hallucinatory."

and more as the drug takes effect until it reaches a critical mass of the incessant repetition of the essence of the object of focus, only to be broken or interrupted. Romitelli pushes this Michaux-ian principle further to its extremes by distorting the harmony in the strings beyond recognition once the loop-state is reached in order to oversaturate and overwhelm through violent destruction born out of obsessive rumination. However, this isn't necessarily how the loops are perceived from a temporal standpoint in *Professor Bad Trip*. As the loop is generated, it creates a pulse pattern, which the listener entrains to and can therefore predict (which Romitelli alluded to in the program note, seen at the top of this section). The interruptions are therefore necessary to break this cycle of predictability, as well as to maintain the overall impression of a mescaline-induced hallucination.[95]

As a brief aside, it is fascinating to also observe how Michaux, as much a visual artist as a poet, concretized his impressions of the drug experience through ink drawings, such as the one seen in Figure 13 below. The image bears a striking resemblance to Romitelli's work. It is almost as if the entire *beta* section was directly inspired by this particular image, which features repetitions of groups of relationships. The floating concentrations of spherical intensities possess an internal magnetic energy where even smaller spheres cluster together, and this grouping of objects is externally bookended by rapidly-moving scribbles. Each repetition is visually compartmentalized, and this is repeated many times from the bottom of the page to the top, gradually accelerating

[95] It is important to observe that accelerations of this kind in Romitelli's works are not exclusive to the *Professor Bad Trip* cycle. They can be found in a number of his works, including his video opera *An Index of Metals* (2003), *Trash TV Trance* for electric guitar (2002), *Seascape* for contrabass recorder (1994), only to name a few.

upwards (or decelerating downwards). If the eye travels from the bottom of the page upwards, it appears that the main group of objects at the bottom is gradually subjected to a process of compression and acceleration that, by the time it reaches the summit, is no longer recognizable as a result of its intense concentration and speed.

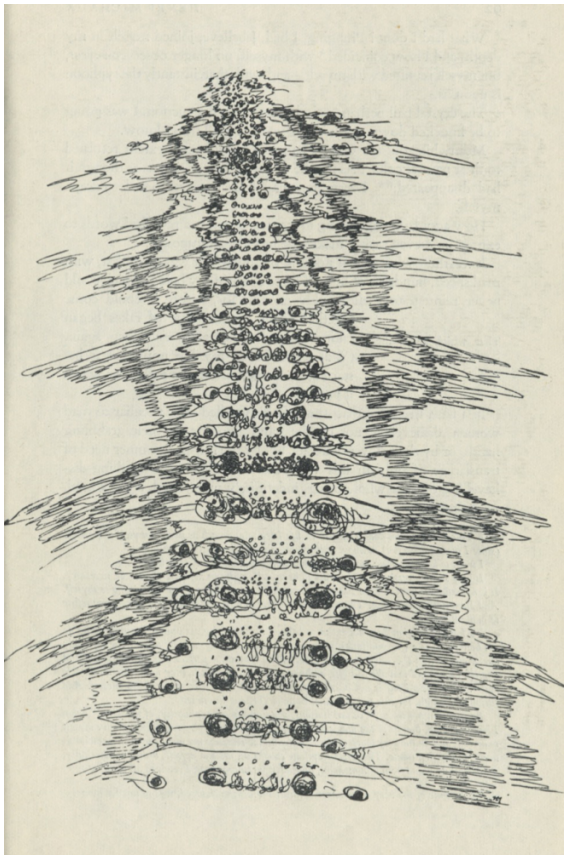

Figure 13: One of Michaux's drawings from his book Misérable Miracle[96]

The second long-term acceleration in *Lesson I* (mm. 68-105), what Romitelli called the gamma section (γ), begins with a kind of musical "fake-out," almost like a false recap, in which Romitelli creates the illusion of a return to the opening. However, there are too many subverted expectations that immediately make this sensation short-lived. The dramatic difference in pacing

[96] Henri Michaux, from Misérable Miracle, *The Paris Review* 15, trans. by Louise Varèse (Winter 1956): https://www.theparisreview.org/miscellaneous/4888/from-miserable-miracle-henri-michaux.

at the outset of this passage compared to the intensity of the first loop potentially functions as Romitelli's interpretation of Michaux's "law of interruption," or discontinuation,[97] in which the trajectory of the loop generated at the end of the *beta* section is completed derailed and forgotten only to be usurped by the creation of a new one, seen below:

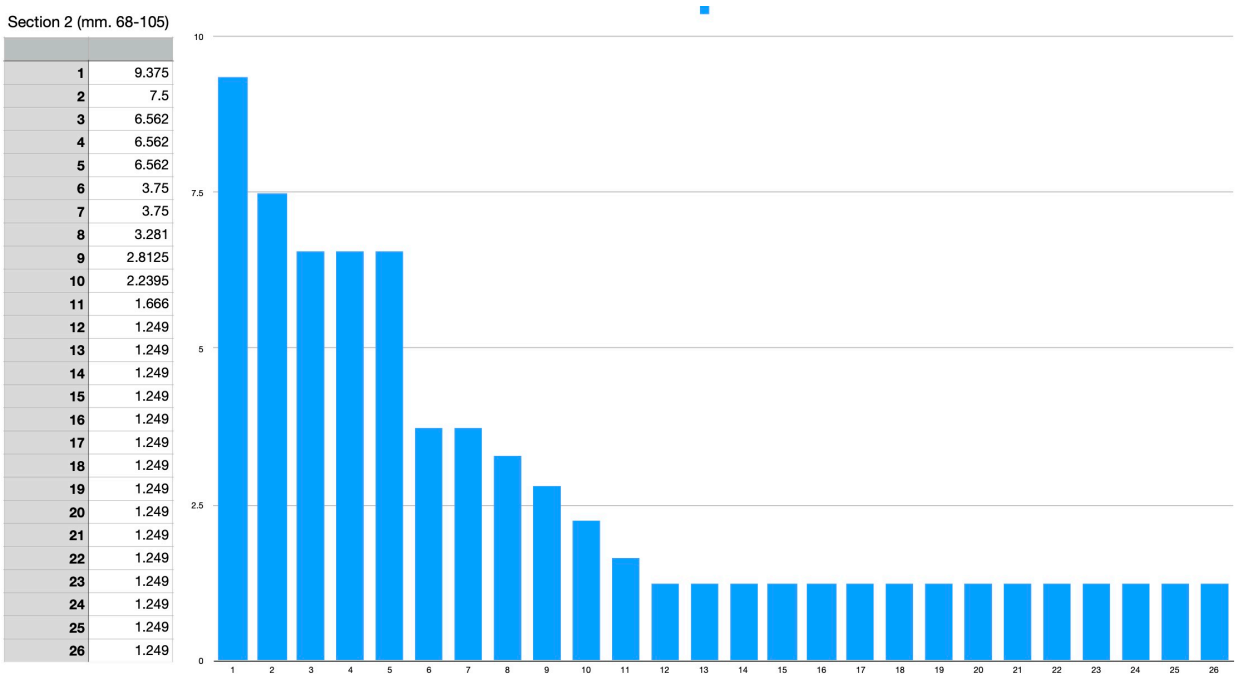

Figure 14: Rhythmic acceleration in the gamma section, or section 2 (mm. 68-105)

The first reprise (mm. 106-111) also functions as an interruption, although in this case, expectations of a return are met with many of the harmonic, melodic, and orchestrational conditions being mapped directly from the opening. This provides respite from the intense process of multiple accelerations, a moment where the looping pulse-pattern (and subsequent entrainment) is broken and dissipates in the auditory memory, or

[97] These interruptions were, according to Michaux's description of the effects of mescaline, obligatory to the experience of the drug.

echoic storage, of the listener, and thus gives Romitelli the opportunity to pivot towards the B section.

Finally, the last proportional acceleration occurs in the second half of section 4 of the piece, leading up to the last appearance of the reprise material. This progression spins out of a long passage of cellular mutations that are emblematic of Romitelli's aesthetic. These mutations are in many ways the encapsulation of his musical poetics of hallucination, and perhaps most importantly, violence, which is a kind of acoustic equivalent to destructive editing. In the following sections, I will unpack the ways that cells are mutated and how this is closely linked to the rhythmic and harmonic organization of the materials.

Cellular Mutations as Temporal Distortion in *Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I*

The way repetitions behave shifts in the beginning of the B section (or what I refer to as section 3 of the piece). Repetitions are less compartmentalized or marked by the orchestration of onsets and offsets of larger blocks of music. Prior to this section, the ensemble moves in unison through the various iterations of repeated content, and while this is largely still the case from section 3 onwards, the edges of phrases are blurred and slightly rhythmically displaced between the instruments. Materials are temporally displaced between the parts and the individual cells gradually mutate over time in a cycle of deformation. Within groups of repetitive cell mutations, pitches are reordered, rhythms are modified so that notes of emphasis shift, and new materials are introduced or subtracted (thus changing the proportions of the overall group). These mutations yield new mutations, and those mutations yield even more, like a continuous spiral of deformation in which the listener is dragged in a confused tow, sometimes subjected to zig-zags

through time when Romitelli brings back the original cell to contrast the difference with its mutated successors.

Romitelli uses this particular cycle of chords as the main harmonic constraints in which cells occur:

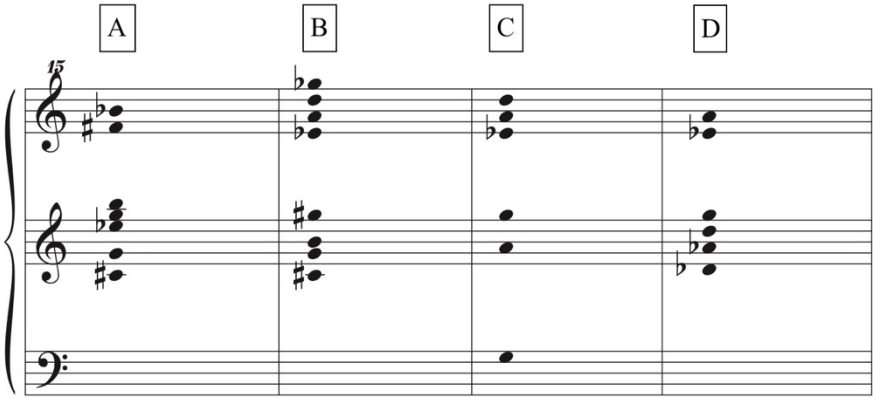

Figure 15: harmonic cycle for the B section, or section 3

I label these chords as A, B, C, and D, although this labelling may only be relevant internally within sections 3 and 4.[98] Throughout these two sections, there are minor deviations in pitch information within this harmonic progression (which I notate as A', B', or A", B", depending on the degree of difference), but the overall identity of the harmonic cycle is maintained through the melodic and rhythmic information of the internal cells, even as these cells are subjected to continuous processes of transformation.

It is helpful to track this process of mutation by following a single instrument's trajectory within the group. I have chosen to focus my attention on the bass clarinet because of the audible

[98] These harmonies come from earlier in the piece. For example, chords D and A can be understood as being derived from the *beta* section. However, rather than finding cohesive harmonic relationships across the work to justify labels, my intent is to simplify the cyclic nature of sections 3 and 4 in order to study the cellular mutations. See Moroz for more details.

prominence of its melodic identity at the start of section 3. This prominence disintegrates with time, as the auditory field becomes more and more saturated, but for the purposes of this study, it is an adequate starting point. Additionally, it is one of the easiest to track because of the predominantly monophonic writing, compared to the polyphonic nature of the guitar, piano, percussion, and strings. Following the trajectory of the bass clarinet will help to unlock an understanding of the behavior of these more complex parts within the score.

In Figure 16 below, I break down the various repetitions of cells within the bass clarinet part and demonstrate the way that each cell is linked to subsequent iterations as well as how they evolve or change from one harmonic cycle to the next. The first iteration (measures 112-115) of the cycle of cells is the simplest, featuring, for the most part, arpeggiations of the A, B, and C chords that underpin the section. There are some subtle deviations from this, for example the grace-note ascending arpeggio in measure 114 leading up to the written high A6 (sounding G5). The first two tones of the arpeggio are displaced from the harmonic set by a half-step, a strategy that Romitelli employed frequently throughout the work in order to dial up the distortion, to destabilize via noisy interference, which is immediately contrasted by the purity of the written high A6, or the sounding G5 that has acted as a through-line since the first note of the piece. As the piece unfolds, the main *idée fixe* of the piece, the G5-G#5 glissando, becomes subjected more and more to processes of change that renders it almost inaudible, particularly in sections 3 and 4—the operative word being *almost*. The nature of the harmonic sets never allows this irregular pendular two-note entity to fully disappear, as these pitch classes are always present, but their degree of relief in relation to the swarms of activity around them is in constant flux.

As can be seen in Figure 16**,** content circled in blue is new, relative to the previous iteration of cells. These new arpeggiation figures, or even new pitch content, function to extend the cycle to increase the degree of unpredictability. Between the first and second iterations, there are several notable differences. The first is that in measure 116, Romitelli adds an extra repetition of the opening arpeggiation of the A chord, like a hiccup in the flow of the cycle, which rhythmically propels the bass clarinet's momentum, and doesn't reach a standing point until the sustained high A6. The sustained F6 from the first iteration is all but erased from the bass clarinet's part. The arpeggio still hits that F6 mark several times, maintaining an implied sustain. The B chord is also arpeggiated ("hiccupped") twice, while the high A is sustained as part of the C chord, followed by a downwards arpeggiation that lands on the lower two notes of the collection, subsequently followed by the first inclusion of the D chord in this section.

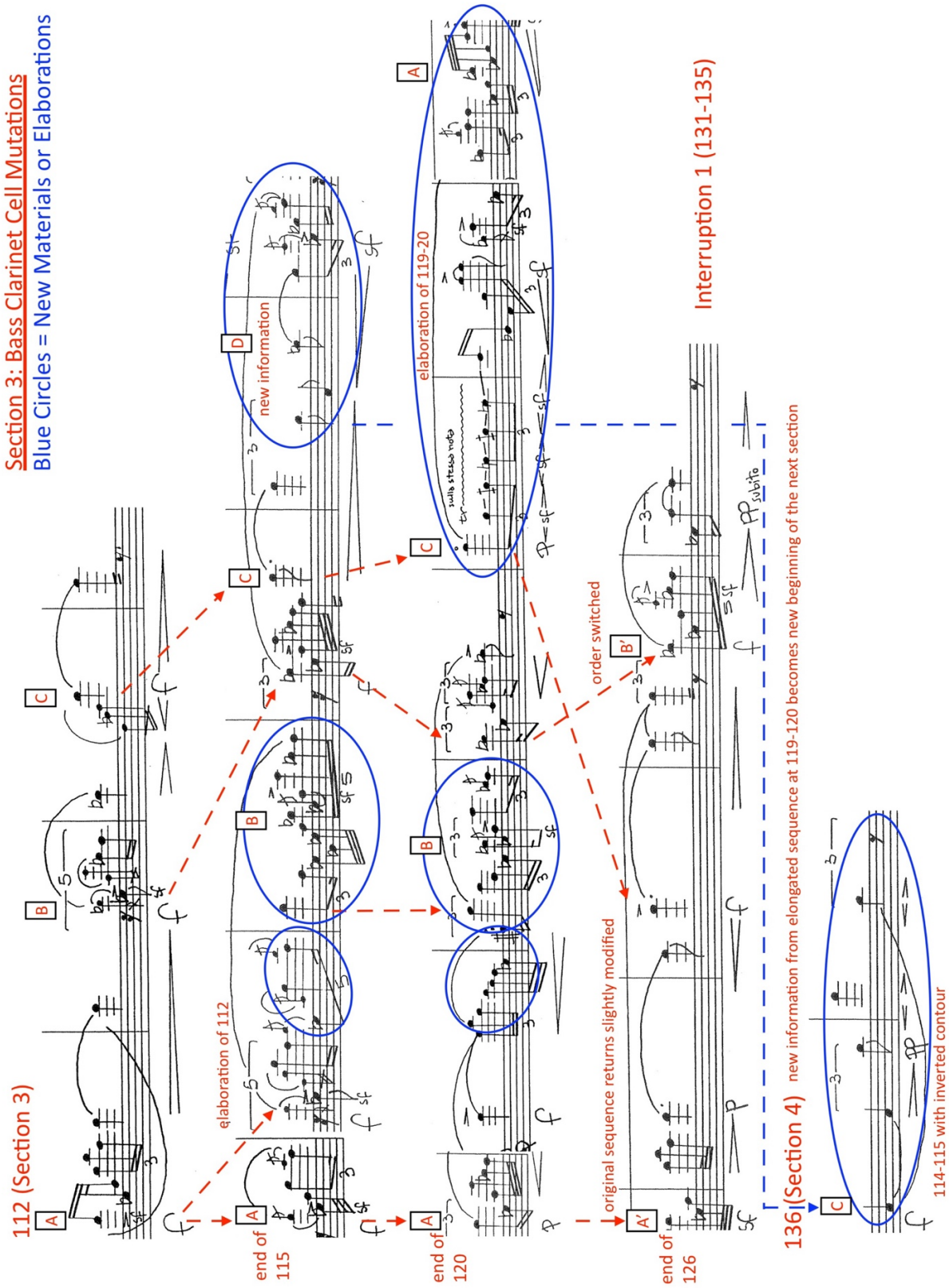

Figure 16: Section 3, cellular mutations in the bass clarinet

In the third iteration of the cycle of cells, the longest of section 3, the most notable difference occurs in measure 124. In this iteration, the point of emphasis that has been achieved via sustain is reversed, relative to the previous cycle from 115-120. The F6 is now the point of stability, while the A6 is subjected to a microtonal elaboration of the C chord, with an increase in density rhythmically, timbrally, and dynamically. It is perhaps in this displacement of stability across repetitions that we can find technical correlations between Romitelli and Francis Bacon.

In the final repetition of the section, Romitelli shortened and simplified the phrase, making it the most like the initial presentation of the cycle of cells. This strategy of contrasting a complex and heavily mutated cycle of the primary cells to a simplified one has multiple effects on the listener. First, because it is recognizable, it draws on the listener's memory to orient them within the instability of this section. Second, this simplified presentation of the cycle also features prominent sustains, which pop out of the texture in a noticeable way. We can understand this as the "old-plus-new heuristic," which most simply put, can be understood as observing closely "the continuation of what went before and then [paying] attention to what has been added to it."[99] In other words, these sustains that pop out of the texture function both as a contrasting "new" entity added to the "old" sound mass, but they also trigger associations with previous materials because of their close proximity to the prominent G5-G#5 of the piece and the bass clarinet's initial sustains at the outset of section 3.[100]

We can understand that the loops at the end of sections 1 and 2 are concentrated, albeit transformed, essences of the main materials (beta and gamma respectively, as per Romitelli's sketches) achieved through acceleration. Thus, sections 3 and the first half of 4 can be

[99] Bregman, *Auditory Scene Analysis*, 224.
[100] Ibid.

understood as the elimination of the need for linear temporal progressions to achieve these essences (e.g. the bass clarinet arpeggio that opens section 3). On the contrary, Sections 3 and 4 are highly developmental and explore nuances of repetition and mutation via harmonic, timbral, rhythmic, and dynamic distortions.

Figure 17 below consists solely of the rest of the bass clarinet part from section 4, followed by an excerpt of the score that shows the looped contraction of the reprise materials. I use arrows only to denote the points of origin in the score with the most overlap in terms of harmonic content and overall gestural shape. In this case, 118-123 functions as the source for 136-144. It is possible to read the harmonic cycle that immediately precedes 136-144 (in other words just before the interruption from 130-135) as C, D, A, B (124-130), but because of the re-simplification of the A cell, and consequently the reordering of the cells independent of the harmony that was identified earlier, this is circumspect. Therefore, the most stable sequence of cells relative to the harmonic cycle beginning in 136 is that of 118-123. When reading the score following the arrows that demonstrate these connections in the figure below, the cells can be easily identified by observing the harmonic cycle. Some simple annotations are also occasionally included as a guide.

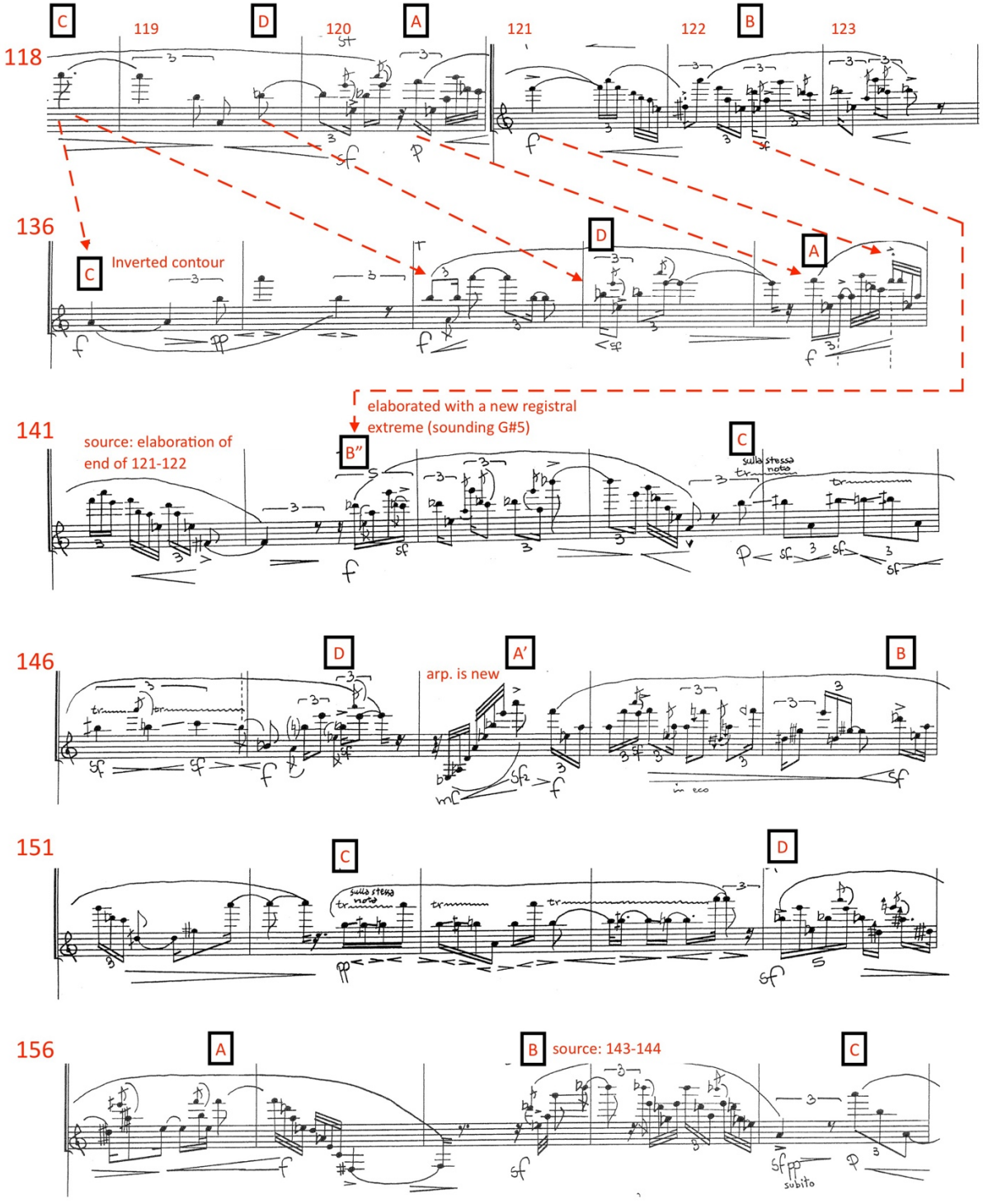

Figure 17: sequence of cellular mutations and temporal progressions of the bass clarinet in sections 3 and 4

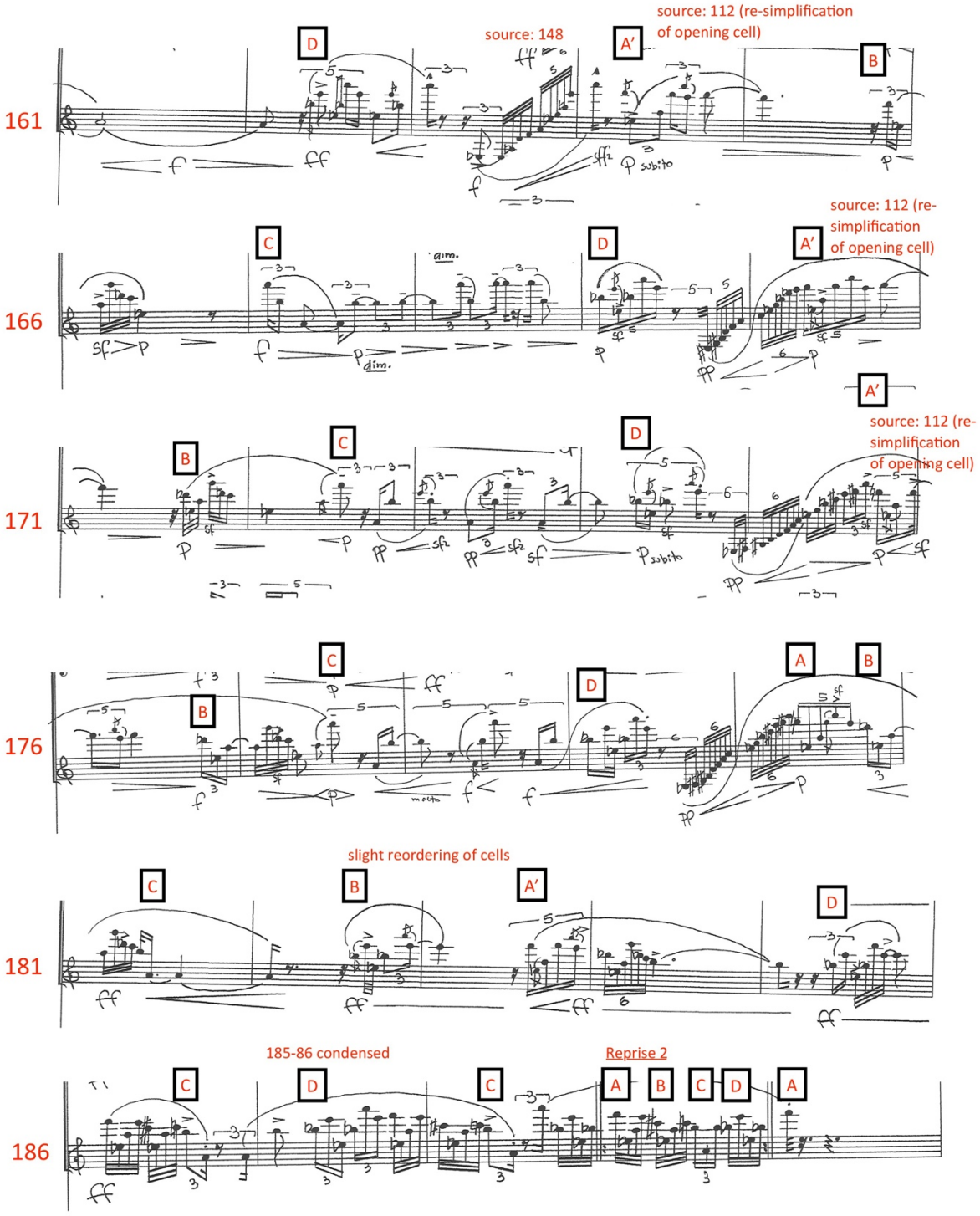

Figure 17 (continued): sequence of cellular mutations and temporal progressions of the bass clarinet in sections 3 and 4

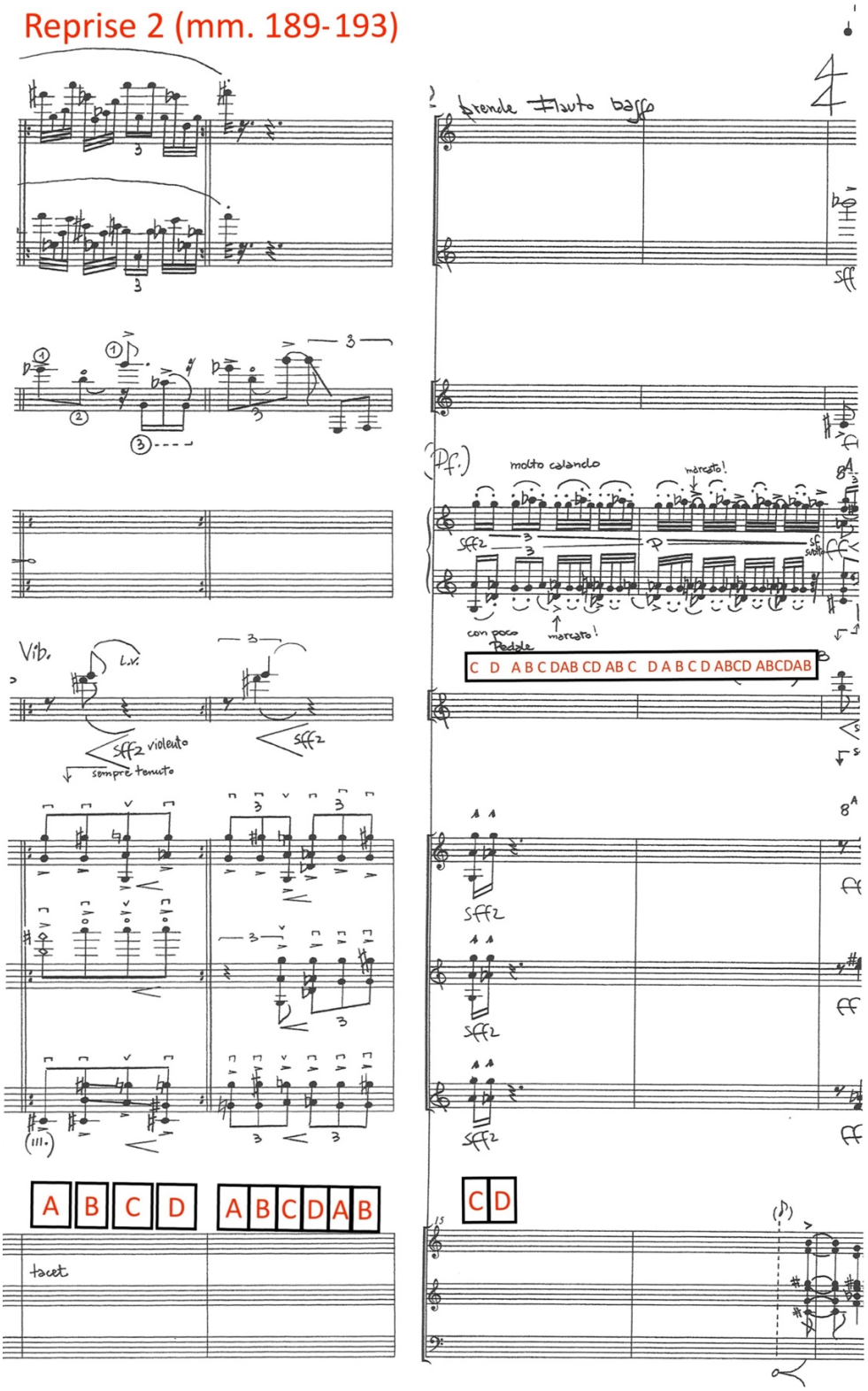

Figure 18: Final reprise, contracted and accelerated

It is crucial to note that the exact rhythmic locations of cells vary slightly from part to part. While some of the sequences of mutations follow similar mappings or points of origin, the trajectory of each instrument's process of transformation is slightly different. While the entire ensemble follows the same harmonic sequence within the same rough rhythmic boundaries, the displacement of points of origin is what contributes to the feeling of discontinuous time, to the feeling of disorientation and disarray, which is essential to the poetics of the "bad trip."

Repetitions are less predictable, so the material is experienced almost outside of time, as if, like in Michaux's writings, the internal atoms of moments become disconnected from one another, granulated, only existing in time as an inscrutably oversaturated sequence, almost too much for the mind to bear. Recognizable moments of cellular simplification exist within contracted proportions, as if the atoms of time restabilize and reconcentrate the perception of group structures, only to fall apart once more and restabilize again. In other words, these oscillations between stable and unstable time (or predictable versus unpredictable) that occur on the middle-ground level within section 3 and 4, as well as the largest global structure from the accelerations in sections 1 and 2 to the lack of audible progression in section 3 and the first half of 4, could have been Romitelli's musical interpretation of Michaux's antagonisms: repetitive presentations of semantic oppositions that approximate the temporal whiplash experienced while intoxicated with mescaline.

This last proportional acceleration of the piece is difficult to perceive. It is clear that the harmonic cycle accelerates in the bass clarinet part, and the cells become more and more contracted, while the low sliding bass notes in the synthesizer underline the acceleration. However, the hollow artificial sound of the synthesizer is buried under a much more frenetic

texture in the ensemble. It isn't until the strings' aggressive downbow chords of the final reprise that the acceleration comes to the foreground. At the apex of the acceleration, the piece explodes into a paroxysm of activity that cycles through a new harmonic progression twice, which I understand formally to be the second interruption. First, because it discontinues the trajectory of the acceleration with a contrast in pacing, which is somewhat predictable (i.e. continuous[101]) and second because it features completely new materials that haven't been heard before. This then ends abruptly and pivots towards a primarily discontinuous temporal scheme for the rest of the piece. While sections 5 and 6 feature very strong rhythmic profiles, for example between the strong chords in the electric guitar and the swells between the synthesizer and the strings of section 6, this is within a relatively static temporal progression (that is, neither accelerating nor decelerating). The final stretch of the piece is completely discontinuous and arrhythmic, where the resonance of all that has passed slowly evaporates.

[101] Again, I borrow Grisey's terminology from his article "Tempus Ex Machina."

Conclusion

A summary of the temporal progressions that occur throughout the piece can thus be understood as follows:

A	Intro (mm. 1-6):	deceleration - - -> acceleration
	Section 1 & 1A (mm. 7-67):	acceleration that climaxes in a loop
	Section 2 (mm. 68-105):	Previous acceleration is discontinued, a new acceleration begins and climaxes in a loop
	Reprise (mm. 106-111):	Deceleration, functionally an interruption/discontinuation of the previous acceleration
B	Section 3 (mm. 112-130):	deceleration via cellular mutation (expansion) - - -> acceleration via subtraction
	Interruption 1 (mm. 131-135)	Predictable but static time
	Section 4 (mm. 136-188):	Cyclical but discontinuous time - - -> acceleration
	Reprise (mm. 189-193):	Compressed loop of the opening materials
	Interruption 2 (mm. 194-198)	Predictable but static time
	Section 5 (mm. 199-218)	Static time with tempo acceleration. Rhythmically insistent but not dramatically progressive.
	Section 6 (mm. 219-229)	Static time with tempo acceleration. Rhythmically insistent but not dramatically progressive.
C	Section 7 (mm. 230-end)	Dramatic tempo deceleration (discontinuous and arhythmic time).

Table 2: Summary of the temporal progressions in Professor Bad Trip: Lesson 1

Throughout the piece, many manipulations of the temporal experience are presented, where accelerations, decelerations, and static temporal progressions all possess equal footing. In the acoustic and electronic investigations of timbre in Romitelli's work, one can clearly find the influence of multiple musical genres, such as art rock, psychedelic rock, punk, grunge, avant-garde EDM, and so forth as well as the clear importance of Romitelli's mentors, especially Grisey. However, one gains a greater understanding of how and perhaps why Romitelli's temporal schemes are deployed when the analytical interpretation is filtered through a comparative analysis of the composer's main poetic sources. The visual language of Francis

Bacon offers an interesting point of entry into Romitelli's musical realization of mutations, transformations, and distortions through repetitive sequences, and this is all the more true when reading the entire cycle as a triptych. Furthermore, because of their shared political and cultural context, one can no longer leave the profound imprint of Gianluca Lerici's work unresolved in relation to the work of Romitelli. As a result of his potential (and likely) exposure to *Decoder* magazine and therefore Lerici's work, Romitelli's music is most likely informed by cyberpunk culture, as it possesses the relevant criteria to qualify it as such: a technologically hybridized organism, which draws attention to its own ontological hybridity and is radically motivated in opposition to the accepted norms of the social order (i.e. contemporary music of the time). Lastly, the clear correlations with Henri Michaux's syntactical procedures have been a particularly fruitful area of investigation and should be considered essential source materials when analyzing the remaining *Lessons* of the *Professor Bad Trip* cycle. It is my hope that this analysis motivates listeners, composers, and analysts alike to examine Romitelli's music through the poetic lenses that he himself cited in interviews and programs in order to access a fuller understanding of the intended meaning of the *Lessons*, as well as his mature music in general.

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Appendix: List of Works by Fausto Romitelli

1982	*Suite* for chamber ensemble (unpublished)
1982	*Dia Nykta* for solo flute
1983	*Versilia* for soprano and orchestra (unpublished)
1983	*Lustralis* for wind quintet (unpublished)
1983	*Solare* for solo guitar
1984	*Dimensioni* for 16 performers (unpublished)
1984	*Highway to Hell* for solo guitar
1985	*Furit aestus* for soprano and instrumental quintet
1986	*Invita la sua ninfa all'ombra* for soprano and cello (text by Giovan Battista Marino)
1986	*Ganimede* for solo viola
1987	*Ariel* song for voice and guitar (unpublished)
1987	*Pallide sabbie* for orchestra (unpublished)
1987	*Coralli* for solo guitar
1987–88	*Simmetria d'oggetti* for recorder and guitar
1988–89	*Have your trip* for harp, guitar and mandolin
1989	*Kû* for 14 performers
1989–90	*Meridiana* for orchestra
1990	*Spazio - Articolazione* for 32 performers and amplification systems
1990	*Nell'alto dei giorni immobili* for 6 performers
1991	*Natura morta con fiamme* for string quartet and electronics
1991	*La Lune et les eaux* for 2 guitars
1991	*La sabbia del tempo* for 6 performers
1992	*Mediterraneo - I. Les idoles du soleil* for ensemble
1992–93	*Mediterraneo - II. L'azur des déserts* for voice and 14 instruments
1993	*Your time is over* for cello and ensemble

1993	*Golfi d'ombra* for solo percussion
1994	*Acid Dreams and Spanish Queens* for ensemble
1994	*Seascape* for contrabass recorder
1995	*EnTrance* for soprano, ensemble and electronics
1995–96	*Domeniche alla periferia dell'impero*. *Prima domenica* for 4 instruments
1996	*Cupio Dissolvi* for 14 performers
1997	*The Nameless City* for strings and bells ad libitum
1997	*Lost* for voice and 15 instruments
1997	Music for László Moholy-Nagy's film *Ein Lichtspiel, schwarz-weiss-grau* for recorder, double bass, guitar, percussion and piano
1998	*Professor Bad Trip: Lesson I* for 8 performers and electronics
1998–99	*Professor Bad Trip: Lesson II* for ensemble
1999	*The Poppy in the Cloud* for choir and ensemble
2000	*Professor Bad Trip: Lesson III* for ensemble
2000	*Blood on the Floor, Painting 1986* for ensemble
2000	*Domeniche alla periferia dell'impero. Seconda domenica: hommage à Gérard Grisey* for 4 instruments
2001	*Flowing down too slow* for string orchestra, percussion and bells
2001	*Amok Koma* for ensemble and electronics
2001	*Chorus* for percussionists
2002	*Trash TV Trance* for electric guitar
2003	*An Index of Metals*, video opera for soprano, ensemble, multiple projections and electronics (Text: Kenka Lekovich, Video: Paolo Pachini, Leonardo Romoli
2003	*Dead City Radio Audiodrome* for orchestra
2003	*Green, Yellow and Blue* for ensemble