

Mp3 Yannis Kyriakides/ Veenfabriek - The Thing Like Us



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Electronic music theatre by Yannis Kyriakides performed by the VeenFabriek on texts of Spinoza. 98 MP3 Songs ELECTRONIC: Experimental, CLASSICAL: Contemporary Details: The Thing Like Us Yannis Kyriakides . VeenFabriek About the Origin of the Project This CD is a realisation of the music written for the 2002 Veenstudio production SPINOZA: I am not where i think myself to be. It is in two parts: Affectio and Epistola, based respectively on the definitions of the emotions from the third part of Spinoza's Ethics, and on a letter about free will Spinoza wrote to G. H. Schaller. We chose to call the CD 'The Thing Like Us' referring to Spinoza's famous phrase 'Res Nobis Similis' in which he sets out a theory of the imaginary ego and how that affects our conception of ourselves. This was one of the initial inspirations behind the compositions on the CD. It struck me how apt that concept was to show how music effects our emotions, how we look for a mirror of ourselves in music, how we identify to certain orderings of sound and feel that expresses 'something like' our feelings and desires. Naturally the main inspiration behind this music is the compositional beauty of Spinoza's Ethics itself. The form and structure of this book can be seen almost as music in its own right. The clarity of his thought, and the level of abstraction of his language function like music. I first had the idea of using Spinoza's texts when singer Ayelet Harpaz asked me to write a piece for her and harpsichordist Zohar Shefi. They both lived in the Hague very near Spinoza's house, and though I admired his writing, I never thought that I could do anything with it in music. However I took this request as too big a coincidence to ignore: it was the right instruments, the right place, and the right people. The first half of Affectio was written in 2000, for their voice and harpsichord program and was performed many times. In the meantime I had met with Paul Koek, one of the founding directors of the theatre group ZTHollandia and Veenstudio, with whom I had worked in the past with on several projects together with the maverick composer and conceptual artist Dick Raaijmakers. These had been wonderful

experiences. Working with Paul was always a great pleasure, and we were trying to brainstorm and come up with an idea for a future collaboration. Thanks to Ayelet, the Spinoza idea came up again, and though we had no real story in the conventional sense, it felt like a rich source of possibilities. The Theater aan het Spui joined the production and found us an amazing location to perform in, the old ABN bank headquarters in The Hague, which had just been left empty awaiting refurbishment. The building is located just opposite the parliament overlooking the old prison where the De Witt brothers were assassinated by a mob in 1672, an event which had a huge impact on Spinoza's life. There was so much history resonating in the area, and it felt like a real privilege to be working on a piece about Spinoza in The Hague in his old neighborhood. Having got a great team of people together to work on the piece which included artist Isaac Carlos, and actors Bert Luppés and Carola Arons, dramaturge Paul Slangen and assistant director Andrea Astbury, we developed the project on location over the space of about six weeks. Paul Koek (Director): "Even before 2002, I knew Yannis as a composer with an original approach to theatre, music or music-theatre. Therefore when I asked him to make something for the Veenstudio, I knew I had to give him a lot of space, which is what I did, with a lot of confidence and trust. Both Yannis and Ayelet seemed to know the work of Spinoza well (and what had been published about it), but even so, I was slightly taken aback by the proposal to set to music all 48 of Spinoza's Definitions of the Emotions. Not that I doubted Yannis's ability, but I was more concerned with the question of how I would bring that to an audience. We were living in the time of the Pim Fortuin murder (who incidentally was also an admirer of Spinoza). We were playing a stone's throw from the old Spinoza house, in the old ABN bank headquarters (thanks to John Reinders from the Theater aan het Spui) and Veenstudio/ZTHollandia has always had a strong connection with social reality. What could I do with this material in order to stay close indeed to the social reality? How do I get those texts which are supposed to be read and not spoken onto the stage in this location? Those were my thoughts during the Summer of 2002 before we started work. I knew that I had two amazing actors, three fantastic musicians and a wonderful artist Isaac Carlos who Yannis had proposed. This was what I thought: "I have to get some life into this text and I can do this by projecting the text and having it spoken in a working class Hague accent (which Bert could do very well). As long as he believed in what he was saying he was able to communicate the text clearly and simply. Spinoza The Worker . Alongside that, a woman (Carola) spoke a language that was forward-looking. A strange hostess who lives in the future and hears Spinoza's texts sung in her home. In

this way I could offer these ingredients to this group of artists, because no matter if you're singing or acting, composing or designing it's about artists working together and the process of collaboration itself. I had a lot of pleasure and inspiration working on the piece and I don't expect to miss much of the 'theatre' on the CD. I gave myself the task of following whatever Yannis, with his knowledge of Spinoza and my faith in his music, would produce, and that gave rise to a very 'musical' performance piece, which certainly translates very well to CD, unlike many other theatre performances where the music is more functional and thus temporary." Isaac Carlos, an Angolan artist living in The Netherlands, created some object pieces which functioned in a dramatic way throughout the course of the performance. A large glass bowl with intravenous tubes around it, which was suspended from the ceiling, was lowered into the middle of the space, where it was used as a fish-tank. The harpsichord was suspended from the ceiling of the building and hung 20 metres down where the harpsichordist met it seemingly in mid-air. The singer seemed to float through the space on a giant dress which used a foot-controlled steering stick to run a wheelchair type motor. There was a giant flat-bed scanner with an anatomical print on it which was controlled by sound. The building itself became an integral aspect of the performance. The architecture of the space and how it affected the light and sound and the performers, who appeared and disappeared in its many corners became an essential part of the theatre. We used multiple speakers spread around all levels of the space; hence the decision on this recording to recreate that effect by making the voices inhabit specific acoustical spaces, or to give the effect in *Affectio* of the singer moving around an imaginary architecture. The light created by Joost Verest also highlighted these aspects of the space; he used special lamps under and inside the high ceiling to draw the attention towards the architecture. The audience was seated on 'bean bags' - cushions on the floor and thus had a view of the space looking upwards. It was therefore logical for us to make use of the two balcony levels that surrounded the main atrium. The effect was almost dreamlike. The space began to represent the idea of being inside one's mind, or Spinoza's mind. In fact that is how I saw the function of the characters in the piece. Bert Luppés who plays a character just come off the street looking for a cash-dispenser gets drawn into the space and becomes a Spinoza wandering in his own mind, a Spinoza dreaming of himself. The layers of his character had tragi-comic dimensions which were brought out by an exaggerated "Hague" accent. (On the CD we decided to record his voice in a neutral tone, because without the context of the performance the accent was not so relevant). The character of Carola was originally a reference to Clara-Maria van

den Enden. Supposedly she was an unrequited love in Spinoza's youth. The daughter of van de Enden, she had taught Spinoza Latin, and at their house in Amsterdam he had his first taste of Cartesian philosophy and amateur theatre. The character began to gain other dimensions, when we started working on location in the building. Her character seemed to become very connected to the space itself. Carola Arons (actor): "When I saw the building , I imagined that a woman lived in one of the rooms there and nobody knew about it. She didn't know it herself. She had no memory, nor remembrances and didn't have any emotions anymore. Because of the corset around her body and the prosthetics on her leg we see that in the past something must have happened that was connected to violent emotions, and there is generally an unhappy air about her. She exposes her body with pride. Every evening she makes her rounds of the building, naming every individual body part; a ritual which gathers her body together and keeps hold of that memory which is so transitory. This had to be her character, that somehow in a mysterious yet self-evident way would be connected to the building. The music and the definitions of the emotions are expressed through the personage of the actor." The music of the CD: *Affectio (The 48 Emotions)*: In the third part of the *Ethics* (the other parts concern God, the mind, human bondage and freedom) Spinoza sets out to demonstrate that emotions are as determined in their occurrence as are the laws of motion. 'Our affects follow from the same necessity and force of nature as the other singular things.' He divides these into actions and passions. When the cause of an event lies in our own nature then it is a case of the mind acting. When something happens in us of which the cause is outside our nature then we are passive and being acted upon. What takes place when we are acting or being acted upon is a change in our mental and physical capacities: 'an increase or decrease in our power of acting' The essence of all things is 'conatus' (desire): 'Each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being'. An affect is any change in this power for better or for worse. Affects that are actions are changes in this power that have their source in our nature alone, affects that are passions are those changes in this power that originate outside of us. The complex model of human emotion that he builds up from the primary affects of desire, pleasure ('the transition from a lesser to a greater perfection') and pain ('the transition from a greater to lesser perfection') gives a model of emotions as a constant changing flux of states, in a literal sense: movements, that have the net effect of either increasing or decreasing a man's power of acting. This 'structural theory' model of emotion, which was very much anathema in his day, bares close resemblance to how emotion is understood in cognitive psychology nowadays and even hints

at neurological theories of brain activity. One of the themes that Spinoza stresses in the Ethics is how much the body itself defines who we are and how we act and think. By setting up this deductive psychological approach to its analysis, he does not mean to arrive at a definition of each and every emotion but to show that its roots lie in the structures of both the mind and the outside world. Affectio is a setting of this table of definitions. In setting this text, I was inspired by the idea of a flux of velocities which transforms the material from one state into another. I did not want to exaggerate the semantic character of each emotion, but to address the general interconnection between them. Nor did I want to use a very operatic 'expressionist' musical language to represent emotional states as a psycho-narrative, though I do colour the different emotions at times by bringing out opposites by simple changes in mode or harmony. The sound world is made up of the voice and harpsichord (a setting of the Latin text); paper sounds, wax falling on paper, glass-sine tones and live manipulated samples of fragments of the piece. The intention is that the electronics create a sense of a living organism; an image of the physical. A body of slowly transforming states, that constantly move between the mental and the material world ('idea and extension'). From the high-pitched sine tones of the cerebral cortex to the image of a lung, a heart, breathing paper, blood coursing through the veins; the connection between the rational world of the Latin definitions and the visceral experience of emotion as a physical phenomena. The physicality of the electronic sounds plays an important function in the music, as it highlights the gray area between the corporeal, sensual presence of sound in a space, and its abstraction into a codified musical language. This is fertile territory for music-theatre and is one of the more direct influences from Spinoza's philosophy on my music. The changes in tempo and velocity are used to connect polyphonic layers of different states of activity and non-activity. Epistola (The Letter on Free Will): This was originally the third part of the performance, the second part being a dialogue between the two actors with some minimal musical intervention. The basis of this text is Spinoza's letter to one of his German correspondents G. H. Schaller where in simple terms he sets out a metaphor for understanding our illusion concerning free will. Schaller asked Spinoza for some explanations regarding this matter, and the letter is an answer to his request. He describes a stone in flight and wonders if the stone thinks it moves of its own will not being aware of the hand that has thrown it. Strictly speaking Spinoza is a 'determinist', but in the Ethics he sets out an idea of freedom which is defined as something we are not necessarily born with, but have to attain in life through understanding thus increasing our power of acting. Being determined by 'adequate ideas

from which active affects follow'. The music in *Epistola* uses a cinematic type structure of many short scenes which constantly change the focus and perspective of the material. The piece develops on sudden shifts from layers of changing polyphony; sometimes there are six things happening at the same time, sometimes just one. The voice sings the latin text of Spinoza's letter from a distance, and this is stretched out through the whole part. The female actor's voice is constantly moving around the acoustical space like a voice inside our head and is highlighting themes about free will and her character's desire to live in a world free of emotion, a dystopian future. The male actor's voice is always right in front of us in the acoustical field, his texts have to do with the growing awareness of his character's existential situation, the gradual realisation of his mortality as he experiences it through his senses and memory. This was in part inspired by the mysterious circumstances of Spinoza's death, and by his own writing about mortality. The actors have a musical function in the work in the way their voices are used and the text is interpreted. Organisms within the music are created whereby the polyphony of voices have an interactive effect on each other through live computer processing using algorithms with feedback loops, whereby one voice influences the level of processing used on another.

Yannis Kyriakides *AFFECTIO* Definitions of the Emotions from the Ethics of Spinoza, Part III numbers also correspond to tracks on CD 01

- 01 Desire (Cupiditas) is the actual essence of man, in so far as it is conceived, as determined to a particular activity by some given modification of itself.
- 02 Pleasure (Laetitia) is the transition of a man from a less to a greater perfection.
- 03 Pain (Tristitia) is the transition of a man from a greater to a less perfection.
- 04 Wonder (Admiratio) is the conception of anything, wherein the mind comes to a stand, because the particular concept in question has no connection with other concepts
- 05 Contempt (Contempus) is the conception of anything which touches the mind so little, that its presence leads the mind to imagine those qualities which are not in it rather than such as are in it.
- 06 Love (Amor) is pleasure, accompanied by the idea of an external cause.
- 07 Hatred (Odium) is pain, accompanied by the idea of an external cause.
- 08 Inclination (Propensio) is pleasure, accompanied by the idea of something which is accidentally a cause of pleasure.
- 09 Aversion (Aversio) is pain, accompanied by the idea of something which is accidentally the cause of pain.
- 10 Devotion (Devotio) is love towards one whom we admire.
- 11 Derision (Irisio) is pleasure arising from our conceiving the presence of a quality, which we despise, in an object which we hate.
- 12 Hope (Spes) is an inconstant pleasure, arising from the idea of something past or future, whereof we to a certain extent doubt the issue.
- 13 Fear (Metus) is an inconstant pain arising from the idea of

something past or future, whereof we to a certain extent doubt the issue. 14 Confidence (Secutitas) is pleasure arising from the idea of something past or future, wherefrom all cause of doubt has been removed. 15 Despair (Desperatio) is pain arising from the idea of something past or future, wherefrom all cause of doubt has been removed. 16 Joy (Gaudium) is pleasure accompanied by the idea of something past, which has had an issue beyond our hope. 17 Disappointment (Conscientiae) is pain accompanied by the idea of something past, which has had an issue contrary to our hope. 18 Pity (Commiseratio) is pain accompanied by the idea of evil, which has befallen someone else whom we conceive to be like ourselves. 19 Approval (Favor) is love towards one who has done good to another. 20 Indignation (Indignatio) is hatred towards one who has done evil to another. 21 Partiality (Existimatio) is thinking too highly of anyone because of the love we bear him. 22 Disparagement (Despectus) is thinking too meanly of anyone, because we hate him. 23 Envy (Invidia) is hatred, in so far as it induces a man to be pained by another's good fortune, and to rejoice in another's evil fortune. 24 Sympathy (Misericordia) is love, in so far as it induces a man to feel pleasure at another's good fortune, and pain at another's evil fortune. 25 Self-approval (Aquiescentia) is pleasure arising from a man's contemplation of himself and his own power of action. 26 Humility (Humilitas) is pain arising from a man's contemplation of his own weakness of body or mind. 27 Repentance (Poenitentia) is pain accompanied by the idea of some action, which we believe we have performed by the free decision of our mind. 28 Pride (Superbia) is thinking too highly of one's self from self-love. 29 Self-abasement (Abjectio) is thinking too meanly of one's self by reason of pain. 30 Honour (Gloria) is pleasure accompanied by the idea of some action of our own, which we believe to be praised by others. 31 Shame (Pudor) is pain accompanied by the idea of some action of our own, which we believe to be blamed by others. 32 Regret (Desiderium) is the desire or appetite to possess something, kept alive by the remembrance of the said thing, and at the same time constrained by the remembrance of other things which exclude the existence of it. 33 Emulation (Aemulatio) is the desire of something, engendered in us by our conception that others have the same desire. 34 Gratitude (Gratia) is the desire or zeal springing from love, whereby we endeavour to benefit him, who with similar feelings of love has conferred a benefit on us. 35 Benevolence (Benevolentia) is the desire of benefiting one whom we pity. 36 Anger (Ira) is the desire, whereby through hatred we are induced to injure one whom we hate. 37 Revenge (Vindicta) is the desire whereby we are induced, through mutual hatred, to injure one who, with similar feelings, has injured us. 38 Cruelty or savageness (Crudelitas) is the desire, whereby a man

is impelled to injure one whom we love or pity. 39 Timidity (Timor) is the desire to avoid a greater evil, which we dread, by undergoing a lesser evil. 40 Daring (Audacia) is the desire, whereby a man is set on to do something dangerous which his equals fear to attempt. 41 Cowardice (Pulcila) is attributed to one, whose desire is checked by the fear of some danger which his equals dare to encounter. 42 Consternation (Consternatio) is attributed to one, whose desire of avoiding evil is checked by amazement at the evil which he fears. 43 Courtesy or deference (Humanitas) is the desire of acting in a way that should please men, and refraining from that which should displease them. 44 Ambition (Ambitio) is the immoderate desire of power. 45 Luxury (Luxuria) is excessive desire, or even love of living sumptuously. 46 Intemperance (Ebrietas) is the excessive desire and love of drinking. 47 Avarice (Avaritia) is the excessive desire and love of riches. 48 Lust (Libido) is desire and love in the matter of sexual intercourse. Tracks 49 and 50 are silent tracks, placed there in order to create some space between the two parts. They are each one minute in duration. EPISTOLA Correspondence from Spinoza to Schlller 51 Though I am, at present, much occupied with other matters, not to mention my delicate health, your singular courtesy, or, to name the chief motive, your love of truth, impels me to satisfy your inquiries, as far as my poor abilities will permit. 52 I say that a thing is free, which exists and acts solely by the necessity of its own nature. 54 Thus also God understands Himself and all things freely, because it follows solely from the necessity of His nature, that He should understand all things. 58 You see I do not place freedom in free decision, but in free necessity. 59 However, let us descend to created things, which are all determined by external causes to exist and operate in a given determinate manner. 60 In order that this may be clearly understood, let us conceive a very simple thing. 61 For instance, a stone receives from the impulsion of an external cause, a certain quantity of motion, 62 by virtue of which it continues to move after the impulsion given by the external cause has ceased. 64 The permanence of the stone's motion is constrained, not necessary, because it must be defined by the impulsion of an external cause. 66 What is true of the stone is true of any individual, however complicated its nature, or varied its functions, 68 inasmuch as every individual thing is necessarily determined by some external cause to exist and operate in a fixed and determinate manner. 69 Further conceive, I beg, that a stone, while continuing in motion, should be capable of thinking and knowing, that it is endeavouring, as far as it can, to continue to move. 70 Such a stone, being conscious merely of its own endeavour and not at all indifferent, would believe itself to be completely free, 71 and would think that it continued in motion solely because of its own wish.

This is that human freedom, which all boast that they possess, 72 and which consists solely in the fact, that men are conscious of their own desire, but are ignorant of the causes whereby that desire has been determined. 74 Thus an infant believes that it desires milk freely; 77 an angry child thinks he wishes freely for vengeance, 79 a timid child thinks he wishes freely to run away. Again, a drunken man thinks, that from the free decision of his mind he speaks words, 80 which afterwards, when sober, he would like to have left unsaid. 83 So the delirious, the garrulous, and others of the same sort think that they act from the free decision of their mind, 84 not that they are carried away by impulse. 85 As this misconception is innate in all men, it is not easily conquered. 90 For, although experience abundantly shows, that men can do anything rather than check their desires, 92 and that very often, when a prey to conflicting emotions, they see the better course and follow the worse, 94 they yet believe themselves to be free; because in some cases their desire for a thing is slight, 96 and can easily be overruled by the recollection of something else, which is frequently present in the mind. 97 I have thus, if I mistake not, sufficiently explained my opinion regarding free and constrained necessity, and also regarding so-called human freedom: 98 from what I have said you will easily be able to reply to your friend's objections.

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