“Poor in Material, Non-Dramatic, Without Pathos”:
Elements of the Danish New Simplicity in the Choral Works of
Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen

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By
A.J. Keller

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Abstract

This paper examines the vocal works of Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen in an effort to establish that, despite their technical difficulty and apparent complexity, these pieces are actually rooted in the Danish New Simplicity (*Ny Enkelhed*) aesthetic. It also provides biographical, historical, and cultural context for those who are interested in performing the composer’s vocal works. It draws on the little available English-language literature on the composer as well as a number of Danish-language sources to provide historical context on the emergence of the New Simplicity style in Denmark in the 1960s and its manifestation in the works of contemporaneous composers. A brief biography and general overview of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s oeuvre is provided. Twelve of the composer’s vocal works are analyzed in varying degrees of detail over the course of the remaining chapters, which focus on his musical materials, harmonic language, form, and artistic and philosophical influences. Other works, both vocal and instrumental, are referenced when appropriate.
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Introduction

This document is intended as a resource for those interested in Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s vocal music—both in general and in regard to specific works—and for those interested in learning more about the Danish New Simplicity aesthetic movement of the mid-1960s. Despite Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s substantial output of ensemble vocal music in the last fifteen years of his life, the English-language literature on the composer is almost entirely focused on his instrumental music. This literature is similarly lacking in detailed discussion about the Danish New Simplicity, to the degree that the movement has been almost entirely omitted from the printed historical narrative of the English-speaking world. The term “New Simplicity,” for instance, is not even mentioned in Richard Taruskin’s mammoth, six-volume *Oxford History of Western Music*, which is considered a major, authoritative music history survey.¹ There is also no article in *Grove Music Online* devoted to Danish New Simplicity, and the articles about Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen and Denmark each only mention the term once, following up with no explanation of its meaning.² Even when the term is used in the occasional dissertation, article or liner note, it is often simply stated rather than defined. The few actual attempts at a description in the English literature involve vague language and very little specific detail or analysis. This study identifies tangible style characteristics of the New Simplicity aesthetic and, through substantial musical analysis, demonstrates how these traits are manifested


in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s works. Most importantly, this document is intended to demonstrate that, despite their technical difficulty and apparent complexity, the composer’s late vocal works are rooted in the Danish New Simplicity aesthetic.

The document is structured in two large parts; the first provides background information to prepare the reader for the second, which consists of detailed discussion and musical analysis of twelve of the composer’s vocal works. Rather than address each piece individually, the author has structured Part 2 around the different New Simplicity characteristics he has identified in the composer’s late vocal works, as understanding these clear trends that persist throughout the composer’s oeuvre is necessary in order to understand his compositional style in general. The final chapter focuses on the composer’s text choices as well as the influence of the visual arts, Absurdism, and nature on his work. The principal pieces discussed in the document include the following:

- **Konstateringer** (1969)
- **Eksempler** (1970)
- **Four Madrigals from the Natural World** (2001)
- **6 Enkle Danske Sange** (2002)
- **Three Stages** (2003)
- **Igen** (2006)
- **Song/Play/Company** (2010)
- **Green/New Ground Green/No Ground Green** (2011)
- **Sound I** (2012)
- **Sound II** (2012)
- **On One Note** (2014)
- **Ad Cor** (2015)

The two early works—**Konstateringer** and **Eksempler**—share several characteristics found in the vocal works written after 2000 and therefore warrant inclusion in this paper. Several other pieces are mentioned throughout, particularly those from the 1960s, since they reveal much about the composer’s approach to the New Simplicity trend. Some vocal works have been left out of this
discussion due to both the limited scope of the project and their general irrelevance to its thesis. Although the dissertation is intended to be read in its entirety, an index has been provided for those short on time who are looking for detailed analyses of specific works, since several pieces are discussed in multiple chapters. For those lacking the time to read the entire document, the sections discussing the composer’s grid technique (Chapter 3) and process of superimposition (Chapter 5) should also prove quite useful, as these compositional techniques have not been discussed in detail in the other English-language literature on the subject.

This study draws on what little available English literature on the topic exists as well as a number of Danish-language sources to provide historical context on the emergence of New Simplicity in Denmark in the 1960s and its manifestation in the works of contemporaneous composers. Those interested in exploring the literature on twentieth-century Danish music will find Lansing McCloskey’s annotated bibliography extremely helpful.³ Additionally, Jean Christensen’s chapter on Denmark in New Music of the Nordic Countries has proved absolutely essential,⁴ Anders Beyer’s interview with the composer in The Voice of Music is extremely illuminating with regard to the composer’s aesthetic sensibilities,⁵ and Karl Aage Rasmussen’s book Noteworthy Danes is a useful starting point for those interested in expanding their knowledge of twentieth-century Danish composers.⁶ Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s publisher,


⁴ Jean Christensen, “New Music of Denmark,” in New Music of the Nordic Countries (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2002), 1-120.


Edition Wilhelm Hansen, published a Danish-language book in 2002 commemorating the composer’s seventieth birthday, which contains written contributions by Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Ib Nørholm, and Per Nørgård, among others. Ursula Andkjær Olsen has written a monograph about the composer which, unfortunately, has not been translated into English.

There have been at least two documentary films made about Gudmundsen-Holmgreen. The first is the feature-length *Musikken er et monster* by Jytte Rex, which is available on DVD. The other is *På Tvært*, a half-hour-long profile by the composer’s good friend Birgit Tengberg, which is currently only available by rental, in online streaming format. Additionally, liner notes from the numerous recordings of the composer’s work (mostly released by the Danish label Dacapo Records) have proven useful in painting a clearer picture with regard to his aesthetic sensibilities. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of specific biographical information about Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, but the information provided in Chapter 2 should serve as a useful starting point for future research. Though embraced by the insular musical circles of Denmark and small pockets of the new-music communities of the United States and United Kingdom, it appears that Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s works have yet to receive wide recognition. Hopefully, this study will serve as a pathway into the composer’s work and encourage hesitant conductors to study and curate more of his music.

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9 This film was premiered at the KLANG avantgarde music festival in Copenhagen on June 17, 2016—ten days before the composer’s death—after a performance of his trio of string quartets *All in One*. 
PART 1: THE RISE OF THE DANISH NEW SIMPLICITY

Chapter 1: New Simplicity and the Class of ‘32: Henning Christiansen, Per Nørgård, Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, and Ib Nørholm

1.1 Danish Music in the Twentieth Century

Any discussion of twentieth-century Danish music must begin by mentioning Carl Nielsen (1865-1931), who, by the middle of the century, had become the preeminent figure of Danish music. “Just as Grieg became synonymous with Norwegian music and Sibelius with Finnish, the world considered Nielsen to be the one Danish name to remember, to the point of exclusion.”¹⁰ Though earning the recognition of the rest of the Western world only fairly recently, Nielsen’s work has long defined the Danish musical aesthetic. Still, Nielsen was a composer torn between two compositional approaches: “on the one hand, Nielsen sought to win international recognition by aspiring to an advanced, cosmopolitan style; and on the other, he felt a responsibility to sustain his native music tradition by writing compositions in a more directly accessible idiom.”¹¹

Danish art music had been dominated by Nielsen’s work, and “for a time after his death in 1931 his works had a stifling effect on composers, who felt unable to free themselves from his influence.”¹² Indeed, nearly all of the most noteworthy Danish composers of the generation following Nielsen were heavily influenced by him.

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¹⁰ McLoskey, Twentieth Century Danish Music, xv.


¹² Jensen, “Denmark,” in Grove Music Online.
It is generally accepted that the most influential composer in the years after Nielsen was Vagn Holmboe (1909-96), who taught the three major figures of the following generation: Ib Nørholm (1931-2019), Per Nørgård (b. 1932), and Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (1932-2016). Although Holmboe inherited from Nielsen a propensity toward the staple genres of the Classical period—the symphony and string quartet—Holmboe’s music was significant in its divergence from the complexity of the German Romantic style, the Danish nationalistic flavor of Nielsen, and the most popular modernist trends.

His independence of prevailing musical styles was also a factor in a historical situation where his contemporaries were tempted to mix elements of the accepted (Nielsen-based) tradition with influences of everything from early Stravinsky and Bartók, jazz and the French Six, to the Neue Sachlichkeit of Hindemith and Weill.13

His originality of style and compositional approach, perhaps most exemplified by his technique of “metamorphosis”—“an original formal principle where the material is continually transformed from one state to another, gradually ‘reaching the total change,’ but without ever losing its identity or basic properties”14—had a profound impact on his students, who occupy a generation unique in its stylistic pluralism. Although the generation of composers to which Nørgård, Nørholm, and Gudmundsen-Holmgreen belong at first perpetuated the musical traditions of the first half of the century, early on their styles diverged, and the composers explored a variety of different, independent compositional approaches. The ISCM festivals of 1959 and 1960, in Rome and Cologne, respectively, exposed this generation to the European avant-garde and marked a turning point in the composers’ individual philosophies and aesthetic sensibilities.

13 Christensen, “New Music of Denmark,” in New Music of the Nordic Countries, 19.

Most young composers adopted an independent attitude to serialism, and during the 1960s individual styles and experiments appeared, such as Nørgård’s ‘infinite series’, Nørholm’s lyrical expressive style, the ‘new simplicity’ and experiments with open form, ‘fluxus’ events and ‘happenings’ in the works of Henning Christiansen and others.\(^{15}\)

1.2 The Inception: Henning Christiansen, Fluxus, and Perceptive Constructions

Henning Christiansen (1932-2008) studied at Copenhagen Conservatory with Finn Høffding, the principal teacher of Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen and Vagn Holmboe. After dropping out of the conservatory to pursue more opportunities to engage with experimental music, he spent two summers in Darmstadt (1962-63). There he “deepened his acquaintance with Terry Riley, and they worked together in Darmstadt presenting musical ‘happenings.’”\(^{16}\) It was during the same time period that Christiansen became involved with Fluxus, an international, interdisciplinary performance-art community whose American origins can be traced back to John Cage’s 1958-59 composition class at New York City’s New School for Social Research.\(^{17}\) Christiansen participated in multiple Fluxus concerts in Copenhagen between 1962 and 1964, and the movement had a profound impact on him. Many of the characteristics of the Fluxus movement—a general playfulness of tone, attention to everyday objects and activities, compositional approach largely comprised of musical or non-musical “events,” and an attempt to remove the monopoly on art from the hands of the “studied” bourgeoisie—are represented in his

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\(^{15}\) Jensen, “Denmark,” in *Grove Music Online*.


work from the period. The influence of Fluxus and his distaste for Darmstadt high modernism were both driving forces pushing him toward the development of a new, simpler musical style.

In 1964, Henning Christiansen composed *Perceptive Constructions*, the work that essentially defined this new musical style, which the musicologist Poul Nielsen dubbed “Ny Enkelhed” (New Simplicity) in his essay “Omkring den ny enkelhed” (About the new simplicity). Written for an instrumental ensemble of eight players, *Perceptive Constructions* consists of four movements, each of which essentially functions as a Fluxus-style musical “event.” In the first movement, “Space and Object,” a single, dissonant chord is held fourteen times in different voicings by the ensemble, with each chord separated by ten seconds of silence. The second movement, “Next Point,” consists of simple musical fragments being played sporadically above a slow, eighth-note whole-step trill in the strings. In the third movement, “On the Line,” a single chord is played a total of eight times, with each player sustaining their pitch a different number of seconds in every repetition. And the final movement, “Point-Blank,” consists of disparate, repetitive musical fragments competing with one another to produce a cacophonous cloud of sound. “Thus the parts of the work are undisguised and unrelated sound constructs without any messages, neither overt nor implied. They are devices to be received, or perceived, hence the title.”

By the time the piece premiered, Nørgård, Nørholm, and Gudmundsen-Holmgreen had each been searching for their own voice for several years, with limited success. Each had

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20 Christensen, “New Music of Denmark,” in *New Music of the Nordic Countries*, 47.
experimented in a variety of genres and styles, and each had dabbled in serialism. Christiansen’s *Perceptive Constructions* is generally recognized as the turning point for his three compatriots. Indeed, after the work’s premiere, all three composers began to move away from the Darmstadt avant-garde and began producing pieces simpler in form, comprised of more familiar musical materials.

1.3 Defining Danish New Simplicity

As with any compositional trend, the difficulty is in developing a clear, applicable definition. Unfortunately, Danish New Simplicity is not a clearly-defined movement or aesthetic, and the composers who are most commonly associated with it—Nørholm, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Ole Buck, Hans Abrahamsen—have each developed their own, unique compositional voice. In fact, each of these composers even treats the concept of *simplicity* differently. Therefore, any analysis of New Simplicity characteristics in a composer’s work must be tailored to the specific composer.

First of all, it’s important to note that the Danish New Simplicity is an entirely different musical movement than the German movement of the same name (*Neue Einfachheit* in German) which developed in the 1970s and ‘80s. This movement can also be interpreted as a reaction against Darmstadt serialism, but the German movement was more focused on developing a directness of expression and clarity of communication between composer and listener. The composers who operated within this style turned to the gestural and tonal language of the late German Romantics.²¹

Danish New Simplicity is also distinctly different than the more well-known brands of minimalist music. The common associations made with the term “minimalism”—with the American minimalists La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and John Adams; the so-called “holy minimalists” Arvo Pärt, Henryk Górecki, John Tavener, and Pēteris Vasks; and post-minimalist composers like David Lang, Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon, William Duckworth, and Ingram Marshall—reflect neither the philosophy nor the compositional practice of the Danish New Simplicity composers.

Musicologists and critics can’t seem to agree on what exactly the term “New Simplicity” entails. According to the composer Karl Aage Rasmussen:

Labelled the ‘New Simplicity’ (a new simplicity as opposed to merely a new naivety [sic]), the new ideals were anonymity, strict regularity and a cleansing of all emotional tension, drama and expansion. The idea came from the so-called ‘concrete’ movement in Danish art and poetry, and challenged not just serialism, which, in fact, is not so foreign to systems and abstractions, but the whole cramming of information in our brave new media-society. With younger composers, this eventually took the form of a veritable kick in the pants to all the musical establishment.22

Bendt Viinholt Nielsen, the Danish writer and biographer of Rued Langgaard, explains it this way:

As a reaction against serialism, Henning Christiansen in 1965 introduced ‘New Simplicity’ with a super-simple work, Perceptive Constructions. New Simplicity is a Danish phenomenon with parallels in American and Polish music. The simplicity is characterized by the use of simple melodies, triads, simple rhythms, repetitions, and a clear form.23

And in his book The Nordic Sound, John H. Yoell describes it thus:

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[Per Nørgård] has transformed himself to an advocate of the “New Simplicity,” a phrase on loan from Danish literary criticism which implies no “return” to anything, but rather means rejection of the new musical orthodoxy as perpetuated by the highly organized serialist “gurus” at Darmstadt.24

And so on. Poul Nielsen’s article “Omrøring den ny enkelhed,” one of the key early documents explaining the movement, is understandably descriptive in a very general way, presenting observations of loose trends rather than defining the style in specific, detailed terms.25 Erling Kullberg takes a different approach altogether and, rather than attempting to clearly define the aesthetic, simply points to general trends within the stylistic movement. He identifies four: Concretism, Absurdism, Stylistic Pluralism, and Neo-Simplicity (Påny-Enkelhed).26 These observations are less helpful for defining the New Simplicity movement, since all four of these trends arguably also exist in other style movements that have not been documented as having any close relationship to Danish New Simplicity. However, they do act as a useful counterweight to the kneejerk comparison with the other strands of minimalism, since the trends Kullberg identifies are not significantly prevalent in those other stylistic branches.

Ultimately, “New Simplicity” is a term without a clear definition, and any analysis of a composer’s work within the category itself will be a bit unspecific. The one thing these writers seem to be able to agree on is that the movement can be interpreted as a reaction to, and rejection of, Darmstadt serialism. It is therefore ironic that early New Simplicity works tended to elicit negative audience reactions comparable to those elicited by serialism during the same period.


So perhaps the best way to understand the movement is to talk in general terms. New Simplicity works may be identified by the existence of any combination of the following characteristics:

- Simple melodies, often diatonic
- Harmonies built off of basic triads
- Simple rhythms
- Clearly-defined formal structure
- Musical regularity
- Objectivity
- Lack of drama or expansion
- Concretism
- Absurdism
- Stylistic Pluralism
- Neo-Simplicity

But ultimately, New Simplicity is less a style movement than it is a loosely-defined set of musical and aesthetic values. The general characteristics that Kullberg identifies, along with the specific style features listed above, will be more clearly understood upon examining some representative works by Danish composers from the “Class of ‘32” and the following generation.

1.4 New Simplicity in Works of Nørgård, Nørholm, et al.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s colleagues Per Nørgård and Ib Nørholm both embraced the Danish trend toward simplicity in very different ways. In the late 1950s, Nørgård famously discovered a mathematical formula capable of producing an infinite number of pitches using only a single pitch interval as the germinal material. Dubbed by Nørgård as the “infinity row,” the device is an example of the composer’s use of simple, minimal musical material as the basis for a more expansive work.

Nørgard's discovery of the 'infinity row' or 'infinity series' underlies almost all the music he wrote from the late 1950s until around 1980. The infinity row - using
fractal techniques two decades before they entered general discussion - expands from a single interval, mirrored up and down symmetrically, thus creating new intervals, themselves mirrored in turn, and so on. The procedure can be applied melodically, rhythmically and harmonically.\textsuperscript{27}

The infinity series is essentially a procedure which can produce a limitless tone row with only a single interval as its germinal musical material. For example, here is the beginning of a tone row produced by his system, based on the interval of a half-step:

Example 1.1, The ‘Infinity Series,’ first sixteen pitches

Two representative works from the period are Nørgård’s \textit{Voyage into the Golden Screen} (1968) and \textit{Symphony No. 2} (1970), both of which incorporate clear statements of tone rows constructed using the “infinity series” formula. For instance, in the second movement of \textit{Voyage into the Golden Screen}, the composer is able to apply the “infinity series” to different layers of orchestral texture, producing dense contrapuntal landscapes in which the musical gestures played by different sections map onto each other in seeming complexity, despite the fact that the germinal material is extraordinarily simple (Example 1.2).

Ib Nørholm went in a different direction and returned to the more immediately-recognizable language of functional harmony. His early student works explore Nielsen-style Nordic lyricism and expansiveness, and he dabbled in serialism in the late 1950s. But his interest in the Fluxus movement, paired with a distaste for modernism after experiencing both Darmstadt

and the Cologne ISCM festival firsthand, led to the creation of a number of works that embrace recognizably-tonal melodic and harmonic gestures. These are most apparent in his music for solo voice, like the cycle Flowers from the Flora of Danish Poetry (1966), but similar traditional elements can also be found in his op. 33, Stofer og marker for solo piano, his third and fourth string quartets—From my Green Herbarium, op. 35 and September-October-November, op. 38—and many of his choral works, such as Americana, op. 89 (1984). Still, Nørholm’s compositional approach is difficult to pin down, as his entire career consisted of an incredible amount of stylistic exploration. He has been regarded as an avant-garde composer, an experimentalist, a collage artist, a minimalist, and a traditionalist. He seems to avoid the hampering that results from stylistic labelling, and he has made his reputation as a composer whose oeuvre is, first and
foremost, stylistically pluralistic.\textsuperscript{28} However, elements of simplicity inhabited his music throughout his career. A recent example is his op. 205 for piano and alto saxophone: \textit{Late Harvest} (2016). The piece is tonal and utilizes repetitive figures, lyrical melodies, familiar harmonies, and simple rhythms. Whereas Nørgård and Gudmundsen-Holmgreen sought out new methods for incorporating simple elements in their work, Nørholm’s New Simplicity works are perhaps best described using Kullberg’s category “Påny-Enkelhed,” meaning a kind of “neo-simplicity” or a \textit{return} to simplicity.\textsuperscript{29}

The following generation of composers includes a number of artists who expanded on the New Simplicity trends in their own music; a look at their works is quite revealing. Ole Buck (b.1945) has produced a lot of music that can be interpreted through the New Simplicity lens. Much of his music is characterized by objectivity, a lack of dramatic tension or formal development, and large amounts of melodic and harmonic repetition utilizing simple basic materials.

But Buck does not adopt the conscious monotony and the skepticism towards any narrative content of his older colleagues. Rather he transforms his inspiration into a kind of musical symbol-language consisting of small idioms and building bricks put together in a Lillipution narrative world, sometimes rigorously controlled, sometimes playfully spirited.\textsuperscript{30}

His \textit{Sommer Trio} (1968), \textit{Gymel} (1983), and later works such as his \textit{Landscapes I-IV} (1992-95) for orchestra, and \textit{Estampie} (2005) for recorder ensemble, utilize simple musical materials as well as a large amount of rhythmic and melodic repetition, and all avoid traditional harmonic function and large-scale formal development. Although his melodic materials are often more

\footnotesize

\textsuperscript{29} Kullberg, “Det Andet Oprør,” 74-95.

ornate than the works described above, the fundamental building blocks of the music are simple, and the lack of development places these works within the New Simplicity realm.

In the early 1970s, Hans Abrahamsen (b. 1952) composed a number of works of this kind. *Skum* (1970) is constructed mostly out of sustained chords and complex counterpoint produced by rapid, repetitive melodic fragments. *Ten preludes for string quartet* (1973) is comprised of similar material. In these preludes, he combines complimentary musical materials and pits conflicting materials against one another in a manner resembling the process at work in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s pieces from the same period. Perhaps Abrahamsen’s work most aligned with the New Simplicity aesthetic is his *Symphony in C* (1972), which consists of a three-note motive monotonously repeated in unison by the orchestra in an even quarter-note rhythm, only very gradually expanding to encompass more pitches and, eventually, even eighth notes. But the most striking part comes at the end of the piece, which consists exclusively of a unison C rearticulated by the entire orchestra every two beats for thirty-five measures.

1.5 *Tricolore IV*: PGH’s New Simplicity Debut

Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s oeuvre prior to the mid 1960’s consisted mostly of student works and experimentations with serialism. One noteworthy early work is the orchestral piece *Mester Jacob* (1964), in which the seeds of simplicity were clearly planted—the connective tissue of the entire piece consists of the tune *Mester Jacob* (more commonly known as *Frère Jacques*) being played once through by the violin, in excruciatingly-long augmentation. *Repriser* (1965), an instrumental work for fourteen players, is an important transitional work for the composer and a clear example of his early experimentation with concrete music. Here, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen divides his ensemble into five groups, each assigned a different type of
basic, uninteresting musical material—a single sustained pitch, repetitive percussion hits, a simple scale instructed to be played “amateurishly”; the piece unfolds, nonsensically, with the instrumental groups each in their own world, seemingly unrelated to one another. The interest lies in the process of adding and removing different materials from the landscape as the piece progresses.

The most banal sounds lie before the composer in the form of unstructured raw materials to be manipulated without constraint, and by following simple geometric rules he can infuse these neutralized materials with new qualities. The process has been termed Concretism because the actual existence of the material is the focal point of the composer’s interest.31

The use of the word “geometric” is appropriate, since here there is a connection to visual art.

Poul Nielsen points out that there is a spatial symmetry to the nine-movement work—Movement V serves as the axis of symmetry, with the adjacent movements (IV and VI) featuring extensive percussion and prepared piano, III and VII featuring the woodwinds, and a D-E dyad being played in the piano at the beginning of II, the transition to VIII, and comprising the entirety of movement V.32 Nielsen’s description of the music is also illuminating:

This music might be scattered and fragmentary, but it is because two tendencies pull in the work: the urge to purge - to distill the instrumental sound purely - and the urge to express. This music skirts the line between sound as being and sound as music, between silence and articulation in defiance.33

1966 marked a turning point for Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, when he began to incorporate more immediately-recognizable melodic and harmonic gestures into his work. The first examples of this are 5 Stykker for Orkester (5 Pieces for Orchestra) and 3 Sange til Tekster af Politiken (3

33 Ibid.
Songs on Texts from Politiken), both from that year. The vocal movements in the latter piece consist of diatonic, melodious songs—settings of unrelated (and uninteresting) texts excerpted from news articles from Denmark’s leading newspaper—accompanied by guitar, with the last movement resembling Medieval plainchant. 5 Stykker for Orkester contains music of comparable simplicity—for example, the first movement consists entirely of the pitches E, G-sharp, and A and incorporates a large amount of rhythmic regularity.

The composer’s watershed moment occurred with the premiere of his Tricolore IV, the last of a series of orchestral pieces, each of which consists of three simple sonorities (i.e. colors) pitted against one another for an extended period of time, usually with no change in pitch for any of the instruments within a given movement:

*Example 1.3, “Tricolore IV,” mm. 1-10*
The *Tricolore* series, consisting of three pieces composed from 1966-69, was influenced by a large stripe painting by the Danish artist Poul Gernes which was exhibited in Copenhagen’s Charlottenborg Exhibition Hall alongside works by the concrete poet Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, several of whose poems would later be set to music by Gudmunden-Holmgreen. These pieces are the first of his works which unabashedly embrace simplicity.

The edition of all three *Tricolore* pieces published by Wilhelm Hansen in 1992 contains a preface by the composer that both reveals his intentions and illustrates his awareness of the difference between *his* minimalistic approach and that of the American minimalist composers:

Tricolore NO. 1, 3 and 4 (NO. 2 was never completed) radically simplify musical expression to a point where the music approaches non-music. What you hear is sculptures in sound, inspired by American minimal art as exemplified by Robert Morris, among others. You will find no trace of the pulsation so typical of *musical* minimalism.

In each TRICOLORE three large soundblocks move slowly – at times excessively slowly – around each other, interchanging, overshadowing or highlighting each other.

In NO. 1 and 3 the dimension of time is shaped according to the numeric sequence of Fibonacci: 1-2-3-5-8-13-21 etc., and arranged in a hierarchic system constantly producing proportions coming very close to the *Golden Section*.

Note his emphasis on the term “*musical* minimalism.” Gudmundsen-Holmgreen clearly saw these pieces as more closely related to visual art than the music produced by the minimalist composers of the 1960s, which was sometimes process driven, sometimes aleatoric, etc. His use of the Fibonacci sequence brings these pieces, much like *Repriser*, in close relationship to the field of visual arts—indeed, many of his works can be interpreted more as “sound objects” than as developmentally-interesting pieces of music. Additionally, his use of the Fibonacci sequence

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extends beyond the mere selection of rhythmic durations to determine the length of entire movements. The first movement of *Tricolore I* is meant to last 377 seconds, the second movement is meant to last 233 seconds—both Fibonacci numbers—and the total duration of the piece then obviously correlates with the next number in the Fibonacci sequence: 610.

*Tricolore IV* (1969) is the best-known work in the series as it “caused a scandal at its performance at the ISCM World Music Days Festival in Basel in 1970,” but all three pieces mark a major turning point in the composer’s output. It was during this period, and shortly after, that he began experimenting with his “grid technique” (see Chapter 3) in works like *Eksempler* (1970), *Mirror II* (1973), and *Mirror III* (1974); diatonic simplicity with *Konstateringer* (1969) and the aforementioned *Tricolore* series; and Beckett-inspired absurdism in the works *Je ne me tairai jamais. Jamais* (1966) for choir and chamber ensemble and *Plateaux pour deux* (1970) for cello, cowbell, and car horns. These works are all quite different from one another, and each incorporate different degrees of simplicity, absurdism, concretism, and stylistic pluralism, but each of these works are representative examples of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s brand of the New Simplicity.

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2.1 Biographical Information

Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen was born on November 21, 1932 to parents Grete Søegaard (1908-1996), a teacher, and Jørgen Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (1895-1966), a sculptor. Although his parents were both fond of music, they were not professional musicians themselves, and his childhood home didn’t contain a piano. At about age fifteen, he became captivated with the expressive possibilities of the violin and began studying the instrument, but it wasn’t long before he veered in the direction of composition.

From 1953-58, he studied music theory and music history at The Royal Danish Academy of Music, where his principal teacher was Finn Høffding; during this time, he also studied with Vagn Holmboe. After his studies at the academy, he married his first wife Gunvor Kaarsberg (1938-1984), a ceramic artist, with whom he had two children: Stine and Jeppe. From 1959-1964 he was employed as a cue-caller at The Royal Theatre; it was during this time that he became interested in the works of Samuel Beckett, seeing a production of his play Endgame in 1959. His early works Frère Jacques (1964), Repriser (1965), 3 Sanger til tekster af Politiken (1966), Je ne me tairais jamais. Jamais (1966), and Plateaux pour deux (1970) reveal the influence of Beckett-style absurdism.

In 1960, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen and a handful of young composers carpooled to the ISCM festival in Cologne, where they engaged firsthand with Modernist works by Boulez,
Stockhausen, and Ligeti. The composers began exploring serial techniques, eventually rejecting them in favor of a variety of alternative compositional approaches, most notably a general tendency toward the incorporation of simplistic elements and clearly-defined structures in a style that would become known as the “New Simplicity” (see Chapter 1). Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s most notable works from this time-period—the late 1960s and early 1970s—are his *Tricolore* series (1966-69), *String Quartet no. 4* (1967), *Terrasse i 5 Afsaster* (1970), *Konstateringer* (1969), and *Eksempler* (1970).

In 1964, a disagreement between Per Nørgård and his fellow faculty members at the Royal Danish Academy of Music in Copenhagen, over their refusal to admit Ole Buck into the composition program, led to Nørgård’s resignation and subsequent professorship at The Royal Academy of Music in Århus. As a result, many of the most promising young composers left Copenhagen to study with him, and “the concentration of activity in contemporary Danish musical life shifted from Copenhagen to Århus.”\(^\text{40}\) In 1967, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen joined Nørgård on the composition faculty at the academy, a position he held until 1973, at which point he began composing full-time. While at the academy he had a profound impact, teaching some of the most promising composers of the subsequent generation, including Karl Aage Rasmussen and Hans Abrahamsen. In 1980, he won the Nordic Council Music Prize for his orchestral work *Symphony, Antiphony* (1977), making him the second Dane to win the prize since its inception in 1965.

\(^{39}\) This event, famous among the Danish musical community, is considered a pivotal moment in twentieth-century Danish music and is mentioned in many accounts of the emergence of the New Simplicity. According to the Danish music publisher Edition-S, the composers drove to the festival in Ib Nørholm’s Volkswagen. “Ib Nørholm,” Edition-S, accessed April 9, 2020, http://www.edition-s.dk/composer/ib-noerholm.

\(^{40}\) Christensen, “New Music of Denmark,” in *New Music of the Nordic Countries*, 37.
Major works from 1980-2000 include his String Quartets Nos. 6-8 (1983-86), his percussion “concerto” _Triptykon_ (1985), _Concerto Grosso_ (1990), and _Traffic_ (1994). His wife Gunvor passed away in 1996; he remarried the following year, to the visual artist Karin Birgitte Lund (b. 1946), to whom he remained married until his death.

Toward the end of the century, he turned more consistently toward composing for voices, which included a couple of dramatic works. He collaborated with Danish singer-songwriter Nikolaj Nørlund by composing music for a theatrical adaptation of _The Odyssey_ in 1998 for the 150th anniversary of the Thorvaldsen Museum in Copenhagen, entitled _Blæs på Odysseus_. By the end of the decade, he had begun work on an opera (or, as the composer has written, a “non-opera”) entitled _Sol går op, sol går ned_ (Sun goes up, sun goes down), which he finished in 2008. The choruses for this work were excerpted by the composer in an earlier edition, as the three-movement work _Igen_ (2006), for a cappella choir. In the first two decades of the twenty-first century, he produced at least fifteen new works for vocal ensemble, more than he had produced in the previous sixty years. These include his _Sound/Sight_ (2001), written for the Danish Radio Choir; _Three Stages_ (2003), for Ars Nova Copenhagen; _Song_ (2010), _Green_ (2011), _Sound I_ (2012), and _Sound II_ (2012), for Theatre of Voices; and _Ad Cor_ (2015), written for The Crossing. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen never really retired, composing up until his death from cancer at age 83 in 2016. Throughout his career, he developed a reputation as a progressive and experimental composer occupying the outer edges of Danish musical life, but his work is

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widely respected in Denmark and continues to develop a following throughout Europe, the
United Kingdom, and the United States. Pelleprisen—The Pelle Prize—is a cash award
established in 2017 in his memory and which is awarded annually at Denmark’s largest avant-
garde music festival: The KLANG Festival. The Pelleprisen is awarded to “a young composer
who dares to go against the given trends of the time.” This award is a testament to
Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s artistic rebelliousness as well as his lifelong support of the younger
generations of outside-the-box thinkers in music composition.

2.2 Artistic & Philosophical Influences

Coming from a long line of sculptors and painters, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen was heavily
influenced by the visual arts:

According to the family myths my great-grandfather was a sculptor – and named
Thorvaldsen – my father was a sculptor, my father’s father was a painter (especially
of portraits), my father’s brother was a painter and also his sister painted, my
grandmother Lauretta was a teacher but drew and painted always, my first wife was
a potter, my second is a draftsman and a graphic artist, my daughter designs
costumes, my son is a photographer just like my son-in-law – and my mother, who
is very receptive to visual art, has dragged me to art exhibitions in the interior and
abroad since I was very small: In short, I have been surrounded by pictures and
visual art all my life.

His works have been described as “musical sculptures” due to their clearly-designed formal
structure, basis on mathematical principles such as the Fibonacci sequence, and their general
sense of timelessness and stasis. This influence is also reflected in his symmetrical approach to
composition, his use of an intervallically-symmetrical pitch set in many of his works, his

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43 Kasper Madsbøll Christensen, “Nøgen Brite Vinder Musikpris: Jeg Prover Bare at Få Min Person til at Skinne

treatment of musical materials as concrete objects meant to be juxtaposed against one another, his deconstruction of complete pieces of music into their component parts, and his practice of superimposition, in which movements or entire pieces can be layered on top of one another to produce a new work. The composer himself has admitted influence of one visual artist in particular:

‘Fluxus’ was fascinating to me, but it wasn’t there that I got my real inspiration. I was more on the wavelength of the artist Robert Rauschenberg who, with his installations of ‘found objects,’ created new aesthetic materials. Well-known objects were not only recycled but reborn. You could say that he collected things that one thought couldn’t possibly be brought together. But thanks to his clear vision and artistic sensibility, it worked, and not only as a provocation, but as a valid artistic statement. I felt in tune with Rauschenberg’s methods and his art directly affected my concepts.45

Rauschenberg’s “combines” of the 1950s are formally similar to Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s early instrumental works, in which instruments, either individually or in groups, are assigned specific musical gestures, which are repeated and combined with one another in a variety of ways to produce a collage of sound-objects. This is a practice he began to explore very early in his career, and it would remain a part of his work throughout his life, although in slightly different forms.

There are also two literary influences that have had an enormous impact on the composer: the Danish concrete poet Hans-Jørgen Nielsen and the Irish absurdist playwright Samuel Beckett. In the 1960s, Nielsen was an editor of Dansk Musik Tidsskrift, the principal music periodical in Denmark, and he served as a spokesperson for trends in contemporary art. His work was extremely influential to both Gudmundsen-Holmgreen and his colleague Henning

Christiansen. The former went so far as to set several of Nielsen’s poems to music; both of the poems in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s *Konstateringer* and the first piece in the set *Eksempler* are by Nielsen. The formal structure of these pieces reflects both the structure and concretism of the poems—the focus is on the qualities of the words themselves and their arrangement on the page rather than the expressive or emotional content of the texts. Actually, this approach permeates all the pieces in *Eksempler*, and the composer undergoes a similar approach, decades later, in his *Enkle Danske Sange* (2002).

Samuel Beckett has been Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s most significant literary influence ever since the composer’s tenure at The Royal Theater, when he was first introduced to the author’s work:

I was immediately captivated by Beckett when I saw his *Endgame* at the end of the 1950s. Since then I have read everything that he has written…Beckett is preoccupied with meaninglessness, which has the strange power of releasing new ways of experiencing the world. By getting rid of all that well-meaning speech one is surrounded by, and knocking it down point by point — whether it be love of God, mother love, love of children, love of love, all the things we get so crammed full of that finally we don’t know what we mean ourselves — then we end up in that catastrophic situation which has something deeply liberating about it.

The composer’s affinity for Beckett is particularly noticeable in his early works, which are also “preoccupied with meaninglessness.” In both *Repriser* and *Mester Jacob*, he juxtaposes newly-composed, disparate musical materials against one another, forcing the listener to engage with the sounds independently of one another. The listener is no longer able to rely on conventional historically-established aesthetic cues to guide them through the cacophony, so the musical

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47 Ibid., 211-212.
gestures lose their pre-established, cultural meaning. A similar process is at play in his *Tricolore* pieces, in which simple sonorities and timbres remain static in form, but phase in and out of the listener’s consciousness over a period of several minutes. By removing these sonorities from their usual contexts, they are stripped of any extra-musical meaning. His oeuvre also includes two musical settings of texts by Beckett: *Je ne me tairai jamais. Jamais* (1966) and *Trois Poèmes de Samuel Beckett* (1989). The work for which the composer is probably most indebted to Beckett is his “non-opera” *Sol går op, sol går ned* (pub. 2011), which is essentially an absurdist music-drama in which the main characters consist of both an old and young version of the biblical King Solomon, and over the course of the ninety-minute production, four actors playing the role of stagehands gradually empty the stage of all props and set pieces while having a conversation of their own. That last element of the piece is also reminiscent of a Fluxus-style happening, in which the definition of a performance is turned on its head and ordinary, everyday activities are framed as artistically-valuable performances. Therein lies a key element of Gudmundsen-Holmgren’s work—the constant tension between the Absurdist philosophy, in which the term “high art” is stripped of its meaning, and the Fluxus philosophy, in which daily life is injected with meaning as though it is “high art.” Most of the composer’s work seems to draw from both of these camps.

These visual-art and literary influences appear to have had a much greater impact on his music than any musical influences, which for Gudmundsen-Holmgren are rather varied. Henning Christiansen clearly had a profound impact on the composer, as his New Simplicity style doesn’t appear to have developed until after his exposure to Christiansen’s *Perceptive Constructions*. His teacher Finn Høffding was influential in teaching him how to mine the
maximum amount of music from limited germinal material.\textsuperscript{48} He has cited Igor Stravinsky, Béla Bartók, and John Cage as major influences, as well as the collage elements in Satie’s \textit{Parade} (1917), the musical satire of the American bandleader Spike Jones (1911-65), and the musical traditions of African and Asian cultures.\textsuperscript{49} Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s range of influences greatly expanded after the 1960s. According to the composer:

\begin{quote}
The tough period in the 1960s with the anti-art, point-zero search on one side, and serialism on the other, is history. We have now opened doors to new trends, first and foremost, because the musics from the East and from Africa have been drawn into the music of the West and have provided a new range of sensuality.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

His late works in particular reveal a wide range of musical influences, from the Baroque and Renaissance periods to ragtime, boogie-woogie, rock and roll, and Mongolian chant.\textsuperscript{51} Much of this music has been seamlessly assimilated into his unique New Simplicity aesthetic, but at times these influential musical styles appear more explicitly in his work.

Ultimately, his aesthetic is difficult to define, as it is based on removing the familiar musical gestures from their original context to such a degree that they are no longer immediately recognizable. The beauty of a lyrical cello line takes on a completely unique character when combined with the sound of car horns and cowbells, for example.

\begin{quote}
I think it’s exciting to combine the raw with the refined, or to put it another way: ‘there is rock in baroque and baroque in rock.’ Or as I have said about the \textit{Concerto Grosso}: ‘Vivaldi on safari, Spike Jones in plaster.’\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 220.


Still, despite the busyness of his pieces, the music is constructed from fundamentally simple material, which allows the listener access to familiar elements in every piece, like recognizable melodic gestures or diatonic harmonies. These elements are positioned in a musical context that is just strange enough to produce a kind of musical “uncanny valley” which is at turns both comforting and provocative.

2.3 Overview of Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s Oeuvre

Early New Simplicity Pieces

The works from about 1964 through the early 1970s include about a dozen pieces that are clear examples of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s early experiments in working with simplistic musical materials and structures. Often cited as his first two important New Simplicity pieces, *Mester Jacob* (1964) and *Repriser* (1965) display the composer’s penchant for collage and reduction of musical materials to very basic forms. *3 Sange til Tekster af Politiken* (1966) is an early example of his skill in composing tuneful, diatonic music in a non-functional harmonic landscape as well as an early experiment with concretism in texted music. The *Tricolore* pieces (1966-69) are the most closely related to Henning Christiansen’s *Perceptive Constructions* due to their severe limitation of musical material and their focus on the juxtaposition of different blocks of sound. *Mirror II* (1973) is an orchestral New Simplicity work utilizing the tone grid which the composer would integrate into his musical language for the rest of his life. His choral work *Eksempler* (1970) is another such example, and his other choral work from the time period—*Konstateringer* (1969)—is a process-based etude in concretism. Other noteworthy New Simplicity pieces from the period include *5 Stykker for Orkester* (1966), *Re-Repriser* (1967), *Piece By Piece* (1968), *Terrasse i 5 Afsatser* (1970), and *Solo for Electric Guitar* (1972).
Orchestral Works

After *Mirror II* and the *Tricolore* series, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s next important orchestral work is certainly *Symphony, Antiphony* (1977), for which he was awarded the Nordic Council Music Prize in 1980. The composer’s “percussion concerto” *Triptykon* (1985) is the first of several works for solo instrumentalist and orchestra. *For Cello and Orchestra* (1996) and *For Violin and Orchestra* (2002) are not really concertos in the traditional sense, but rather opportunities for solo instruments to collide with orchestral sounds by playing disparate music of their own. *For Cello and Orchestra* uses a unique instrumentation, entirely replacing the strings with a contingent of eight double basses, each assigned different music. The composer describes *Chacun Son Son* (2014), for recorder and orchestra, as more of a “ritual” than a “concerto.” In *Concerto Grosso* (1990, rev. 2006), he takes a different approach than the works for soloists, allowing a variety of different sections and individual instruments to leap out of the texture and take over at various points throughout this grid-based piece. The orchestral prelude *Incontri* (2010) is loosely related to this work; the composer states in his program note for the piece that both its form and concertato musical style are reminiscent of the Baroque concerto grosso. He even describes the piece using the same term he applied to his *Concerto Grosso*: “jungle baroque.” In all of his orchestral works, the composer is more concerned with pitting sections against one another than crafting a unified musical product with an overarching aesthetic.

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Chamber Works

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has written many works for chamber-sized forces, and, apart from the string quartets, which really warrant a category of their own, they don’t follow a consistent pattern with regard to instrumentation. In addition to the works mentioned above, the cello/car horn duet *Plateaux pour deux* (1970) is one of his more significant early chamber works and a clear example of the Beckett-inspired absurdism described earlier in this chapter. Other noteworthy pieces are *Album, Four Relatives* (1996) for saxophone quartet; the grid-based work *Mirror Pieces* (1980) for clarinet, violin, and piano; and *Moments Musicaux* (2006) for violin, cello, and piano, which consists of spliced up and rearranged material from Schubert’s set of the same name. He has also composed a few chamber works incorporating voices. *Near Still Distant Still* (2005) for violin, horn, and piano calls for the players to speak nonsense syllables as a sort of verbal response to the music. *Moving Still* (2005), for string quartet, baritone, and electronics, is a setting of two Hans Christian Andersen texts. The first movement is a nod to American minimalism, and the second is a setting of a text known to every Dane: “I Danmark er jeg født” (In Denmark I was born). He has also written a number of pieces for solo organ: *Mirror III* (1974), *Octopus* (1989), *Still. Leben* (1999), *Countermove I-III* (1999), *In Triplum I-III* (1999), and *Spejlkabinet* (2002), the last of which calls for assistants to tune the pipes in the organ chamber while they are played in order to produce a novel glissando effect.

String Quartets

The string quartet is a genre that Gudmundsen-Holmgreen explored at an early age and to which he consistently returned throughout his life, composing fourteen in total. The first three, Modernist in style, are from 1959. He returned to the genre in 1967 with his fourth quartet,
influenced by the sound of chirping cicadas the composer encountered in Greece. The next group of quartets (Nos. 5-8) were written in the 1980s, and they represent yet another exploration of the tonal grid. The eighth quartet is subtitled ‘Ground’ due to the composer’s incorporation of a repeated ground bass line and his intention that the quartet would act as a “termination of the series of four string quartets which it thus closes.” The next series of quartets were written for the Kronos Quartet, and are among his more adventurous pieces. String Quartet No. 9 ‘Last Ground’ (2006), which the composer intended to be his last quartet, begins with two minutes of a pre-recorded ocean soundscape. His String Quartet No. 10 ‘New Ground,’ (2011), is humorously based on the most well-known ground of all: Pachelbel’s Canon in D. At the same time, he produced a complementary piece—his atonal String Quartet No. 11 ‘No Ground,’ which is based on his seventh string quartet. In typical PGH fashion, string quartets 10 and 11 can be combined with his vocal quartet Green to produce the pieces New Ground Green and No Ground Green. He wrote the final three quartets—‘Each in Each’ (2013), ‘Mutual Ordering’ (2013), and ‘Well-Tuned Sounds’ (2013)—three years before his death. These last three quartets are combined to form the piece All in One (2013).

**Vocal Works, 1966-1998**

The vocal works can generally be divided into two stylistic groups: those written before 2000 and those written after. The Beckett-setting *Je ne me tairai jamais. Jamais*, (1966) for

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twelve-voice mixed choir and chamber ensemble, is his first substantial vocal work. The piece essentially functions as a miniature absurdist music drama. It’s also the earliest piece in his oeuvre that utilizes closed-throat singing, a technique he calls for in multiple works decades later. Two of the pre-2000 works are representative of the New Simplicity style: *Eksempler* and *Konstateringer*. *Trois Poèmes de Samuel Beckett* (1989) is another absurdist work which consists of abrasive half-step and quarter-tone cluster chords and which is unlike any of his other choral music. The remaining choral music of the period consists mostly of short works of minor significance to his oeuvre. His score for *Blæs på Odysseus* (1998) contains some choral writing similar to that of his last few choral works.

**Vocal Works, 2001-2016**

The year 2001 marks a turning point for Gudmundsen-Holmgreen. In the last fifteen years of his life, he composed more works for vocal ensemble than he had in the first sixty. They are of broader scope and higher quality than nearly all of his twentieth-century vocal works. This period begins with *Sound/Sight* (2001), a setting of four poems by the Australian poet Les Murray. He later combined two of these settings, rearranged for six voices, with two newly-composed Les Murray settings to form *Four Madrigals from the Natural World* (2001), commissioned by the six-voice Australian vocal ensemble The Song Company. All six of these pieces contain a level of virtuosity and musical variety not found in his previous vocal works. The following year, he wrote six original Danish-language songs for a co-publication with Ib Nørholm entitled *12 Danske Sange* (2002). These songs were also arranged for four-part a cappella choir and published separately in the same year by Edition Wilhelm Hansen as *6 Enkle Danske Sange*. (It is unclear which version of these six songs came first) The choral versions are
similar in affect to the earlier works *Konstateringer* and *Eksempler*, though they are freely-composed. *Three Stages* (2003), a three-movement work for twelve solo voices, was commissioned by Ars Nova Copenhagen, which would also premiere his *Igen* (2006), consisting of choruses from his music drama *Sol går op, sol går ned*. His connection to their conductor Paul Hillier and his chamber ensemble Theatre of Voices led to collaborations on several late works, including *Song* (2010), *Company* (2010), *Green* (2011), *Sound I* (2012), *Sound II* (2012) and *On One Note* (2014). His last major choral work was *Ad Cor* (2015), written as part of The Crossing’s *Seven Responses* commissioning project, in which seven composers were asked to write musical responses to the seven cantatas which comprise Dietrich Buxtehude’s cycle *Membra Jesu Nostri*. The last fifteen years of his life saw a remarkable increase in both the sophistication and quantity of his vocal output, likely due to the existence of several virtuosic vocal ensembles interested in commissioning works from him.
PART 2: THE NEW SIMPLICITY MANIFESTED IN GUDMUNDSEN-HOLMGREEN’S VOCAL WORKS

Chapter 3: Minimal Musical Materials

New Simplicity does not simply mean a return to tonality, as most of the representative compositions of the movement are not functionally tonal. Instead, for the early New Simplicity works, composers would employ a variety of strategies to produce basic musical materials on which they could construct a piece of music. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen employs several different methods of producing or mining pitch material for his vocal works that can be distilled into four basic strategies: “grid technique,” syllable-pitch pairing, quotation, and deconstruction of pre-existing musical materials. The last two strategies have been combined into a single section in this chapter.

3.1 Grid Technique

In the 1970s, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen began to use a symmetrical collection of notes produced through the use of a series of intervals that expand outward from a central pitch. This device has been assigned several different names, but the most common appears to be the “grid.”

The grid held two attractions: first, the mechanical aspect of using a pitch collection satisfied the need for intervals; second, moving up and down from the center tone provided the opportunity to pass through areas of chromaticism, diatonicism, pentatonicism and major-minor triads, all within a small range of pitches.57

Use of the grid allows for the composition of simple, diatonic music without depending on the functional tonality of the Common Practice Period. Additionally, the composer has access to a variety of dissonant intervals that are still considered ‘fair game,’ allowing him to sabotage

57 Jean Christensen, “New Music of Denmark,” in New Music of the Nordic Countries, 51.
overtly expressive gestures that may emerge in the composition. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen employs this technique in many of his instrumental works, such as *Symphony, Antiphony* (1977), *String Quartet No. 5 “Step By Step”* (1986), *Mirror II* (1973), *Mirror III* (1974), and *Concerto Grosso* (1990).

While Gudmundsen-Holmgreen does use the grid sporadically in some later vocal works, he appears to have only used the grid technique to define the entire pitch content for two of his published choral works: *Eksempler* (1970) for a cappella mixed choir and *Skabelsen – Den 6. Dag* (1991), for mixed choir and violin. Considering the extensive use of grid technique in the early part of his career, it will prove useful to look deeply at the various ways in which he employs the grid pitches in *Eksempler* as a means of tracing the development of his approach to the selection and manipulation of musical materials throughout his oeuvre. Indeed, it will become apparent that the sonorities produced by his use of the grid emerge even in his freely-composed works.

*Eksempler* is a collection of six short pieces which derive the entirety of their pitch-content from the following collection:

Expanding from the central pitch D4, outward an octave and a tritone to A-flat, this collection is produced using the following intervallic progression:

\[ m2 - m2 - M2 - m3 - M3 - m3 - M2 - m2 - m2 \]
Note the symmetry of the intervallic progression itself—the intervals form a chiastic structure, expanding outward from the central interval of the major third by a minor third, major second, and two minor seconds, in that order. Additionally, the pitch pairs produced by each “position” of the collection are noteworthy:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Pitch</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F#</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>C#</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F#</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Pitch</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C#</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>Eb</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Bb</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ab</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervallic Relationship</td>
<td>P1</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>M3</td>
<td>m6</td>
<td>M2</td>
<td>m7</td>
<td>M3</td>
<td>m6</td>
<td>m7</td>
<td>P8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This produces the sequence of the following pairs, repeated: E-flat/C-sharp, E/C, F-sharp/B-flat, A/G. Note the symmetry of the intervallic relationships between the pitch pairs in each position of the grid. The intervallic relationship in each position is an inversion of that of its symmetrical counterpart—the intervals formed in grid positions 2 and 9, 3 and 8, 4 and 7, and 5 and 6 are all inversionally related to one another.

Ten out of the possible twelve pitch classes are represented in the collection, and the order in which they appear allows for the use of several different familiar diatonic sets. For example, the collection of pitches below D4 includes the following triads: Ab, Adim, Eb6/4, Cm, Eb, Cm6, Gdim, and Gm. Additionally, since the collection includes ten of the pitches, omitting the notes F and B, five tritones are available, which allows for the inclusion of familiar tonally-functional sonorities such as the dominant seventh chord and fully-diminished seventh chord.

The six works in this set show just how much variety the composer is able to produce despite the rigid adherence to a limited collection of pitches. They are, in essence, “examples” of
the myriad ways such a systematic method can be used to produce new collections of both familiar and unfamiliar musical material. The melodic and rhythmic elements of these pieces are generally extremely simple, consisting of stepwise or triadic motion in quarter notes and half notes at a slow or moderate tempo. The invention really lies in the harmonies that are produced through the grid system which, although simple, are utilized in such a way that they still sound fresh. It is as if one is looking at a familiar object that’s simply been placed within an unfamiliar frame.

There are some characteristics shared between all six pieces that are worth mentioning:

1) In addition to being the center of the pitch-collection itself, the note D4 plays a central role in all six pieces. Four of the pieces begin with the choir singing that pitch in unison, and the other two pieces in the set begin on the basic triads produced by stacking thirds above or below it: G-minor and D-major. The pitch D4 also plays a significant role in the final piece of the set, since it’s the only note sung in the piece.
2) The pitches always appear in the octaves in which they are notated in Example 3.1.
3) None of the pieces utilize all of the notes in the pitch collection. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen chooses specific pitches for each piece.
4) None of the harmonies exhibit traditional, common-practice harmonic function.
5) The pieces are settings of six Danish-language poems, which are set in unaltered form. The form of the individual poems influences the formal devices used in the pieces themselves, which also affect the pitches and rhythms utilized by the composer in each piece.

As a means of understanding the specific ways in which the composer utilizes the grid-produced pitch content in these pieces, it will be helpful to discuss his approach in each piece in the set individually.

*Ikke blot hende*

The compositional approach used in the first piece of the set is particularly clear. The composer selected half of the pitches from the grid pitch collection, assigning a specific subset of
pitches to each half of the choir. The pitch-content of this movement consists entirely of the following notes:

**Soprano/Alto:** C#4, D4, Eb4, E4, F#4, A4 — Positions 1-5 on the treble-clef row of the grid, plus position 2 of the bass-clef row (Example 3.2, circled in blue).

**Tenor/Bass:** G3, Bb3, C4, C#4, D4, Eb4 — Positions 1-5 on the bass-clef row of the grid, plus position 2 of the treble-clef row (Example 3.2, circled in red).

There is a symmetry in the pitch-content that mirrors the formal construction of the piece. The form of the piece is directly related to the form of the poem itself, a work by the aforementioned concrete poet Hans-Jørgen Nielsen. The poem is presented below in its original form, but the text has been color-coded to illustrate both its chiastic structure and the way in which the musical gestures coincide with the specific sections of the poem:

Ikke blot hende men også den måde hun smiler på og ikke blot den måde hun smiler på men også den måde hun er nærværende på og ikke blot den måde hun er nærværende på men også hendes hånd og ikke blot hendes hånd men også hendes hånd i hans hånd og ikke blot hendes hånd i hans hånd

men også hans hånd i hendes hånd og ikke blot hans hånd i hendes hånd med også hans hånd alene og ikke blot hans hånd alene men også den måde han er nærværende på og ikke blot den måde han er nærværende på men også den måde han smiler på og ikke blot den måde han smiler på men også ham
Here is the poem in English translation to clarify the form for English speakers:

Not just her but also the way she smiles
and not just the way she smiles but
also the way she is present and not
just the way she is present but also
her hand and not just her hand but also
her hand in his hand and not just her
hand in his hand
but also his hand in her
hand and not just his hand in her hand but
also his hand alone and not just his hand
alone but also the way he is present
and not just the way he is present
but also the way he smiles and not just
the way he smiles but also him

The piece consists of both short musical cells and long phrases which illustrate the chiastic structure of the poetry through the use of retrograde repetition in the second half of the piece.

The melodic content of the work consists of five basic musical gestures:

Example 3.3, “Ikke blot hende,” phrase content
These gestures are sung in inversion—using D4 as the central plane of reflection—in the second half of the piece, during the lines of the poem which textually coincide with each musical gesture. For example, the musical gesture associated with the text “men også den måde hun smiler på” in the first half of the piece is also used to set the text “men også den måde han smiler på” in the second half of the piece, like so:

Example 3.4, “Ikke blot hende,” mm. 51-55, Soprano and Alto; mm. 3-7, Tenor and Bass

The inversional relationship between these five phrases results in a chiastic musical structure to complement that of the poem:

Phrase 1 – Mi-Re-Do (in Bb major) – Not just her
Phrase 2 – but also the way she smiles…
Phrase 3 – but also the way she is present…
Phrase 4 – but also her hand
Phrase 5 – and not just
Phrase 4 – her hand but also…
Phrase 5 – and not just
Phrase 4 – her hand in…
Phrase 4 – but his hand in…
Phrase 5 – and not just
Phrase 4 – his hand in her hand…
Phrase 5 – and not just
Phrase 4 – his hand alone
Phrase 3 – but also the way he is present…
Phrase 2 – but also the way he smiles…
Phrase 1 – Do-Re-Mi (in D major; with an added third above the final pitch) – but also him.

Figure 3.2, “Ikke blot hende,” chiastic structure
Gudmundsen-Holmgreen also plays with the binary and gendered language of the poem by assigning the male voices the entirety of the text and melodic material in the first half of the piece (in which the speaker of the poem is describing “her”) and the female voices the entirety of the text and melodic material in the second half (in which the speaker of the poem is describing “him”). The half of the choir not singing the melodic material provides a sustained harmonic landscape consisting of the following sonorities:

![Example 3.5, “Ikke blot hende,” harmonic content](image)

The women sing this material throughout the first half of the piece, whereas the men sing this material in retrograde-inversion throughout the second half of the piece, adding to the symmetrical quality of the work. For a complete, annotated score, see Chapter 5, pp. 125-126.

**Morgen**

The second piece in the set begins on a unison D4 as well, broadcasting the centrality of that particular note in the pitch-collection on which the set is based. This piece is more freely composed than the previous one. Each phrase begins on a unison D, and the voices move up and down through the grid pitches by step, either expanding outward or contracting inward to create cluster chords. The pitches used in the movement are:

![Example 3.6, “Morgen,” pitch content](image)
The composer explores a variety of pitch-combinations while reinforcing the centrality of D4. Beginning with that single note, he adds pitches from adjacent positions above and below the first position of the grid to produce a series of sonorities—mostly cluster chords. This results in the following twenty-three different combinations (prime forms are listed underneath):

(02) (01) (02) (01) (02) (04) (01) (02) (05) (013) (024) (013) (015) (024) (027) (013) (016) (025) (037) (0246) (0135) (02468) (01358)

*Example 3.7, “Morgen,” harmonic content*

Given the composer’s self-imposed pitch restrictions, there is a surprising amount of harmonic variety in the piece. He incorporates four of the six possible diad sonorities and seven of the twelve possible trichord sonorities. There’s also an element of harmonic development throughout the first five phrases, throughout which the sonorities employed expand in such a way that a whole-tone cluster is produced toward the end of each phrase.

*Example 3.8, “Morgen,” first five phrases*
The first three phrases introduce (02), (024), and (0246) in turn, and the fifth phrase ends with a half-note whole-tone cluster (02468).\textsuperscript{58} This subtle harmonic development is obscured by the inclusion of so many dissonant clusters within each phrase.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen creates his own, unique harmonic language in this piece, juxtaposing tightly-constructed cluster chords with the more expansive-sounding sonorities that are introduced at the end of the second system—most notably (027) and the F-sharp minor triad. At first glance, his harmonic decisions may appear random, but the limitation in pitch-content and the repetition of specific sonorities produce a very specific and unique harmonic landscape.

\textit{Born kender overmagt}

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen sets this simple, three-line Charlotte Strandgaard poem to three homophonic, closed-position chords accompanying a more rapid, spoken recitation of the poem by the Sopranos. This is one of only two pieces in the set that don’t begin on a unison D4. By electing to use only three chords in a kind of mono-rhythmic recitative, the composer creates a problem—how should one select which of the available harmonies to use?

The chords may appear random, but by looking a little closer, the results seem like logical choices, given the harmonies that are available to the composer. The grid pitch collection only allows for the use of the major triads A-flat, A, C, D, E-flat, and F-sharp. The minor triads available are A, C, C-sharp, F-sharp, and G. Example 3.9 shows each of these triads in all of the available voicings, given the limitations of the tone grid:

\textsuperscript{58} This chord also consists of the interlocking tritones of B-flat/E and C/F-sharp surrounding D4, the central pitch of the \textit{Eksempler} set.
Example 3. "Eksempler," available major and minor triads

The G-minor chord is a logical starting point, since it is a root position chord that creates a logical foil to the D-major chord which begins the following movement, as the chords share the same intervallic relationship branching out from D4 and therefore mirror each other (Example 3.10). Additionally, starting on the G-minor chord avoids any practical difficulties for the singers, as the chord contains pitches that fit comfortably into the Alto, Tenor, and Bass vocal ranges.

Example 3.10, G-minor/D-major interval content

Given that starting point, it would be most convenient to use two chords in close range to the root-position G-minor chord, and the most logical choices for the remaining chords, based off of vocal-range and voice-leading considerations, would be the second-inversion C-major and first-inversion F-sharp major chords:
Had the composer used the second-inversion C-minor chord, for instance, instead of the C-major chord, the Altos would be required to sing a minor second followed by an augmented second in order to reach their F-sharp in the last bar, which would have been physically awkward and also would have eliminated the Do-Re-Mi melodic line (it doesn’t get much simpler than that) of the Alto part. Note that these chords are not functionally related to one another, and their use is only logical given the limitations of the grid system Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has employed.

*Barn rødkinder*\(^{59}\)

The fourth piece in the set demonstrates the *diatonic* possibilities of the grid system. The harmonic language of the entire piece consists of a repetitive undulation between three basic sonorities: a root-position D-major chord, a second-inversion A-major chord, and a second-inversion C-major chord. The end of the piece is punctuated with an unexpected quarter rest which interrupts the line and prepares the listener for the final “cadence” of the piece, concluding on an open fifth between G and D. The excessive rhythmic, melodic, and harmonic repetition in the piece make this one of the simpler works in the set.

\(^{59}\) Gudmundsen-Holmgreen produced a second choral setting of this poem in 2002 as part of his *6 Enkle Danske Sange* (*6 Simple Danish Songs*).
**Gammel mand i meditation**

The longest piece in the set is based on a number of different motivic ideas and pitch collections which are loosely related. Starting on a unison D4, the voices expand outward to establish the first harmonic idea—a series of the dominant seventh chords (or more accurately, considering their lack of function, major-minor seventh chords) D7, F#7 (enharmonically spelled), and Eb7. This is a surprise, as none of the other works in the set include this familiar sonority.

As stated above, the pitch collection for this set of pieces includes all of the notes except F and B, which means there are five tritones available to the composer. These five tritones allow for the use of ten different major-minor seventh chords, as each note in the tritone can function as either the third or the seventh of one of these chords. Eliminating B7, F7, E7, and Bb7, as these four chords require the use of the two pitches not represented in the pitch collection (F and B), this allows for the inclusion of the following dominant seventh chords:

C7, F#7, D7, Ab7, A7, Eb7

Gudmunsen-Holmgreen utilizes D7, F#7, and Eb7 in the beginning of the piece, and he refrains from incorporating the other three chords. The reasons for selecting these chords specifically are unclear, but it may be significant that they each contain one of the three remaining available tritones. One possibility for his selection of these chords is that the pitches D, F-sharp, and E-flat play a significant formal role in the piece itself. We have already established that D is the central structural pitch of the entire set of pieces. F-sharp and E-flat play a major role here as well, acting as the root of several arpeggiated chords which recur throughout the piece.
The pitches in positions 4, 5, 6, and 8 of the grid produce a closed-position F-sharp minor chord in the treble clef and a closed-position E-flat major chord in the bass clef, which appear in arpeggiated form in mm. 9-10 and 18-21, respectively. The F-sharp minor arpeggio is repeated in mm. 30-34, 39-41, 45-46, and 49-51, and the Bass and Alto arpeggiate an E-flat minor chord which forms the basis of mm. 41-44 and 47-48. Additionally, mm. 57-66 are based on the arpeggiation of the pitches in positions 2 and 6 of the grid: E-flat and D-flat, each an octave apart.

Two characteristics of these chords form the basis of future material. The tritone, which gives the dominant seventh chord its unstable quality, reappears several times throughout the piece, not solely within the context of the dominant seventh chord, but outside of it as well. It appears in mm. 9, 11, 13, 17, 20, and 33 in the pairs B-flat/E and C/F-sharp—representing the four pitches contained in positions 3 and 4 of the grid. Also, m. 52 contains the only fully-diminished seventh chord in the piece, consisting of the overlapping tritones C/F-sharp and E-flat/A—pitches taken from positions 2-5 of the grid.60

In total, the composer makes use of four of the five available tritones in this particular piece, omitting only A-flat/D—likely because of the fact that A-flat only appears in the outermost positions of the pitch collection at extreme ranges for the Soprano and Bass. In fact, he doesn’t utilize the pitch A-flat in any of the six pieces in the set. These four tritones also appear

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60 Note the symmetry of these pitch collections and the way the composer exhausts all of the sonic possibilities in this piece. The F-sharp minor and E-flat major arpeggios are built off of pitches occupying positions 4, 5, 6 and 8 of the collection; the E-flat/D-flat diads in mm. 57-63 are the result of the fact that positions 2 and 6 only contain those two pitches; and the diminished seventh chord is comprised of four notes chosen from positions 2-5 on the grid (and could also be taken from positions 6-9 as well—the pitches would just be in the outer octaves). Gudmundsen-Holmgreen is playing around with the structural peculiarities of the pitch set.
in the first and second pieces in the set, but they do not play as fundamental a role, as they are obscured by being part of denser pitch clusters.

På træet sidder der et blad

This is the shortest piece in the set, consisting of only a single line of text, sung by the Sopranos and Altos in strict quarter notes on a unison D4 while the Tenors whisper the text slightly faster and the Basses speak the text softly, even faster than the Tenors. The piece is as simple as the message of the poem itself: “På træet sidder der et blad” (On the tree is a leaf).

Throughout the six pieces in Eksempler, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen thoroughly explores the possibilities of employing his grid system in a choral setting. There is an enormous variety of pitch content, harmonic color, and formal structure in the set. Additionally, there are clues as to the composer’s intentions regarding the overall organization of the collection. The pieces appear to be organized musically. The harmonic language of the first two pieces is rooted in half- and whole-step sonorities. The third and fourth pieces are based on familiar triadic sonorities, and they are the only two pieces in Eksempler that do not begin on a unison D4; the third piece in the set begins on a G-minor triad, while the fourth begins on D-major—it’s correlative in the grid pitch collection—and ends on an open G-D perfect fifth, echoing the start of the previous piece. The fifth and sixth pieces are paired in the sense that they are drastic opposites. Gammel mand i meditation is by far the longest of the six pieces and contains some of the most adventurous music, incorporating plenty of dissonance (including the only obvious tritones in the set and plenty of aleatoric pitch-clusters) to contrast the F-sharp minor and E-flat major arpeggios which
permeate the piece. The final piece in the set is the opposite—it is one phrase in length, and its only pitch content consists of D4, sung in an even quarter-note rhythm.

The pieces are also paired with respect to the poetry. The first two pieces are linked by their incessant use of pronouns; the pronouns in Ikke blot hende take on a major structural role in the poem, and most of the lines in Morgen begin with the feminine pronoun “hun.” The central pieces are both about children (the plural “børn” and singular “barn,” respectively). The last two pieces are both focused on nature. The first is about a man in a vast forest, insects hitting him in the eye, and wind blowing through his beard. The text of the final piece is simply “On the tree is a leaf.” The textual relationship of the last two pieces is particularly shocking considering that the music itself appears to relate only to the physical properties of the poems, not the content. But there seems to be a clear organizational plan in mind with regard to the texts themselves.

3.2 Syllable-Pitch Pairing

Although the grid technique can clearly be used to produce musical materials for choral works, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen usually bases his vocal works on more traditional pitch sets which, although usually not functionally tonal, on the surface appear extremely familiar to the listener. He often uses this material as the basis for freely-composed music, but he will sometimes employ a musical process in order to add a dimension of objectivity to the music. To illustrate this approach, we can examine another early vocal work of his: Konstateringer (1969).

Although originally written for six-part children’s choir, the piece has been performed by many adult treble choirs. The work is another setting of poetry by Hans-Jørgen Nielsen, and the poetry itself dictates Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s compositional approach in regard to both pitch content and formal structure. It will be helpful to first examine the poetry.
The work is a setting of two different Nielsen poems: the first movement is a setting of “Episk Tekst” and the second is a setting of “KONSTATERINGER,” the poem from which the piece takes its title. First, let’s look at “Episk Tekst” (again, an English translation has been provided to aid English speakers in comprehending the poem’s form):

### Episk Tekst

morgen et ansigt en kyst et øje en dis og spring
spring et ansigt en kyst et øje og dis
dis en morgen et ansigt og kyst
kyst et spring og morgen
morgen og dis
KYST

spring en morgen et ansigt en kyst et øje og dis
dis en morgen et ansigt og øje
øje et spring en morgen og ansigt
ansigt en dis og spring
spring og øje
ANSIGT

dis et spring en morgen et ansigt en kyst og øje
øje et spring en morgen et ansigt og kyst
kyst en dis et spring og morgen
morgen et øje og dis
dis og kyst
MORGEN

øje en dis et spring en morgen et ansigt og kyst
kyst en dis et spring en morgen og ansigt
ansigt et øje en dis og spring
spring en kyst og øje
øje og ansigt
SPRING

kyst et øje en dis et spring en morgen og ansigt
ansigt et øje en dis et spring og morgen
morgen en kyst et øje og dis
dis et ansigt og kyst
kyst og morgen
DIS

### Epic Text

morning a face a coast an eye a haze and jump
jump a face a coast an eye and haze
haze a morning a face and coast
coast a jump and morning
morning and haze
COAST

jump a morning a face a coast an eye and haze
haze a morning a face a coast and eye
eye a jump a morning and face
face a haze and jump
jump and eye
FACE

haze a jump a morning a face a coast and eye
eye a jump a morning a face and coast
coast a haze a jump and morning
morning an eye and haze
haze and coast
MORNING

eye a haze a jump a morning a face and coast
coast a haze a jump a morning and face
face an eye a haze and jump
jump a coat and eye
eye and face
JUMP

cost a an eye a haze a jump a morning and face
face an eye a haze a jump and morning
morning a coast an eye and haze
haze a face and coast
coast and morning
HAZE
Each stanza consists of the same text, but the text itself is treated to a systematic process in which individual words are removed and rearranged as the poem progresses. The result is that the initial line of text (eleven words in length) is gradually trimmed down—two words per line—until the last line of text consists of only a single capitalized word:

morgen et ansigt en kyst et øje en dis og spring  (11 words)
spring et ansigt en kyst et øje og dis           (9 words)
dis en morgen et ansigt og kyst               (7 words)
kyst et spring og morgen                      (5 words)
morgen og dis                                 (3 words)
KYST                                        (1 word)

Every stanza follows the same rearrangement process, and since each stanza begins with the words in a slightly different order, every stanza, though comprised of the same basic material, is unique.

The process is worth outlining, as it will inform one’s understanding of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s musical setting. Each stanza begins with a line of text consisting of six nouns, connected to each other using the articles “en” and “et” and the conjunction “og.”61 The first line is then treated to a process that produces the second line, the second line is treated to a process that produces the third line, and so on. The process is the same for producing lines 3 through 6,

---

61 Nouns in the Danish language are categorized into one of two possible genders: common (which uses the article “en”) and neuter (which uses the article “et”). “Og” is the Danish word for “and.”
but the process for producing line 2 is slightly different. The process is based entirely on altering the positions of the *nouns*, each of which fall into one of six positions.

**Process for producing line 2 from line 1:**
1) The word in first position is removed.
2) The word in last position begins the new line.

**Process for producing the remaining lines:**
1) The word in first position is removed.
2) If there are still two or more nouns in the line, the word in last position begins the new line.
3) The remaining last-position word is removed permanently.
4) The word in first position from the previous line becomes the second-position word of the new line (see orange arrows in Figure 3.3).

Below is a graphic representation. For the purpose of universality, the nouns of the poem have been replaced by the numbers 1 through 6, since the nouns are the only words relevant to the form of each stanza, and every stanza undergoes the same rearrangement process.

*Figure 3.3, “Episk Tekst,” structural process, graphic representation*
The next stanza begins with the same line as the previous stanza, except the final word from the first line of the previous stanza begins the first line of the new stanza:

1st line of stanza 1: Morgen et ansigt en kyst et øje en dis og spring
1st line of stanza 2: spring en morgen et ansigt en kyst et øje og dis
1st line of stanza 3: dis et spring en morgen et ansigt en kyst og øje
1st line of stanza 4: øje en dis et spring en morgen et ansigt og kyst
1st line of stanza 5: kyst et øje en dis et spring en morgen og ansigt
1st line of stanza 6: ansigt en kyst et øje en dis et spring og morgen

The remaining words consist of the articles “en” or “et” (which coincide with the gender of the noun they precede) and the conjunction “og,” which always precedes the final word of the line.62

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen sets the poem in six separate movements to coincide with the six separate stanzas. Musically, he follows the form of the poem itself by attaching a specific pitch to each syllable of the text:

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Example 3.12, “Konstateringer,” Part 1, syllable-pitch pairs
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The music contains the pitch content of F major (minus the sixth scale degree). Each syllable occupies exactly one quarter note, except for the word which closes each stanza, which takes up a dotted half note for each syllable.63 Additionally, the composer inserts rests to separate each

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62 Note that the English-language version of the piece uses different articles, since in English, nouns are not gendered, and the choice of article depends on whether the word it precedes begins with a vowel or a consonant.

63 Despite the difference in the number of syllables between some of the Danish words and their English counterparts, the English-language version of the piece maintains the rhythm and pitch-content of the original,
line of the poem—a whole rest after the first and second lines, a half rest after the third and fourth lines, and a quarter rest after the fifth line.

The first movement of the piece consists of the text being delivered in unison:

Example 3.1, “Konstateringer,” Part 1, Mvt. 1

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen creates variety in each movement by gradually dividing the choir into multiple parts and having them sustain specific syllables for a pre-determined length of time, as in this example from Movement 5:

Example 3.14, “Konstateringer,” Part 1, Mvt. 5, mm. 1-5.

Danish-language version (e.g. “ansigt” is two syllables, yet its English counterpart—“face”—is one syllable). Therefore, in order understand how the piece is constructed, one must study the original Danish-language version of the piece.
Part 2 of the work, titled *Konstateringer*, is drastically different than Part 1, as is clear from the poetry.\textsuperscript{64}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KONSTATERINGER</th>
<th>STATEMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 det er og det er nok og det er godt nok og det er godt nok som det er</td>
<td>1 it is and it is enough and it is good enough and it is good enough as it is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>det er det og det er det hele og det hele er som det skal være</td>
<td>it is it and it is everything and everything is as it should be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 jeg konstaterer</td>
<td>2 I make statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>det er det hele</td>
<td>and that is all</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The composer completely abandons the use of any systematic process, instead producing music that is completely freely composed. The entire part, consisting of two brief movements, is sung homophonically, beginning in the “key” of B-flat major and modulating in the second movement to E-flat major and A-flat major. The composer retains one bit of musical material from the first part of the piece: he calls for two of the words to be spoken, rather than sung:

\textit{Example 3.15, “Konstateringer,” Part 2, Mvt. 2}

\textsuperscript{64} The English translation provided is taken from the English-language version of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s piece.
The reference to Part 1, along with the terseness of these last two movements and their lack of a sense of harmonic conclusiveness, result in a sort of negation of the stability and relevance of the preceding music. Should the listener become enchanted, or perhaps comforted, by the F-major stability of Part 1, they might easily become shocked and confused by the statements of Part 2. The bluntness of the music is appropriate, considering the poem being sung.

3.3 Quotation and Deconstruction of Pre-existing Musical Materials

Several pieces by Gudmundsen-Holmgreen are based largely or entirely on pre-existing musical material. These works can be divided into two categories: works that merely quote pre-existing materials and works that deconstruct musical materials. In his deconstruction works, the composer reduces fully-formed music down to its component parts. There are multiple possible motives behind this approach, which will be explored after some analysis.

Perhaps the clearest example of this technique is his vocal quartet Green (2012), written for Theatre of Voices. Upon first hearing, this piece appears to be a frivolous and playful exploration of simple intervals sung on nonsense syllables, accompanied by percussion instruments played by the singers. However, the musical material is all based on the four-voice part song that closes the piece—a musical setting of the burden (i.e. refrain) from the poem “You and I and Amyas” by the sixteenth-century poet and composer William Cornysh (1465-1523). Although Cornysh originally produced a three-voice musical setting of this poetic refrain, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s simple D-major setting is entirely newly-composed:

---
65 The composer incorporates claves, guiro, a crotale pitched on F-sharp, and an angklung pitched on D.
Of the works studied thus far, this is the first demonstrating his freely-composed style of choral writing—a style that permeates his late vocal works. The music contains playful syncopations,
brief moments of diatonic dissonance, and a consistent meandering between the leading tone and lowered seventh of the key—the first time with a glissando (m. 82). This charming and light-hearted setting provides the material for all of the music which precedes it.

With this music in mind, a close look at the piece from the beginning will illuminate Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s compositional strategy, as all of the vocal music in the work is based on the material which concludes it. The way in which the composer arranges this material throughout the work produces a final product that sounds as though the closing part song is being composed in real time over the course of the seven-minute piece. It is worth discussing the development of both the textual and pitch material, but it will be clearer to address these independently. First, the pitch material.

The simple musical motive opening the piece is based on two elements of the concluding part song: 1) the perfect fifth between voices which opens and closes the part song and 2) the glissando gesture which the Soprano and Tenor sing in m. 82. The composer expands the ascending-fifth gesture by passing it off to the different voices in ascending order—Bass D-A, Tenor A-E, Alto/Soprano D-A:

Example 3.17, “Green,” m. 3

Example 3.18, “Green,” mm. 93-94, perfect fifths
He explicitly states the half-step glissando gesture from m. 82 in the soprano in m. 8:

\[ \text{Example 3.19. “Green,” m. 8} \]

\[ \text{Example 3.20. “Green,” mm. 81-82} \]

These elements function as the primary musical material for most of the work. After some simple elaboration of the ascending-fifth gesture, through the use of different starting pitches and an expansion of vocal range, the gesture of the fifth is explored in the opposite direction, through the incorporation of the intervallic material contained within the space of the fifth itself.

Measures 24-38 consist of a series of sonorities which are produced as a result of each of the voices sliding in either direction from the central pitch D to a note within the span of a perfect fifth. Each of the intervals except for the tritone are represented, including the fifth itself, resulting in the following sonorities (labeled with their prime forms):

\[ \text{Example 3.21 “Green,” mm. 24-38, harmonic content} \]
Note how reminiscent these tightly-constructed harmonies are of those found in *Morgen*, the second piece of *Eksempler*. Clearly the musical aesthetic Gudmundsen-Holmgreen created through his use of the grid in the 1970s affected even the more freely-composed music he wrote in the new millennium. The harmonic results act as a foreshadowing to both the diatonic dissonance contained within the part song and the horizontal intervallic content contained within the individual voice parts.

The next section of music (mm. 41-54) consists of the exact musical content of the closing section, with the consonants of the text omitted. Any sense that the piece is developing at a predictable pace is abolished by the following section (mm. 61-76), a return to the perfect-fifth glissandos which opened the piece. However, these give way to more compact harmonies reminiscent of the clustered chords in mm. 24-38. A brief percussion interlude prepares the listener for the arrival of the final section—the complete, four-part musical setting of the Cornysh poem.

His treatment of text throughout the piece also follows the logic of deconstruction. The singers gradually move from singing simple, pure vowels to eventually delivering the complete text in its original form. Although the path of development is not a straight line, in each of the main sections of the piece, each of the sung syllables is derived from some part of the complete poetic text (Table 3.1). Despite the unorthodox musical product, the piece is fundamentally constructed from simple musical materials that are playfully deconstructed, examined, and combined to produce this charming and disarming work.
The remaining pieces in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s oeuvre that employ the technique of deconstruction are all related to a single, pre-existing work: *Flow My Tears* by John Dowland. The first of these pieces is *Company* (2010), written for Theatre of Voices and the London Sinfonietta. *Company* is actually three works in one, consisting of a vocal quartet entitled *Song* and an instrumental work entitled *Play*, which are layered on top of one another to form *Company*. The composer suggests a variety of performance options:

SONG, PLAY and COMPANY can be sung/played separately or together,

As triptychs or as diptychs,

In the following combinations:

SONG — PLAY — COMPANY
SONG — COMPANY
COMPANY — SONG
PLAY — COMPANY

67 Despite the fact that in mm. 41-54, the vowel sounds are clearly supposed to coincide with those sung in the part song in mm. 81-94, there are some discrepancies. For instance, each time there is a single “o” printed, it should clearly be pronounced [u], as it is a deconstruction of the English word “to.” Some of the vowels appear to be written phonetically, and some appear to be carried over from the complete words themselves. Theatre of Voices realizes the vowel sounds correctly on their Kronos Quartet collaboration *Green Ground*, and conductors may want to consult that recording as a reference.

Song is constructed similarly to Green, in that the material is all derived from a four-part vocal setting (in this case, a pre-existing one). As in Green, the music unfolds as though the piece is being gradually composed on the spot, as it is being performed. The difference between the two pieces seems to be one of scale—while in Green, the music is all essentially based on only a couple of musical gestures, in Song, the connection between the basic musical ideas which occupy the first half of the piece and Dowland’s song is less clear. While the opening of the piece is obviously based on the phrase (or at least the text) “flow my tears,” as the piece progresses, the music has very little resemblance to the Dowland. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen uses the original material as a jumping-off point to create music that is entirely unique. This is musical deconstruction of a different breed, based on microscopic musical elements—not only syllables, but mere consonants; not only vowels, but even the transition between vowels; not only pitches, but the natural, nearly imperceptible vocal glissando between pitches. Song is a rhapsody on the fundamental musical material singers encounter in every performance of every song and is therefore not merely a deconstruction of Flow My Tears, but a deconstruction of the act of singing itself.

Song is related to the two contemporaneous Dowland-based works Sound I and Sound II, both of which were also written for Theatre of Voices. However, the latter works are less explicitly related to the germinal Flow My Tears than Song. Each is also more specific in scope than the earlier piece—Sound I can be considered a study in consonants, Sound II a study in vowels. In Sound I, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen takes the opening phrases of the first two strophes of Flow My Tears (Flow, my tears, fall from your springs/Down vain lights, shine you no more) and extracts the following consonant sounds: fl, w, m, t, r, s, trs, d, wn, v, n, l, ts, sh. Using this
seed material, he produces a five-minute-long vocal percussion piece which ends by introducing
the basic material on which Sound II is based: the vowels from the Dowland.

Despite the variety with which Gudmundsen-Holmgreen treats the original musical
material, these four pieces, employing musical deconstruction, show the extent to which a
composer can create unique musical works out of simple germinal material, whether borrowed or
original. By breaking down pre-existing music into its component parts, the composer reduces a
simple musical excerpt to its atomic level, allowing us to examine these musical products from a
unique perspective, and revealing the fundamental ingredients that are at play in music we
perceive as emotional. It is worth noting that three of these works are based off of Flow My
Tears, a deliberately melodramatic piece, and in the hands of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, the
ingredients become farcical, playful and, at times, even groove. By reducing the music to its
most basic building blocks, the composer reveals that there is nothing inherently doleful about
Dowland’s music; as listeners, we are provoked to rethink the way that we emotionally interpret
such works of art. One specific quote from the composer is particularly appropriate:

The catastrophe of meaninglessness has something deeply liberating about
it...The joy of it, surely, is that meaninglessness invites scrutiny: we are more
likely to flip something meaningless over, dissect it or shake it rigorously, just to
be sure nothing we’ve missed falls out.69

Despite the emotional saturation of the original Dowland piece, the composer’s method of
exhaustively examining its component parts discharges the emotional power of the piece,
disarming it of its original meaning.

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69 Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, Green Ground, Kronos Quartet, Theatre of Voices, Paul Hillier, Dacapo
8.226153, 2016, Compact disc, Liner notes by Andrew Mellor.
Another work based largely on borrowed musical material avoids deconstruction altogether. *Three Stages* (2003) utilizes pre-existing musical material specific to the concert for which it was commissioned, as Paul Hillier describes:

We commissioned this work to fit into a very specific concert programme called *Cries & Birds*. The programme included the *Cries of London* by the Jacobean composer Orlando Gibbons and part of a work of the same title by Luciano Berio; it also featured *Le Chant des Oiseaux*, the famous ‘programme’ chanson by Clément Janequin (C16) – i.e. works based on both urban and rural soundscapes. I gave Pelle the outline of these ideas and suggested he write a ‘Cries of Copenhagen’ for us. He did, but went further! The Janequin chanson became the aural framework for the whole piece, and Vagn Holmboe’s 1988 collection of old Danish street cries was the source of most of the street cries. But in addition we hear snatches of ‘rural’ folksong and ‘urban’ children’s songs, brief allusions to Berio (at the start of I and III), someone calling for a taxi, and for good (Jacobean) measure Shakespeare’s sonnet *Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore.*

The opening measures of the first and last movements consist of a paraphrase of the Berio. Though Gudmundsen-Holmgreen makes melodic modifications and adds a harmony part in the Tenor 1, the tune which begins the movements is clearly based on the opening of *Cries of London*:

Example 3.22, Luciano Berio, “Cries of London,” mm. 1-7, Alto 1

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Gudmundsen-Holmgreen bases his harmonic palette on the opening of *Cries of London* as well. He uses the basic idea with which Berio opens his piece—each voice sustaining a different pitch, resulting in a series of ascending fourths:

**Example 3.24, Berio, “Cries of London,” m. 1, harmonic reduction**

But rather than building his texture off of ascending fourths, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen reverses the direction of the gesture, descending by fifths to produce a more expansive landscape which lasts throughout the twelve-measure introduction:
Even the grace notes that the composer adds to the accompanimental voices are derived from the Berio:

![Example 3.26, “Three Stages,” Mvt. 1, m. 6, Soprano 2](image1) ![Example 3.27, Berio, “Cries of London,” Mvt. 1, m. 22, Alto 1](image2)

After the introduction, the first movement proceeds with what appears to be completely original musical material, but much of the music is derived from various moments in the Berio:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Berio, Cries of London</th>
<th>PGH, Three Stages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mvt. 3 m. 31 Sop 1</td>
<td>Mvt. 1 m. 23 Sop 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mvt. 7 m. 5 Alto 1</td>
<td>Mvt. 3 m. 81 Sop 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mvt. 2 m. 9 Bass 1</td>
<td>Mvt. 1 m. 89 Bass 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mvt. 3 m. 36 Tenor 2</td>
<td>Mvt. 1 m. 75 Alto 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.2, Berio vs. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, motivic comparison*

However, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen crafts what amounts to a new and unique piece through the incorporation of a simpler harmonic language (to be discussed later, in the chapter on harmony), adherence to simple duple meter throughout, the incorporation of Danish street cries (compiled
into a published collection by his own composition teacher Vagn Holmboe)\textsuperscript{71}, and an incredibly physical, highly percussive musical product aligned with an aesthetic approach the composer himself dubbed “jungle baroque”: “The phrase ‘jungle baroque’ has been a key one for me. So a ‘raw’ lion’s roar comes right out of the orchestra.”\textsuperscript{72}

The second movement uses a variety of different pre-existing materials. The most substantial is the excerpted music from Clement Janequin’s \textit{Le chant des oiseaux}, which depicts the songs of the nightingale, thrush, blackbird, and cuckoo. A quartet of singers is assigned this music, which is delivered at first as a paraphrase of the original, but by m. 4 consists entirely of exact quotations—though rearranged and therefore appearing in a different order—from Janequin’s chanson. This music, pitched in its original key of D minor, forms the harmonic and melodic basis for the entire movement.

In addition to the chanson, the composer incorporates traditional Danish folk songs, children’s songs, Danish- and English-language poetry recited by various singers (including the William Cornysh refrain “To the greenwood must we go” on which \textit{Green} is based), and birdcalls which are at times musically notated and at times merely indicated.\textsuperscript{73} Here is a complete list of the quoted musical material in the movement:

\begin{itemize}
\item For the birdcalls that are not musically notated, but rather indicated in the score with the name of each bird, the assumption is that the performer will learn the appropriate birdcall and simply whistle it when the score calls for it. Those measures in the score are completely empty, containing neither rests nor notated pitches. Performers should whistle the appropriate birdcall until a rest appears. Note that this is also the notational practice for the spoken parts in the movement.
\end{itemize}
Material | mm. | Voice part | Type
---|---|---|---
Clement Janequin, *Le chant des oiseaux* | 1-95 | S3, A1, T3, B1 | Polyphonic Chanson
William Shakespeare, “When daisies pied” from *Love’s Labours Lost* | 1-14; 24-51 | S1, S2; B2 | Recited Poem
Thomas Nashe, “Spring, the sweet spring” | 7-15; 24-42 | A2; T2 | Recited Poem
William Cornysh, “To the greenwood” | 55-56; 64-74; 78-92 | S1, S2, A2, A3, T1, T2, B2 | Recited Poem
*Højt på en gren en krage*, traditional tune, text by Johan Ludvig Heiberg | 2-23; 53-87 | B2 | Danish Children’s Song
Ernst Friedrich Weyse, *Nu vågne alle Guds fugle små* | 37-41; 46-50 | T1 | Danish hymn
*I skovens dybe stille ro*, text by Fritz Andersen | 56-72; 77-81 | S1 | Traditional Danish song
Steen Steensen Blicher, “Gøgen” | 1-98 | B3 | Recited Poem

Table 3.3, “Three Stages,” Mvt. 2, quoted material

And the birdcalls:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bird</th>
<th>mm.</th>
<th>Voice Part</th>
<th>Musically Notated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nattergale (Nightengale)</td>
<td>70-75</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Krage (Crow)</td>
<td>throughout</td>
<td>S2, A2, A3, T1, T2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solsorte (Blackbird)</td>
<td>62-66</td>
<td>S2; A3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bogfinke (Chaffinch)</td>
<td>27-31; 50-52</td>
<td>A3; T2</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musvit (Titmouse)</td>
<td>48-51</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due (Dove)</td>
<td>throughout</td>
<td>S2, A3, T1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pirol (Oriole)</td>
<td>29-35; 52-56</td>
<td>T1</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natugle (Owl)</td>
<td>73, 75, 77</td>
<td>A3, T2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4, “Three Stages,” Mvt. 2, birdcalls

The remaining musical material in the movement consists of sustained diatonic pitches and occasional “Cuckoo” gestures of a descending minor third which mimic the birdcalls found in the Janequin chanson (these are not included in the above table, since the composer does not label them like he does with the other birdcalls). By assembling over a dozen pre-existing materials together, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen creates a striking forest soundscape that appears complex but, upon closer inspection, is plainly based on relatively simple musical and poetic material.
The third and final movement of *Three Stages* consists primarily of musical material from the first and second movements, repeated verbatim. The movement begins with the introduction from the opening of the piece, though this time softer and with a different text. Following the introduction, the Janequin quartet sings the chanson from Movement 2, and Tenor 2 and Basses 2 and 3 repeat their music from Movement 1, leaving five remaining voices to present new musical material. The Soprano 1 and Tenor 1 deliver a sustained melodic “cantus firmus” in octaves—a setting of the first four lines of Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 60” (“Like as the waves make toward the pebbled shore”), and the remaining three voices (S2, A2, and A3) fill out the texture with material based on the musical gestures from the first two movements of the piece. Again, the combination of several simple musical gestures produces a dense and impressive twelve-voice counterpoint.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has another ensemble vocal work that utilizes pre-existing musical material: *On One Note* (2014). However, this piece will be explored more fully in the following chapter, which focuses on harmony.
Chapter 4: Simplicity of Harmonic Language

The harmonic language of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s vocal works is generally one of two types:

1) Diatonic harmonic landscapes based on simple triadic structures in common major and minor modes that usually do not follow any sort of Common-Practice-Period harmonic function.
2) Dense chromatic landscapes resulting from a compositional approach or musical process, such as the mirroring technique employed in the *Eksempler* pieces *Ikke blot hende* and *Gammel mand i meditation*.

4.1 Harmonic Approach #1: Diatonic Harmonic Landscapes

The late vocal works mostly employ the first approach, and the harmonic language of these pieces is based primarily on simple chord structures—major and minor triads, with occasional chord extensions of a seventh or ninth.

These sonorities are usually present in the lower voices as a means of providing a foundation for more harmonically-adventurous, horizontally-conceived counterpoint in the upper parts; the result is often dissonant pitch-clusters. Many of these works contain pedal points, which are used to establish a centric tone in a given pitch collection and to obscure the appearance of clear-cut chord progressions by serving as extensions to the simple triads or dissonances in the other voices.  

Three of the late vocal works provide particularly clear examples of this juxtaposition between simple chordal structures and complex melodic counterpoint. We have already established that the second and third movements of *Three Stages* are based harmonically on Janequin’s *Le chant des oiseaux*, but Movement 1 is quite different. The harmonic

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74 The term “centric tone” is used throughout this document in the technical sense, referring to a tonic pitch in a tonally non-functional diatonic collection. For more information, see Joseph Straus, “Centricity and Referential Pitch Collections” in *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*, 4th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 228-262.
scheme of the first movement is dependent on the Basses, who undulate between only a handful of chords throughout the movement. A particularly clear example is found in mm. 7-10.\textsuperscript{75}

The Basses almost exclusively establish either B-flat major, G minor, E-flat major or F major, usually for several measures at a time, and the harmonies are reinforced at various times in one or more of the Tenor and Alto parts. This simple harmonic underpinning allows for a playful integration of chromatic inflections in the upper voices, obscuring the gravitational pull toward any central pitch. It also allows Gudmundsen-Holmgreen to employ one of the musical staples of his late vocal works—the incorporation of bluesy, chromatic inflections of a lowered third and lowered seventh in his melodic gestures:

\textsuperscript{75} Note that in the current Edition Wilhelm Hansen printing of the score, the measure numbers reset after the twelve-measure introduction. So this numbering refers to mm. 19-22.
The two lowest Bass parts repeat their first-movement music in the final movement, at times complimenting, at times corrupting, the harmonic structure provided by the Janequin chanson.

In mm. 53-54, for example, the B-flat in the Bass parts produces a dissonance against the C and E in the Tenor and Soprano chanson parts, whereas at other moments, such as mm. 41-42, the Basses are consonant with the chanson, producing clear B-flat major and E-flat major chords (although these moments of consonance are at times obscured by chromaticisms in the remaining voices).

Similarly, in most of the pieces in his *Four Madrigals from the Natural World*, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen employs an extremely simple harmonic-palette, utilizing a comparable approach. The four madrigals are a cappella settings of four poems by Australian poet Les Murray in which the speaker of each poem describes, or speaks from the perspective of, a different creature from the natural world. The harmony of the first madrigal—*Bats’ Ultrasound*—is largely dependent on an ostinato in the Bass parts, comprised of a rhythmically-
consistent oscillation between the notes D and G. These act as pedal tones throughout the piece, establishing the tonic and subdominant of D major. As in the first movement of *Three Stages*, the composer compliments these pedal tones with rhythmically-active upper parts that employ chromatic pitch-inflections of the lowered seventh, lowered third, and, in this case, an augmented fourth, resulting in comparably playful melodic gestures which weaken the sense of harmonic function:

![Example 4.4, “Bats’ Ultrasound,” mm. 10-11, Soprano 1 and 2](image)

The composer further obscures the key by avoiding a conclusive tonal center at the end of the piece. Although it appears to be focused around D major, the madrigal ends with the singers softly whistling the following cluster:

\[ \text{8va} \]

*Example 4.5, “Bats’ Ultrasound,” final chord*

The final madrigal in the set—*Comete*—is compositionally the most similar to the first. The Bass, Tenor, and Soprano 2 parts establish a whole-step pedal tone on the pitches B-flat and
C, which lasts the entire piece. The Soprano parts affirm the key center of B-flat major through their incorporation of the key’s leading tone (A) and third scale degree (D). However, this affirmation is challenged throughout the work with the incorporation of D-flat:

Example 4.6, “Comete,” mm. 2-4, Soprano 1

A-flat:

Example 4.7, “Comete,” mm. 21-26, Soprano 1

And E-natural:

Example 4.8, “Comete,” mm. 25-27, Altos

The incorporation of the lowered third, lowered seventh, and raised fourth weakens the gravitational pull toward B-flat major by implying, at various times, B-flat minor, F minor and F major. The composer further avoids a sense of harmonic arrival by concluding the piece with the pedal on B-flat and C—two of the three pitches shared by all four of the tonal centers explored throughout the piece. After having journeyed through all four of these key centers, the pedal tones now provide a sense of tonal ambiguity rather than arrival.
The inner pieces of the set follow slightly different schemes, but both still employ comparable approaches. The second madrigal—*The Octave of Elephants*—is structured around a repeated ostinato stated in the Bass part a total of sixteen times (once for each line of the poem). For much of the movement, the Baritone and Alto parts compliment the thirty-five-beat Bass ostinato, producing the following chord progression:

![Chord progression](image)

*Example 4.9, “The Octave of Elephants,” chord progression*

The sense of tonic is less prevalent in this piece than in the previous one, but the composer still incorporates comparable melodic gestures in the upper voices, again employing chromaticism and the lowered seventh:

![Musical example](image)

*Example 4.10, “The Octave of Elephants,” mm. 79-83, Soprano 1 and Bass, reduction*
And again, the composer avoids establishing harmonic stability even at the end of the work, which concludes with a first-inversion D-minor-seventh chord, sung piano, which the singers cut off by a descending glissando to nothing.

The third piece of the set—*Cattle Egret*—at first appears to diverge from the composer’s simple harmonic approach, but mm. 19-55 reveal the same trend—the three Bass parts consist of a simple F-major sonority, at times extended to an F7 with subtle E-flats in the Bass 2. However, the tonal center is enigmatic, due to the melodic lines of the Soprano 1 and Tenor 2, which are consistently in C major. Again, the composer pits two exceedingly simple musical materials against one another to weaken the sense of harmonic certainty. Half of the sixty-five-measure piece is fundamentally rooted on the juxtaposition between these two tonal gestures. In m. 57, he finally establishes F major as the tonal center, only to negate the gesture over the course of the last eight measures through the use of cluster chords, the inclusion of notes outside of the key, and the eventual arrival on an F-minor-seventh chord in the final bar. And even that gesture is weakened by the drastic diminuendo to piano and the offbeat arrival of the final chord. In the end, the composer’s treatment of harmony in these pieces is about both simplicity and uncertainty. Both the harmonic obscurity within the pieces and the avoidance of conventional, perhaps satisfying, concluding gestures result in a tongue-in-cheek, playful quality, completely aligned with the composer’s interpretation of Les Murray’s poetry:

> The texts are pictures and situations from – or meditations over – THE NATURAL WORLD. Les Murray’s way of approaching this world is not in the least sentimental or nostalgic; the poems reveal a true *being-out-there* realism; so basically the approach is realistic, but the creating of form elevates the material to an abstract play, a daring and exuberant poetic language.76

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76 Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, "Preface/Programme Note” in *Four Madrigals from the Natural World* (Copenhagen: Edition Wilhelm Hansen, 2001)
No discussion of harmonic simplicity in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s works would be complete without mentioning his *6 Enkle Danske Sange* (*6 Simple Danish Songs*). This set of six newly-composed settings of Danish-language texts exists in three versions—one for SATB choir, one for solo voice and piano, and one for four-part treble choir, arranged by Phillip Faber.\(^7\) The version for voice and piano was published as a joint project with Ib Nørholm, who composed six of his own simple Danish songs. That edition contains a foreword by each composer; Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s comments are relevant for those performing any version:

> If you want to be successful in participating in some kind of broader, popular, Danish songwriting, there is only one way: to emulate the familiar. It is not exactly the kind of formulation that is most appreciated by modern composers!

Ib is a veteran in the field - and I am now making a small attempt. It starts fairly sensibly with “Spring Night” by Tove Ditlevsen and then goes smoothly downhill. My last song “Something in pictures” can hardly be called a song at all, is rather a fiery declamation of Jess Ørnsbo's poem (which also does not exactly sound of the Danish Golden Age). But this gradual dimming of the singable is to me a point that reflects the development of poetry - and the Danish language.

Only *THE SIMPLE* exists.\(^8\)

The six pieces all share a key signature of two sharps, with the first five using the diatonic pitch set of D major/B minor. Oddly, the last song is pitched in E minor, but the composer doesn’t change the key signature, opting instead to retain the C-sharp in the key signature and mark every C with a natural sign.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) As Faber’s treble-choir version was arranged and published in 2019, 3 years after the composer’s death, it is not relevant to this study.


\(^9\) This might be an indication that the composer wrote the solo version of these songs first, then arranged them for choir. The solo songs are all pitched a whole step lower than the choral songs (i.e. requiring no key signature). The solo version of *Det på billeder* has no key signature, and accidentals are used for every non-natural note. The SATB version maintains this consistency of key signature.
The first and third songs follow a clear-cut strophic form, while the rest all follow a more repetitious formal design, consisting of short series of two- to four-measure phrases that simply repeat throughout, until the poem is finished. These straightforward formal structures invite the use of simple musical material as the melodic and harmonic basis for the pieces.

Similar to the examples from *Four Madrigals from the Natural World*, two of the *Danske Sange* from this set are explicitly based on pedal tones. *Digt med ikke* contains the same whole-tone pedal used in *Comete*, consisting of the first and second degrees of the scale, a ninth apart:

![Musical Example](image)

*Example 4.1, “Digt med ikke,” mm. 1-8*

Of course, the difference here is that the pedal resolves to the tonic chord at the very end of the phrase. *Barn rodkindet*, the other pedal-based song, includes a pedal on the centric tone D:
Two of the works—Det på billeder and Min nye kjole—undulate between only two or three simple chords throughout:

Example 4.12, “Barn rødkindet,” mm. 5-8

Example 4.13, “Det på billeder,” mm. 1-6, chord progression
Sovende pige, the second song in the set, appears slightly more harmonically complex than the others, as it is based on an eight-measure chord progression stated a total of six times throughout the work:
Example 4.15, “Sovende pige,” harmonic reduction

Note the lack of dominant-tonic harmonic function throughout the progression. The composer opts instead for a harmonic framework based around the plagal motion from subdominant to tonic in the form of G to D, e to b, and C (the Neapolitan) to b. This song is actually closely related to Min nye kjole and Det på billeder, both of which undulate between two basic harmonies throughout. Even though this progression appears slightly more complicated, the basic harmonic gesture consists of the repetition of subdominant-to-tonic motion; the pull back to the tonic is weak, but this piece more clearly resembles traditional harmonic function than most other works in the set.

The first song—Forårsnat—is harmonically anomalous among the pieces discussed in this chapter, since it is functionally tonal. The work is pitched in D major and contains brief tonicizations to the closely-related keys of A major and G major. Still, the sense of functionality is slightly weakened by the composer’s incorporation of unconventional chord progressions; the piece contains no diminished or augmented chords and no subdominant-dominant-tonic progressions, and the consistent incorporation of added major sevenths along with the nearly ubiquitous stepwise motion of the Bass provide very little sense of harmonic urgency.
The harmonic simplicity that permeates *6 Enkle Danske Sange* is the fundamental ingredient in these charming little works. The songs are all extraordinarily tuneful, which makes them accessible, but the lack of direction in the consistently-diatonic harmony produces a spacious quality that injects these works not only with a sense of simplicity, but also a kind of naivety. This affect is a perfect fit for the six poems Gudmundsen-Holmgreen chose to set. Consider the childish simplicity of Tove Ditlevsen’s “Min nye kjole,” or the sing-song repetition of Charlotte Strandgaard’s “Barn rødkindet” and Vagn Steen’s “Digt med ikke.” The form, meter, and content result in poems just begging to be set to this monotonous, but delightful, music.

Another instance in which Gudmundsen-Holmgreen employs his diatonic harmonic approach in direct response to the form, meter, and content of a poetic text is in the second movement of *Igen*: “Tid til.” In stark contrast to the first movement, in which he employs a harmonic approach based on the intervallic mirroring of different sonorities around a central pitch, Movement 2 consists of six minutes of endless harmonic repetition. All three movements of *Igen* are settings of texts from the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes; the central movement sets the well-known verse from chapter 3, which begins:

1To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:
2A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-2

The form of the text is not reflected in the music itself, as the composer repeats the first two verses as a textual refrain throughout the piece. The movement is constructed around repetitive harmonic and melodic cells, which constantly and reliably shift back and forth between three

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80 This and subsequent English translations are based on the New King James Version.
different modes throughout the duration of the work: F lydian, F ionian, and F aeolian. The modulations between different modes always occur predictably and in a pendulum-like manner:

![Diagram of modes](image)

*Figure 4.1, “Igen,” Mvt. 2, harmonic cycle*

Lydian and aeolian are the primary modes of the piece, and ionian acts as a sort of harmonic pivot between the two. A look at the Soprano parts in the first twenty measures will illustrate the point. They have their own, small-scale pendulum motion, oscillating back and forth between the top and bottom of an F pentachord in thirds. The gesture is mirrored by the Tenors and Basses, who move in the opposite direction to create a three-octave barber-pole effect, but the large-scale harmonic motion is apparent from simply observing the Soprano parts:

![Music Example](image)

*Example 4.16 “Igen,” Mvt. 2, mm. 1-20, Soprano 2 and 3*

As you can see, the music mostly occupies the outer modes, pivoting to F ionian about three quarters of the way through each ten-measure section. Then, following a tutti fermata, the music abruptly begins again in the opposite mode. Although the piece as a whole is scored for twelve
different voices, the music in this movement is notated on only nine staves, which reflect the
nine different building blocks of the piece:

| Staff 1 (S1) | Soprano ‘descant’ |
| Staff 2 (S2/3) | Quarter-note trichords 15va in contrary motion |
| Staff 3 (A1) | Alto ‘descant’ |
| Staff 4 (A2) | High melodic voice |
| Staff 5 (A3) | C4 pedal |
| Staff 6 (T1/2) | Quarter-note trichords 8va |
| Staff 7 (T3) | Low melodic voice |
| Staff 8 (B1) | C3 pedal |
| Staff 9 (B2/3) | Quarter-note trichords |

Table 4.1, “Igen,” Mvt. 2, musical content, divided by staff

These can be organized into four basic component parts: 1) six voices in pairs of stacked thirds
moving up and down by step, 2) two voices sustaining a C as a pedal tone, 3) two voices singing
brief melodic gestures in a very small range, and 4) two voices that enter in the second half of the
movement, with the Soprano singing a kind of descant above the staff and the Alto doubling at
the octave below. The first three components are unchanging, making the movement initially
appear monotonous. However, these three different components (and their octave doublings) are
removed and added back in upon subsequent repetitions of the music, producing various
combinations of these tightly-constructed, very basic musical materials. The movement follows
an asymmetrical tripartite form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm.</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-20</td>
<td>One time through harmonic cycle with the basic materials (S1 and A1 ‘descant’ tacet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-40</td>
<td>Upper voices sing basic materials for 10 measures, then lower voices sing basic materials for 10 measures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-71</td>
<td>Tutti until the end</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2, “Igen,” Mvt. 2, form
“Tid til” actually ends unexpectedly, halfway through the harmonic cycle, landing on the “pivoting mode” of F ionian, a gesture that’s compounded with a sense of inconclusiveness by the composer’s addition of the notes B-natural and E-natural to the final F-major chord, also obscuring the mode.

The music of “Tid til” is static, non-developmental (or at least imperceptibly developmental), like a collage of “musical objects” simply being turned over and examined from a variety of angles. Interestingly, this music is derived from Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s early New Simplicity days. The second movement of *Tricolore IV* employs the same “lydian-stepwise-motion-in-stacked-thirds” gesture in the cellos and violas:

![Example 4.17, “Tricolore IV, ”Mvt. 2, opening](image-url)
The pieces in the *Tricolore* series are all experiments in which exceedingly-basic musical materials are combined with one another and simply observed. Sounds that one is used to taking for granted begin to demand the listener’s undivided attention. Here, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen applies the same minimalistic, combinatorial approach to a piece of vocal music composed forty years later! As with *Tricolore IV*, the banality of the music is what demands attention.

### 4.2 Harmonic Approach #2: Chromatic Harmonic Landscapes

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s earliest major vocal work employing extensive chromaticism is *Eksempler*. As we have seen, his adherence to the use of a collection of pitches produced through his grid technique is both limiting and liberating, as it allows the composer to incorporate moments of dissonance as well as a large amount of material based on familiar sonorities such as basic diatonic triads. Since a full harmonic analysis was provided in the previous chapter, there is no need to recapitulate it here, but it is worth noting that the sonorities the composer explored in his early grid works also appear in his twenty-first-century vocal works. For instance, some similar verticalities crop up in the outer movements of *Igen*.

As stated above, the central movement of *Igen* is a setting from chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes. The outer movements of the piece *also* excerpt verses from Ecclesiastes; like the “to everything there is a season” text, these verses are also fundamentally about time. It is unclear whether the composer has intentionally edited down the original verses to what amounts to a paraphrase or if the Danish-language version of the text he consulted was paired down, but the version he sets omits some of the descriptive text from each of the verses. His result is:
Note that he has altered the order of verses by placing verse 4 at the end of the movement, rather than in its proper place at the beginning, creating a thematic bookend when paired with the opening statement. Verses 4 and 5 are both about time—verse 5 in terms of days, verse 4 in terms of generations. And the movement ends with a focus on the longevity of the earth itself.

The outer movements of *Igen* employ a high degree of chromaticism, far more than is found in the central movement of the piece. In the first movement, “Sol går op, sol går ned,” this is the result of the composer’s adherence to a compositional process based on pitch symmetry. At first glance, it’s unclear just how to make sense of the movement harmonically. There isn’t a clearly-defined centric tone, and the pitch collection is difficult to categorize—in the first ten measures of the piece, all of the pitches are used except B, the verticalities produced by the counterpoint include both diatonic and chromatic pitch sets, and there doesn’t appear to be an obvious harmonic goal. In fact, the piece is constructed using a mirroring technique similar to that employed in *Eksempler* and which we will observe later in *On One Note*. There are a couple of clues toward the end of the movement that can illuminate Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s compositional approach. Four measures from the end, in m. 52, the choir sings the following chord (realized on a keyboard diagram to illustrate its symmetry):
This unusual chord structure consists of two mirrored (0124) pitch clusters that are both framed by voices singing a sustained D in three octaves (Example 4.18). Note that both pitch clusters consist of the same intervallic relationships, radiating outward from the central pitch D4. Since the note D both frames the chord and acts as the plane of reflection for the clusters, this pitch is clearly significant in any analysis of the movement (its significance is also emphasized by the fact that the voices sustaining the D continue to hold their pitches through the following downbeat, despite the fact that the voices singing the other pitches cut off two beats earlier). The importance of that single pitch is confirmed by the following measures, in which all the voices sing a glissando from a unison three-octave D to another symmetrical chromatic cluster—one that contains all of the twelve chromatic pitches except D, and which is framed by octave A-flats in the outer voices (Example 4.19).

With these observations in mind, the harmonic content of the movement makes more sense. In fact, D and A-flat act as the axis of inversive symmetry for the entire movement, and the existence of such an axis in the piece explains several compositional decisions. First off, moments of harmonic arrival occur every five measures. If we examine the sonorities of measures 5, 10, 15, and 20, the harmonic construction of the movement becomes clearer; measures 5 and 15 are inversonally symmetrical, as are measures 10 and 20 (Example 4.20).
Example 4.18, “Igen,” Mvt. 1, mm. 51-52, as printed

Example 4.19, “Igen,” Mvt. 1, mm. 53-55.
The sonorities can also be depicted spatially on a pitch clock to illustrate their symmetrical relationship:

The first phrase of the piece ends on a whole-step sonority between E and F-sharp—the pitches one and two whole steps above D4—and the third phrase of the piece (mm. 11-15) ends on a whole-step sonority between C and B-flat—the pitches one and two whole steps below D4. So in that case, D4 acts as the plane to which the sonorities relate. Similarly, mm. 10 and 20 contain triads that have one common tone: A-flat (also spelled G-sharp). In the F-minor chord in m. 10, the root and fifth of the triad are the pitches a major third above and a minor third below A-flat, and in the E-major chord in m. 20, the root and fifth of the triad are the pitches a minor third above and a major third below A-flat (G-sharp).
With this in mind, the logic of the remaining music comes into focus. As it turns out, the first ten measures of the piece are an exact mirror of mm. 11-20, and mm. 21-30 are an exact repetition of mm. 1-10 (though with different text). In the second half of the piece, different segments of the music are juxtaposed against one another. As in Movement 2, this combinatoriality produces a sense of directionlessness and timelessness.

The resulting harmonic landscape is complex since, as with his grid pieces, the movement incorporates moments of harsh chromaticism (both vertically and horizontally), spacious whole-tone clusters, stable-sounding perfect intervals and—as we’ve seen—even basic major and minor triads. The harmonic language is similar to that of *Eksempler*. Consider the following sonorities, found in the first five measures of *Igen*:

![Example 4.21, “Igen,” Mvt. 1, mm. 1-5, harmonies](image)

All but one of these set classes are found in *Morgen*, the second piece from *Eksempler* (see Chapter 3, p. 43), and the denser clusters in mm. 6-10 of *Igen* are related as well, as they are structurally based on the trichords (013) and (024) which, as we have seen from looking closely at both *Eksempler* and *Green*, are two favorites of this composer.

Movement 3 of *Igen* is constructed quite differently, but there are echoes of both the first and second movement in the third. The most obvious connections to Movement 1 are the title—“Sol går op, sol går ned II”—and the sung text, which consists of the same verses from Ecclesiastes, with two additional verses tacked on to the end:
The movement shares many similarities with Movement 2. Most obvious is the F-major opening, paired with the subtle melodic gesture in Alto 2 and 3, which is reminiscent of the Alto/Tenor “melody” at the beginning of “Tid til.” It is also structurally similar to Movement 2, due to the process of subtraction and addition of concrete, repetitive musical material throughout.

The three movements are united by the descant beginning in m. 26 of Movement 3, as it combines the second movement’s incorporation of a descant with the inversional symmetry of the first. Soprano 1 and Tenor 1 begin on a unison C5, then move mostly stepwise in contrary motion to the octaves above and below their starting point, always traveling through the following pitch sets in this order:

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Example 4.22, “Igen,” Mvt. 3, descant pitches
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By employing the same subtractive and additive process he uses in Movement 2, the composer ensures that as the two descant parts continue to move back and forth between their respective octave Cs, they will eventually move in the same direction, resembling the octave-doubled descant of Movement 2.
The other element unifying the three movements is the harmony. The fundamental musical materials assigned to the non-descant voice parts last a total of thirty-four beats, at which point they are repeated in various combinations ten more times throughout the rest of the movement. The composer references both of the previous movements by incorporating familiar diatonic triads (with extensions) as well as symmetrical chromatic clusters:

Example 4.23. “Igen,” Mvt. 3, mm. 1-9, harmonic reduction
The movement begins with diatonic major chords, then the composer introduces non-triadic, clustered sonorities above the familiar harmonies. By the end of the second phrase (m. 3), the harmony consists almost entirely of combinations of non-triadic pitch clusters. The remaining music continues to reference some of the composer’s standard pitch sets as well as chords and intervals that are more familiar, ending on a stack of open fifths. Although several of the harmonies that are labeled as trichords could be interpreted as more traditional triadic harmonies with extensions, the sequence of trichords in mm. 7-8, in which the sonorities (015), (027), (013), and (024) are mirrored between the upper and lower voices, suggests that a reasonable interpretation would take the component parts of each sonority into account. And all but one of the trichords identified in these measures are found in the first movement of the work, which could suggest intentionality on the part of the composer. Given this interpretation, the complex harmonic scheme in the first eight bars of the movement is clearly constructed using simple musical materials. Not only that, but they are musical materials one can find throughout the composer’s oeuvre and are therefore at least aurally familiar to anyone who has studied or heard several of his works. Since in the final movement Gudmundsen-Holmgreen incorporates the same subtractive and additive process he employs in the second movement, the harmonic scheme underlying the entirety of “Sol går op, sol går ned II” is placed in a constant state of flux, as the material of different voice parts is presented in a series of different combinations. The listener has the opportunity to examine the component parts and hear how they interact with one another in new and interesting ways. Movement 3 is yet another example of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s

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81 The (027) sonority is not found in Movement 1, but the chord in which it appears in mm. 7-8 could be interpreted instead as two (024) trichords surrounding an E. However, that would require abandoning the binary pitch-grouping divided between men’s and women’s voices, which doesn’t appear to be the composer’s intention.
ability to expand a few simple musical ideas into full-length pieces of music by juxtaposing concrete materials against one another in a wide variety of different combinations. Ultimately, the thing that links all three movements of Igen is an overarching aesthetic—one of stasis and non-development.

On One Note (2014)—one of several works Gudmundsen-Holmgreen wrote for Theatre of Voices—is a unique piece in the composer’s oeuvre, as it could meaningfully occupy any of the analytical chapters in this document. It consists of material that is freely composed as well as material that is based on the tone-grid system of pitch production; it has a comprehensible large-scale structure, at least to some degree; and much of the musical material is derived from a pre-existing piece of English Baroque music. However, since many of the most salient features of the piece are related to its harmony, and the purpose of this discussion is to illustrate the fundamental simplicity at the heart of the composer’s complex- or avant-garde-sounding harmonies, the primary discussion of the work is included in the current chapter.

The piece is based on Henry Purcell’s Fantasia upon One Note (1680), originally written for an ensemble of five viols, one of which is assigned an absurdly simple cantus firmus: a single pitch, played in strict breves throughout the entirety of the three-minute work. On One Note is much larger in scale—sixteen short movements plus a full-length vocal arrangement of the original Purcell fantasia. Like Green, the piece is scored for SATB voices with percussion instruments played by the singers. Since the original piece is in five parts and Theatre of Voices only consists of four singers, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen also includes a violin part, played by the Bass, to provide the requisite drone throughout all of the movements. Unlike the original piece, the droning pitch actually changes in some of the movements, and since the droning instrument
is the violin, the composer calls for the player to use the pitches of all four of the instrument’s open strings. In most of the movements he plays a D, in four of the movements he plays an A, while G and E are the droning pitches of only one movement each. The drone, like the grid, serves as a mechanism through which the composer can either limit or derive pitch material, since the harmony and pitch content of each movement are always directly related to the note the violin is playing. Often this drone acts as a structural starting point, with the voices either beginning on that pitch or on a note related to that pitch in some salient way. But there are a variety of compositional approaches employed throughout the work, which will be addressed one by one.

One of the most contrapuntally-interesting sections of the piece occurs at the very beginning. The music in the first movement is, very clearly, melodically based on the Purcell:

However, the composer’s compositional strategy results in a drastically different harmonic landscape than that of Purcell’s fantasia. In the first movement of *On One Note*, the Soprano and Bass mirror each other, as do the Alto and Tenor. For example, mm. 1-5 of the Bass are
inversionally-related to mm. 6-10 of the Soprano. Note that the pitch D acts as both a goal pitch and an axis of symmetry for both of these voices:

Example 4.26, “On One Note,” Mvt. 1, Bass: mm. 1-5, Soprano: mm. 6-10

This produces some very unorthodox verticalities. The first phrase, for example, concludes with the following sonorities:

Example 4.27, “On One Note,” Mvt. 1 mm. 4-5, reduction

Again, one can see the familiar trichords (024), (013), and (027). These sorts of sonorities recur throughout the piece, despite the fact that Gudmundsen-Holmgren alters his compositional approach movement to movement. For instance, in several of the movements, the composer employs the grid technique which produced the pitch content for the entirety of Eksempler. Movement II, for Alto, Tenor, and Bass, utilizes a pitch collection very similar to that of Eksempler:

Example 4.28, “On One Note,” Mvt. II, pitch content
The central pitch of the collection is D4—the third string of the violin, which drones throughout the movement. The Soprano and Bass notes extend outward from the central pitch in the same intervallic arrangement, resulting in an intervallically-symmetrical pitch set. Note that the intervallic arrangement is the same as that of the first seven pitches in the grid used for Eksempler:

\[ m2 \rightarrow m2 \rightarrow M2 \rightarrow m3 \rightarrow M3 \rightarrow m3 \]

The Tenor part shares pitches with both the Soprano and Bass, extending to Position 6 of the treble clef (C#5) and Position 5 of the bass clef (G3). The resulting harmony consists of sonorities recognizable to those familiar with the composer’s work:

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{P1} & \quad (012) \quad (013) \quad (026) \quad (036) \quad (014) \quad (014) \quad (037) \quad (017) \\
(013) & \quad (013) \quad (017) \quad (024) \quad (014) \quad (017) \quad (037) \quad (024) \quad (012)
\end{align*} \]

*Example 4.29, “On One Note,” Mvt. 2, mm. 11-15, harmonic reduction*

The excerpt contains dissonant (012), (013), (014), and (017) trichords; several whole-tone clusters; and major, minor, and diminished triads. Despite the relative consistency of set classes, there are almost no repetitions of concrete harmonies in the five-measure section. Again, the composer produces a wide variety of sonorities despite the pitch restrictions of the tone grid.
Throughout the work, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen utilizes the grid technique to produce other pitch collections as well. Movement III, for Alto and Bass, is based on the following pitches:

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Example 4.30, “On One Note,” Mvt. III, pitch content
```

Again, the collection is intervally symmetrical, but the interval sequence is drastically different:

\[ m3 - M2 - m2 - \frac{1}{4} - \frac{1}{4} - P5 \]

There is also an additional symmetrical component in this movement. The voices begin on pitches a perfect fifth above and below the central pitch D4 (again played by the violin as a drone), and they end on the pitches a major ninth above and below it as well:

```
Example 4.31, “On One Note,” Mvt. III
```
In the following movement, for Soprano and Alto, the drone pitch changes to A—the second string of the violin. The grid collection changes but is still similar to that of Movement III:

![Example 4.32, “On One Note,” Mvt. IV, pitch content](image)

The compositional approach used in the movements utilizing the grid technique is not systematic—the music is freely composed, and there is no rigid musical process employed with regard to form, pitch selection, or the specific intervallic relationship to the violin’s drone pitch. The grid merely limits the available pitch material as a compositional starting point, and it is only used in a handful of the movements in the piece. Most of the other movements are based on material pulled directly from Purcell’s original fantasia.

In addition to the previously-mentioned Purcell material on which the opening movement is based, Movement I also incorporates an arpeggiated figure taken from later in the fantasia:

![Example 4.33, Purcell, m. 20, Viol I and “On One Note,” Mvt. I, mm. 21-22, Tenor](image)
Half of Movement IV consists of music derived from the slow section of the Purcell:

Movements VII and IX appear to be based on a single measure of the Purcell fantasia consisting of a series of descending thirds in the third viol part:

Finally, movements XI, XIII and XV are all explicitly based on the final section of the Purcell, a contrapuntal section beginning with a perfect-fourth leap followed by a series of arpeggios:
While both the grid-based and Purcell-based music is freely composed, there are still a few recurring compositional trends throughout that both unify the work as a whole and relate the piece to the rest of the composer’s oeuvre. For instance, while the beginning and ending pitches of each movement don’t appear to serve a definite function regarding large-scale form, the
closing pitches of several movements reflect Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s preference for sonorities based on perfect intervals. Movement I ends on a chord similar to the one that concludes the thirty-four-beat harmonic progression on which Movement 3 of *Igen* is based:

Example 4.37, “On One Note,” Mvt. I, final chord and “Igen,” final chord in m. 9

In fact, eleven of the movements end on either a single pitch or a sonority based on perfect fifths. Another recurring element of the piece which is characteristic of the composer’s work is a specific type of melodic gesture evocative of American blues music. Note the incorporation of the flat-seventh in the tenor part in Mvt. VII, which is reminiscent of the melodic inflections found in *6 Enkle Danske Sange, Three Stages, and Four Madrigals from the Natural World*:

The harmonic language of *On One Note* is most reminiscent of that found in *Eksempler* due to the composer’s use of the grid system in combination with the direct musical quotations from Purcell’s original *Fantasia upon One Note*. The combination of chromatic pitch clusters with familiar Baroque gestures based on diatonic collections results in a harmonic language that is somewhat unique within the composer’s oeuvre, but which is fundamentally rooted in the composer’s New Simplicity practices of quotation (either stylistically or verbatim) and pitch limitation.

### 4.3 Pieces that Combine Both Harmonic Approaches

Within Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s vocal oeuvre, *Konstateringer* and *Green* are unique in that they employ diatonic harmonic landscapes which are a direct result of different compositional processes. Part 1 of *Konstateringer* utilizes a rigid set of rules in order to allow the F-major music to unfold in a gradually-expanding cascade of diatonic dissonance, while Part 2 employs both diatonic triads and clusters, which places it in both of the previously-defined categories, to some extent. The germinal musical material of *Green* comes entirely from the diatonic part song which closes the piece (Example 3.16), but the incorporation of the perfect sonorities which permeate the work (Example 3.17) and the cluster chords in the middle of the piece (Example 3.21), along with Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s process of musical deconstruction, place this work in both categories as well. If one visualizes the composer’s harmonic language as a *spectrum* between diatonic harmonic landscapes and dense chromatic landscapes, *Konstateringer* and *Green* function as the bridge connecting the works on the outer extremes of that spectrum.
Chapter 5: Non-Development

One crucial element shared by early New Simplicity works is their lack of traditional musical development. They are instead defined by simple repetition; melodic, harmonic and rhythmic regularity; and predictable, clearly-defined formal structures to create a sense of coherence. The resulting music appears static and devoid of extra-musical meaning.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s instrumental works from the mid-1960s are clearly related to this trend; they utilize collage, non-functional harmony, and absurdly simple melodic gestures in way that deliberately avoids conventional musical development. This is a trend that the composer maintains throughout his oeuvre, as even the late vocal works attest. The elements which conventionally produce a sense of development—hierarchies of harmony, cadence, motive, and phrase structure—are either minimal in or absent from most of these pieces, and the works in which the music does evolve are dependent on the unfolding of a large-scale musical process throughout a movement or work. In place of conventional development, the composer often constructs frameworks in which different musical materials may be juxtaposed with one another, either complementarily, adversarially, or objectively.

5.1 Works with No Development

Of all the composer’s works, 6 Enkle Danske Sange are the clearest examples of non-development. Each of these songs maintains a clearly-defined strophic form of miniscule proportions. The smallest-scale example is the fourth song in the set—Barn rødkindet—which consists of a series of four-measure strophes, each containing a pair of two-measure antecedent-consequent phrases:
In each piece, the Soprano sings a repeated melodic line while the lower three voices provide harmonic support. Although in some of these works, the music of the accompanimental voices subtly changes from phrase to phrase, the melody always remains the same throughout the piece. As discussed in Chapter 4, the harmony utilized in these pieces is extremely repetitive, mostly consisting of non-functional progressions which often undulate between only two or three different chords (see Chapter 4, pp. 79-83). The composer also employs pedal tones, the most significant example appearing in the fifth song—*Digt med ikke*—in which the Bass part consists entirely of sustained Ds sung over the course of sixty measures. The brevity of the melodies and the simplistic, repetitive harmony result in works that are not merely non-developmental—they are completely monotonous. Their melodic and harmonic repetition is magnified by their syllabic text setting; throughout the set, every note sung by the Sopranos is assigned its own syllable, a characteristic reminiscent of children’s songs or folk songs. *Forårsnat*, for example, sounds like it might be a contemporary arrangement of a Danish folk song, whereas the rhythmic patter-style singing and harmonic stasis in *Digt med ikke* is comparable to a children’s game song. Rhyme
scheme also amplifies the songs’ repetitive formal structures. The rhymes closing the outer lines of each stanza of *Forårsnat* signal to the listener that the strophe has ended:

Example 5.2, “Forårsnat,” Soprano

*Sovende pige* contains six total stanzas, each a quatrain with rhymes closing out the second and fourth lines. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s setting consists of only sixteen beats of music, repeated verbatim for each stanza. He emphasizes the rhyme scheme by setting the rhyming syllables to the only on-the-beat quarter notes in the piece:

Example 5.3, “Sovende pige,” mm. 1-8, Soprano
Min nye kjole follows the same rhyme scheme, likewise emphasizing the musical repetition:

Example 5.4, “Min nye kjole,” Soprano

One characteristic of many of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s vocal works is the lack of any substantial musical introduction or conclusion. Most of the pieces in 6 Enkle Danske Sange begin and end very suddenly, without preparing the listener with an introduction or providing substantial aural cues that the piece is about to end. While the score includes an instruction for two of the pieces—Forårsnat and Min nye kjole—to be sung with an introduction provided by the lower three voices, these pieces are strophic, with each verse ending the exact same way as the last. Additionally, both pieces end on a weak beat. Therefore, the listener doesn’t realize the piece is ending until the music suddenly stops. This produces a novel effect; when the singing begins, it seems as though the choir has started their performance in the middle of the piece, and when the singing has ceased, one has the sense that there is still more music left to be sung. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen uses this approach in most of his vocal works; usually, the entire choir is singing at the beginning of the piece. On One Note, three of the Four Madrigals from the Natural World and all of the movements of Igen lack both introductory material and any kind of gradual contrapuntal expansion. They just are. Even the works with introductory music—e.g. Ad Cor, Green, and Comete—only contain one or two measures of introduction before the primary
musical material enters. Earlier works like *Eksempler* and *Je ne me tairai jamais. Jamais* follow the same pattern. *6 Enkle Danske Sange* are simply the clearest examples of this trend in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s vocal music.

The two obvious counterexamples to this overall trend are the outer movements of *Three Stages* and Part 1 of *Konstateringer*. Movement 1 of *Three Stages* includes a musical introduction as a direct reference to Berio’s *Cries of London*, which, like the Janequin chanson of Movements 2 and 3, was featured on the concert program for which *Three Stages* was composed. Movement 3 begins with the same introductory music because of the superimposition technique that the composer employs in the piece (explained below). Movement 1 of *Konstateringer*, although technically a stand-alone verse of equal proportion to the others, essentially functions as an introduction in that the basic musical parameters of the piece are all established in the first movement’s unadorned statement of the rhythmic, melodic, and textual material. Despite these exceptions, the overall practice in the composer’s vocal works is to forego any sort of musical introduction.

The outer pieces in his *Four Madrigals from the Natural World* are similar in their lack of musical development, but they achieve this end in a subtler way than the *Danske Sange* due to their more expansive voicing, virtuosic vocal lines, and larger scale. The composer achieves a sense of stasis in these works through the use of harmonic ostinato and musical repetition in a simplistic large-scale form.

*Bats’ Ultrasound*, the first madrigal in the set, is another work which begins without introduction. This brief vignette opens with an explosion of activity, as the accompanimental
voices completely overshadow the Soprano 2 melody with percussive whispers and acrobatic
arpeggios:

Although the piece is written in a repetitive strophic form, these madrigalisms disguise the
melody, making it difficult to tell when the tune ends or repeats. This obscures the overall form
of the piece, which consists of three complete verses—each seventeen-and-a-half measures of
music punctuated by a beat of silence—followed by a truncated fourth verse that devolves into a
coda of whispers and whistles from the entire ensemble. The musical form is based on the form
of Les Murray’s poem, which consists of three five-line stanzas followed by a single line of
poetry:
Sleeping-bagged in a duplex wing
with fleas, in rock-cleft or building
radar bats are darkness in miniature,
their whole face one tufty crinkled ear
with weak eyes, fine teeth bared to sing.

Few are vampires. None flit through the mirror.
Where they flutter at evening’s a queer
tonal hunting zone above highest C.
Insect prey at the peak of our hearing
drone re to their detailing tee:

*ah, eyrie-ire, aero hour, eh?*
*O’er our ur-area (our era*
*aye ere your raw row) we air our array,*
*err, yaw, row wry — aura our orrery,*
*our eerie ü our ray, our arrow.*

*A rare ear, our aery Yahweh.*

The verses of the madrigal consist of five phrases, each an unconventional length of fourteen beats. The irregularity of the phrase lengths further obscures the form by making the seams in the music less predictable, despite the fact that they coincide with the articulation of the pedal tones in the Bass (Example 5.6). These pedal tones act as a harmonic anchor throughout the piece, shifting between only two pitches: D and G. In four of the phrases of each section, the Bass begins on G and glissandos up a fifth to D, but the final phrase reverses this gesture, beginning on D and sliding down to G, clashing with the Altos’ A (Example 5.7). This weakens both the sense of tonal confirmation and the conclusiveness of the gesture which closes the verse; when the next verse begins, it seems as though the previous one still isn’t finished. The upper voices also contribute to the lack of harmonic stability through the constant integration of altered tones.
Example 5.6, “Bats’ Ultrasound,” mm. 7-9

Example 5.7, “Bats’ Ultrasound,” mm. 16-18
At the start of the piece, due to the D pedal tones and arpeggiated D-major and A-major chords, the music appears to be pitched in D major, but by the third measure, the Soprano 2 introduces the pitches C-natural and F-natural, perhaps inferring the keys G major or C major (Example 5.5). Later in the verse, the tonality is further confused when the melody introduces G-sharp as part of a descending chromatic line:

![Example 5.8, “Bats’ Ultrasound,” mm. 10-12, Soprano 2](image)

While there is some variety between verses, this mostly consists of added whistles or aggressive spoken text; the prominent pedal tones in the Bass are present throughout the entirety of the three full verses. It isn’t until the last line of text that the Basses finally transition into the texture of rhythmic whispering produced by the other accompanimental voices. Both the consistent harmonic repetition of the pedal tones and the conclusion in which all of the voices glissando up to a whistled cluster chord (Example 4.5) further contribute to the static quality of the work.

*Comete,* the final madrigal in the set, exhibits similar non-developmental characteristics. The form of the piece largely follows the form of the poem, which consists of fourteen lines separated visually on the page by a substantial indent in the ninth line:

Uphill in Melbourne on a beautiful day
a woman was walking ahead of her hair.
Like teak oiled soft to fracture and sway
it hung to her heels and seconded her
as a pencilled retinue, an unscrolling title
to ploughland, edged with ripe rows of dress,
a sheathed wing that couldn’t fly her at all,
only itself, loosely, and her spirits.
A largesse
of life and self, brushed all calm and out,
its abstracted attempts on her mouth weren’t seen,
nor its showering, its tenting. Just the detail
that swam in its flow-lines, glossing about —
as she paced on, comet-like, face to the sun.

The indentation divides the text into a bipartite structure that is reflected in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s composition. The music which begins the piece is repeated for the second section of the poem. However, the music does not repeat in its full form due to the poem’s formal asymmetry; the second section is two lines shorter than the first. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen arranges the voices in a similar manner to Bats’ *Ultrasound*, in which the Basses sing a B-flat pedal tone which provides a harmonic anchor, the Sopranos sing the melody, and the Altos fill out the texture with more florid counterpoint. But here the Soprano 2 and Tenors sing a pedal tone as well, whole step and ninth above the Baritones’ B-flat. The Altos’ material unfolds irregularly, but the rest of the music is organized in five-measure phrases which do not coincide between the voice parts. The Bass-and-Tenor ostinato consistently anticipates the phrase entrances of the Soprano 1 melody by one measure, and the Soprano 2 phrases enter one measure after the melody (following the first two measures of the Soprano 2 part, which are an incomplete iteration of the ostinato):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>mm</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1</td>
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<tr>
<td>S2</td>
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<tr>
<td>B/T</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5.1, “Comete,” graphic representation of overlapping phrase structure*
Both the unorthodox use of five-measure structures and the overlapping of the different phrases disguise the melodic entrances, thereby obscuring the overall form of the piece. Like Bats’ *Ultrasound*, this madrigal is also harmonically vague, due to the chromatically-altered tones in the Soprano and Alto parts and the ever-present B-flat/C pedal tone, both of which suggest at least four different key centers (as discussed in Chapter 4). The melody ends on an A, undermining any implication that the centric tone of the piece is B-flat. Finally, the Sopranos join the other voices in the whole-tone pedal, and the piece ends the way it began.

### 5.2 Works with Little Development

While formally similar to the outer movements, the inner movements of *Four Madrigals* exhibit characteristics that are slightly more conventionally developmental. *The Octave of Elephants*, for example, also utilizes strophic form, with a thirty-five-beat Bass ostinato that delivers all of the text and acts as the structural basis for the entire madrigal. However, the music delivered by the other voices consistently changes, sometimes harmonizing the ostinato, sometimes providing ornate, rhythmically-active counterpoint, and sometimes simply producing elephant madrigalisms through the use of glissando:

*Example 5.9. “The Octave of Elephants,” mm. 53-54, Baritone, Tenor, and Alto*
Though the changes are subtle, the variety of gestures and textures provides the listener with musical landmarks that can help orient one in the formal structure. For instance, this is the only madrigal in the set that includes a significant, deliberate voicing change. The texture is reduced to only Basses and Baritones about halfway through:

![Example 5.1](image)

Example 5.10, “The Octave of Elephants,” mm. 61-66

However, most of the musical development in the piece is not at all obvious. The madrigal takes the form of a set of variations over a ground bass, and the musical development is mostly a consequence of the exploratory nature of the variations. The work can be divided into eight sections, each consisting of two iterations of the Bass ostinato. Table 5.1 contains a descriptive outline of the eight-part form. The major structural points in the piece consist of the Bass/Baritone duet in Section 4 (m. 52), which is followed by the recapitulation of the opening music; the five-part trumpet cluster halfway through Section 6 (m. 95), which is followed by the exposed F-sharp in the Bass; and the first moment of homophony between all the voices, which occurs exactly halfway through Section 8 (m. 132).
Table 5.1, “The Octave of Elephants,” formal structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-18</td>
<td>Bluesy gestures in upper voices followed by S1/T1 duet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>18-35</td>
<td>S1/T1 duet, B1 elephant trumpet calls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>36-52</td>
<td>Solo quintet trumpet calls, gradually reduced to a quartet, then trio, then duet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>52-70</td>
<td>Bass/Baritone duet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>71-88</td>
<td>Recap of material from Section 1 leading to 4-part elephant trumpet clusters in upper voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>88-105</td>
<td>Recap of material from Section 1 with added chromatic melody in S1, leading to 5-part elephant trumpet clusters in upper voices, which rest in the final bar and expose the final note of the Bass ostinato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4-part imitative counterpoint leading to more trumpet clusters over 2-part ostinato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>106-123</td>
<td>3-part imitative counterpoint, trumpet clusters over 3-part ostinato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2-part counterpoint over 4-part ostinato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>123-140</td>
<td>S1 solo over 5-part ostinato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6-part ostinato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coda</td>
<td>141-142</td>
<td>Final trumpet cluster (soft), then downward gliss. on the offbeat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that these events occur at relatively regular intervals—Section 4 concludes the first half of the piece, the five-part trumpet cluster occurs thirty-three measures after the beginning of Section 4, and the arrival of the six-part homophony occurs thirty-seven measures after that. The final quarter of the piece consists of a subtle and gradual transition in which one voice part at a time joins the Bass/Baritone ostinato, leading to the arrival of the aforementioned six-part homophony. This textural change prepares the listener for the end of the piece by providing a sense of climax. The fourth strophe of Bats’ Ultrasound serves a similar function, but both Bats’ Ultrasound and Comete lack the musical development found throughout The Octave of Elephants, such as systematic changes of voicing; incorporation of homophony; or a complete, unobscured statement of the melody. There is very little in those works that sets one section apart from another. The Octave of Elephants has a more aurally-comprehensible structure.

Cattle Egret is an outlier in the set due to its unique formal structure, which incorporates two contrasting musical sections that alternate with one another throughout, as well as a musical
introduction which is harmonically distant from the rest of the piece. The poem consists of a single stanza:

Our sleep-slow compeers, red and dun,  
wade in their grazing, and whirring lives  
shoal up, splintering, in skitters and dives.  
Our quick beaks pincer them, one and one,  
those crisps of winnow, fats of air,  
the pick of chirrup — we haggle them down  
full of plea, fizz, cark and stridulation,  
our white plumes riffled by scads going spare.  
Shadowy round us are lives that eat things dead  
but life feeds our life: fight is flavor,  
stinging a spice. Bodies still electric play for  
my crop’s gravel jitterbug. I cross with sprung tread  
where dogs tugged a baa-ing calf’s gut out, fold on fold.  
Somewhere may be creatures that grow old.

As with the other madrigals, the form of *Cattle Egret* is based on that of the text, consisting of four large sections which coincide with those of the poem (marked by the capitalized words which begin lines 1, 4, 9, and 14). The two main melodic ideas are expressed by the Soprano 1 in the second section:

**Example 5.11, “Cattle Egret,” melodic material**
The first consists of a brief, harmonically-ambiguous stepwise ascent of a perfect fourth; the second a lengthy melody of limited range which appears to indicate C as the centric tone. These two structures alternate throughout the piece to produce the following four-part form:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Measures</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-15</td>
<td>Introduction, beginning with Melody A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16-33</td>
<td>Melodies A &amp; B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>34-56</td>
<td>Melodies A &amp; B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>57-65</td>
<td>Conclusion, based on Melody A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2, “Cattle Egret,” formal structure

This is the only madrigal in the set that incorporates both an introduction and a conclusion as clearly-defined sections in its formal structure. The introduction begins with the primary melodic motive in the work, sung by Soprano 3 and Alto 1, but beginning on D:

```
\begin{verbatim}
\text{senza vibr.}
\text{Our sleep - slow com - peers, red and dun}
\end{verbatim}
```

Example 5.12, “Cattle Egret,” mm. 1-5, Soprano 3 and Alto 1

However, the rest of the section is completely removed from the music that follows; the key centers that are implied (B-flat major, A major, B major, and G major) do not recur, nor do the musical motives that unfold throughout the section. The rest of the piece subtly oscillates between three basic pitch centers. The two melodies identified above suggest F major and C major. F major is reinforced by the consistent F-A iterations sung by Basses 1 and 3. However, Bass 2 weakens the F-centrism through the introduction of E-flat:
This is reinforced by E-flats and D-sharps sung by Alto 3. Meanwhile, Soprano 2, Alto 2, and Tenor 1 deliver a barrage of staccato cluster chords that suggest A minor:

This harmonic ambivalence is reinforced by the madrigal’s conclusion, which begins with a homophonic delivery of Melody A but ultimately avoids final resolution by closing on an F-minor-seventh chord—sung piano and scored low in all of the vocal ranges—on the last eighth-note of the final measure:

---

82 Note that each of the trichords are from pitch-class (013), a favorite of this composer.
Harmonic arrival is further avoided by the incorporation of a G in the Bass 2, producing a tight (013) cluster on the bottom of the chord.

Despite its similarities with the other madrigals, *Cattle Egret* exhibits a few signs of musical development that don’t exist in the other works. First, despite the harmonic ambivalence of the work as a whole, the piece still changes tonal centers. Melody A and its accompaniment suggest the F-major, E-flat major and C-major diatonic pitch collections; the Melody-B music suggests those of F major, C major and A minor. The other three madrigals, which are so dependent on pedal tones and harmonic ostinatos to guide the ear to a specific centric tone, do not produce a sense of modulation. Despite the tonal ambivalence of *Cattle Egret*, the music appears to shift between different sets of tonal possibilities from section to section due to the use of different pitch collections; in this sense, the music does modulate, although only subtly.

Other developmental aspects of the madrigal can also be observed by comparing the two inner sections of the piece (mm. 16-33 and 34-56). Although their music is mostly similar, in the latter section, the composer produces a sense of gradually-increasing agitation through the incorporation of several unorthodox gestures. First, he calls for the ensemble to interrupt the phrases of Melody A by gradually closing their throats while sustaining the words “lives” and “dead” (mm. 38 and 41). The wild contrapuntal landscape suddenly aligns into a fortissimo homophonic declamation on the word “jitterbug,” in two clusters which, when combined,
contain all of the notes in the C-major diatonic pitch collection. Lastly, the score calls for several of the voices to incorporate a gradually-increasing nasality into their tone, culminating in the final phrase of the section (mm. 52-56), in which most of the choir is singing *molto nasale* at a forte dynamic. Underneath all of the playful madrigalisms and onomatopoeia there is an emotional arc to the piece, though one that ultimately remains unresolved.

Despite the salient differences between these works, all of the *Four Madrigals* share fundamental commonalities. Each functions as a non-developing musical canvas which serves as a delivery mechanism for the poetry. These works do not substantially change throughout and are characterized by harmonic repetition through the use of repeated chord structures or pedal tones, tonal ambivalence through the use of chromaticism, highly-syllabic and simplistic melodic writing, and strophic formal structures. The differences between the works are merely gradations of the same general principles. The fundamental characteristic of these works is their avoidance of any sort of harmonic or melodic arrival. The formal structures are mostly static, the keys always non-committal. This music is not goal-oriented; it is goal-averse.

**5.3 Works Based on Musical Process or Formal Approach**

While most of the pieces in *Eksempler* are through-composed, the first piece in the set—*Ikke blot hende*—has a unique formal structure that completely avoids any sort of conventional musical development. As discussed in Chapter 3 (pp. 38-42), the music mirrors the chiastic structure of the Hans-Jørgen Nielsen poem. The melodic material—introduced by the Tenors and Basses—consists of five phrases, each assigned to a different phrase of the text. The harmonic material—introduced by the Sopranos and Altos—consists of a series of intervals: a perfect unison, half steps, whole steps, and a perfect fifth. Halfway through the piece (the middle of m.
31), the men and women switch roles, and all of the pitches are inverted in relation to their position on the tone grid (e.g. the note in Position 2 on the bass-clef staff is replaced with the note in Position 2 on the treble-clef staff). The result is intensely symmetrical, like two identical images facing one another. Although the color-coded poem was included in Chapter 3, it has been reproduced below to conveniently illustrate the point:

Ikke blot hende men også den måde hun smiler på og ikke blot den måde hun smiler på men også den måde hun er nærværende på og ikke blot den måde hun er nærværende på men også hendes hånd og ikke blot hendes hånd men også hendes hånd i hans hånd og ikke blot hendes hånd i hans hånd

men også hans hånd i hendes hånd og ikke blot hans hånd i hendes hånd med også hans hånd alene og ikke blot hans hånd alene men også den måde han er nærværende på og ikke blot den måde han smiler på og ikke blot den måde han smiler på men også ham

And for English speakers:

Not just her but also the way she smiles and not just the way she smiles but also the way she is present and not just the way she is present but also her hand and not just her hand but also her hand in his hand and not just her hand in his hand but also his hand in her hand and not just his hand in her hand but also his hand alone and not just his hand alone but also the way he is present and not just the way he is present but also the way he smiles and not just the way he smiles but also him

The sections are also delineated in the following color-coded score:
Ikke blot hende

Hans-Jørgen Nielsen

\[ \text{\textit{Ikke blot hende, men og så den måde hun smiler på, og ikke blot den måde hun smiler på, men og så den måde hun er nærørende på, og ikke blot den måde hun er nærørende på, men og så hendes hånd, og ikke blot hendes hånd, men og så hendes hånd i hans hånd, og ikke blot}} \]
Example 5.16, “Ikke blot hende,” color-coded score
*Igen* is another one of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s more tightly-constructed formal experiments. He uses a different structural approach in each of the movements, but all three are related in their lack of formal development. The musical material effectively remains unchanged throughout, and what little variety exists appears as a direct result of the composer’s rearrangement of a set of static component parts.

Movement 1 is comprised of five sections, each of which coincides with a different verse from Ecclesiastes. The form of the piece is clearest when examined on the phrase-structural level. There are ten phrases in the movement, nine of which consist of music based on one of two different five-measure segments of music. These segments are the building blocks of the entire piece—musical modules, so to speak. For clarity, the music contained in mm. 1-5 will be referred to as Module 1:

*Example 5.17, “Igen,” Mvt. 1, mm. 1-5*
And the music contained in mm. 6-10 will be referred to as Module 2:

These two modules are presented in various forms throughout: in their original form, in inversion, or rhythmically offset from their original presentation. While Module 2 covers a two-octave range and involves all of the voices simultaneously, Module 1 encompasses a shallower range which enables the module to be simultaneously presented with its inversion to produce a variety of different sonorities. These combinations are illustrated and color-coded in the diagram below:
The phrases regularly alternate between both modules, whose presentation is at times directly related to the meaning of the text. For example, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen chooses to repeat the first verse of the excerpt, but he modifies the order of the text—“Sol går op, sol går ned” becomes “Sol går ned, sol går op.” This change is illustrated by his restatement of both modules in inversion in mm. 11-20. Likewise, in the following section, mm. 21-30, the modules return in their original form, coinciding with the text “whirling all about, ever returning.” This is the only exact repetition in the movement. In the remaining sections, the modules are modified through combination, inversion, and rhythmic offsetting; new structures are erected using the same two basic materials.

The final phrase (mm. 48-55), in which all of the voices gradually converge on the symmetrical cluster chord discussed in Chapter 4 (p. 90), appears to be new, but it is actually based on the music of Module 2. The concluding section retains the modular character of the preceding music because of the rhythmic misalignment between men’s and women’s voices.
reminiscent of mm. 31-35 and 41-48. The upper and lower voices actually mirror each other’s pitch content—Alto 3 is an inversion of Tenor 1, Alto 2 is an inversion of Tenor 2, etc. The Tenor 3 part is derived from the music sung by Bass 3 in mm. 6-10:

Example 5.19, “Igen,” Mvt. 1, mm. 48-52, Tenor 3; mm. 6-10, Bass 3

Likewise, the Alto 1 music in the final phrase coincides with the Soprano 1 part in mm. 16-20:

Example 5.20, “Igen,” Mvt. 1, mm. 48-52, Alto 1; mm. 16-20, Soprano 1

Similarly, the outer voices in the final section appear to be based on stepwise vocal lines from previous phrases:

Example 5.21, “Igen,” Mvt. 1, mm. 48-51 and 6-8, Soprano 1
Likewise in the Bass:

Example 5.22, “Igen,” Mvt. 1, mm. 48-51 and 16-18, Bass 3

The only music which at first appears unrelated to the two modules occurs at the very end, with the glissando from the three-octave D to the A-flat-framed symmetrical cluster chord containing all eleven other pitches. However, this music is closely related to all that precedes it, since it serves as a sort of key to understanding the composer’s formal approach; as discussed in Chapter 4, A-flat and D function as the plane of inversional symmetry for the movement.

The other movements of Igen are structurally similar to the first; sections are clearly-defined, and concrete musical elements are pitted against one another in different combinations in each section. Movement 1 is unique, however, due to the moments in which the basic musical materials of the piece are presented in forms that differ from those of their initial occurrence (inversion, rhythmic modification, etc.). By contrast, the materials of Movements 2 and 3 are assigned to specific voices and remain unchanged upon subsequent repetitions. The exceptions are the descant voices in Movement 2, whose music is through-composed. For a more detailed discussion of the formal structure of this movement, see Chapter 4, pp. 83-87.

Movement 3 consists of thirty-four beats of music, stated in various vocal combinations a total of eleven times, followed by an eight-measure coda. When all of the voices are present, the harmony is widely varied, with diatonic triads, perfect intervals, and chromatic clusters all
incorporated. When voices are removed from the texture, certain harmonic elements are emphasized, while others are omitted entirely. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen provides a layer of added variety through the incorporation of the descant element that appears in the central movement. Beginning on middle C, the descant voices (Soprano 1 and Tenor 1) journey outward to the pitches an octave above and below, moving mostly by step (see Chapter 4, p. 93). The Tenor continues, alternating directions at the start of each section and meandering between the two poles. The Soprano part is less systematic, at times moving in contrary motion with the Tenor, at times in parallel motion, and sometimes being omitted completely. The remaining voices are presented in different combinations throughout. These parts are divided into four modules, grouped by voice part (i.e. all Basses sing at the same time, all Altos, etc.). Most often, these four groups all sing their music simultaneously, and the rest of the time they are divided into pairs of voice parts. Out of the six possible voice-part combinations, the composer uses four: SA, TB, AB, and AT (SA is used twice).\(^83\) Five of the sections consist of the original music sung by the tutti choir. The penultimate section consists of the standard music, but with an altered ending, and the final section is a coda of new, but harmonically-similar, material. These permutations, combined with the soloists singing the descant in both ascending and descending form throughout, result in twelve completely unique sections of music. The diagram below shows the voices employed in each section, and the bottom half of the image represents the soloists’ parts, with the direction of the lines indicating the direction in which they sing the descant pitch collection in each section:

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\(^83\) It is unclear why the remaining permutations—ST and SB—are not utilized. It may be because the music resulting from the ST combination is quite similar to SA, and the final sonority of the section would consist of only octave Cs. Plus, the glissandos that end each section are omitted when both the Alto and Bass are removed. The justification for omitting the SB permutation is even less obvious.
The text is set unevenly throughout, betraying the movement’s subtle large-scale tripartite structure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>mm.</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1-9</td>
<td>“The sun rises, the sun goes down, hastens to the place where it rises again.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9-18</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>18-26</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>27-35</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>36-44</td>
<td>“The wind goes toward the south, then goes to the north, whirling all about, ever returning.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>44-53</td>
<td>“The sun rises, the sun goes down, hastens to the place where it rises again.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>53-61</td>
<td>“All streams run to the sea, then they return to run again.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>62-70</td>
<td>“The sun rises, the sun goes down, hastens to the place where it rises again.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>71-79</td>
<td>“Generations go, generations come, but the earth remains forever.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>79-88</td>
<td>“All things are full of labor, eyes see, ears hear, however they are never satiated.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>88-97</td>
<td>“That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, so there is nothing new under the sun.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>97-104</td>
<td>“The sun rises, the sun goes down, hastens to the place where it rises again.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3, “Igen,” Mvt. 3, textual organization
The first four sections consist of repetitions of the first verse of the Ecclesiastes passage which opens Movement 1; Sections 5-8 alternate between tutti and half-choir voicing, with the full choir singing the new verses and the half choir repeating the “Sol går op…” textual refrain; Sections 9-12 consist of newly-introduced textual material, concluding with the “Sol går op” refrain, and are characterized by tutti voicing, with the Soprano and Tenor soloists singing the descant in parallel motion for the first time in the movement. Therefore, the large-scale structure can be interpreted as consisting of three sections of equal length, although the sectional divisions are not aurally obvious. Most likely, the movement is intended to be heard as an unstructured series of repetitions that don’t necessarily build to any sort of climax. This is observable even at the phrase-structural level. The movement’s thirty-four-beat subsections each consist of three phrases of various lengths: two pairs of antecedent-consequent phrases—twelve beats and thirteen beats, respectively—followed by a nine-beat stand-alone phrase. Each of these phrases seems steered in a specific harmonic direction, but each consistently veers off course. The first phrase begins with conventional major chords (with extensions), but then sidesteps to a pair of (013) clusters; the second begins on octave Cs which move toward the flat side but then conclude on a C-E major third; the final phrase begins on a C9 chord, moves through a series of stacked clusters, and ends on a chord comprised of stacked perfect fifths. The structure and harmony of each phrase are counterintuitive. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen applies this approach to the end of the piece as well. The music finally changes to an apparent climactic build in the concluding large section, with consistent tutti voicing and parallel motion in the descant voices. But the composer sabotages the gesture by concluding the piece with an inconclusive whole-tone trichord, sung mezzo forte:
Unlike the first two movements, which establish the centric tones of D and F, respectively, here there is no such harmonic reference point. Despite the fact that (024) pitch sets occur in the texture, they are certainly not emphasized in any salient way, so ending with this particular sonority seems deliberately inconclusive.

The descant voices serve to further disguise the larger structure of the work, since they are assigned only the first-verse text, which they repeat throughout every section once they have made their initial entrance. This ever-present textual refrain both adds to the monotony of the piece and reinforces the meaning of the last line of the text—“there is nothing new under the sun.”

Formal structure is the defining musical parameter of each of these choruses; in each movement, the composer combines tightly-constructed frameworks with a unique harmonic approach to communicate the meaning of each text. Movement 1 uses inversionsal symmetry to convey the sun incessantly rising and setting. Movement 2 depicts the relentless, monotonous unfolding of time through the use of an oscillating stepwise quarter-note motive that meanders back and forth between key centers like the changing of the seasons. Movement 3 uses repetitive phrase structures and harmonic misdirection to ultimately convey futility and meaninglessness; we keep striving but are never fulfilled.
5.4 Works Employing Superimposition

A handful of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s works employ a compositional technique in which different movements or pieces are performed simultaneously in order to produce a new movement or piece. There does not appear to be a record of the composer ever explicitly defining or naming this compositional process, despite the fact that this approach appears to be unique to this composer’s work. Paul Hillier refers to this practice as “the palimpsest technique of superimposed variation” or, in Danish, “overskrivnings-variationer” (overwriting variations). However, this author prefers the term “superimposition,” as “variation” has a very specific musical connotation that seems to obscure the composer’s purpose in employing the technique. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s process is additive, which musical variations tend not to be. Also, the term “variation” implies a kind of development. Rather than transforming and developing as time progresses, the materials are stacked on top of one another, like a physical object being constructed in real time. In this sense, Hillier’s use of the word “palimpsest” is quite appropriate, as these works consist of several musical layers; throughout the course of a piece, layers might be added or removed, but the materials themselves remain largely unchanged.

The earliest major work employing superimposition is Triptykon (1985), a three-movement concerto written for the Danish percussionist Gert Mortensen, in which the orchestral music of the first two movements is combined to form that of the third. The composer delineates this music by assigning it to different instrumental groups within the orchestra:

The three movements of TRIPTYKON are composed in an effort to create clear contrasts of colour. The first movement employs only winds in the orchestra, the second movement only strings, and in the third movement the first two movements are repeated, on top of each other, played simultaneously. The percussion solo part has equally distinct colours: for the first movement: metal only, for the second

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84 Hillier, The Natural World of Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, 8.
movement: wood only, and then finally in the third movement – together with the orchestral tutti – skin\(^{85}\)

Of course, in *Triptykon*, the soloist’s music is through-composed, so the technique of superimposition only applies to the orchestra.

Five of the composer’s choral works utilize this technique, all of which were written in the twenty-first century. The earliest of these is *Three Stages* (2003). In this three-movement piece, material from the first two movements is repeated verbatim in the third. *Three Stages* is unique among the vocal works that utilize superimposition in that some of the music from the first two movements is later omitted out of necessity—all twelve voices in the ensemble perform throughout the entirety of each movement, so in order for materials from the first two movements to be combined, some of the music must be abandoned. All twelve voices present the Berio-derived introduction at the beginning of Movement 3, after which they are divided into separate groups which fulfill different roles. S3, A1, T3, and B1 present the Janequin chanson that formed the basis of Movement 2; T2, B2, and B3 sing their Movement-1 music; S1 and T1 deliver a sustained cantus firmus; and the remaining voices fill out the texture with material derived from the first two movements.

There are two collections of works from 2010-2011 that employ this technique on a larger scale. The first collection consists of the pieces *Song*, *Play*, and *Company*—the results of a co-commission from Theatre of Voices and the London Sinfonietta. *Song*, scored for vocal quartet, and *Play*, scored for fourteen-piece chamber orchestra, are played simultaneously to

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form *Company*. Likewise, Gudmundsen-Holmgren’s String Quartet No. 10 “New Ground” and String Quartet No. 11 “No Ground” form a triptych with the vocal quartet *Green*. These three pieces can be performed independently, but the composer also arranged the quartets so that *Green* may be superimposed with each, producing the pieces *No Ground Green* and *New Ground Green*. These two groups of pieces are unique in that their component parts can be presented in concert as stand-alone works. For example, there is no expectation that a performance of *Company* must be preceded by performances of *Song* and/or *Play*. These may be performed individually or in one of the arrangements the composer suggests in his preface to the *Company* score (see Chapter 3, p. 62).

The composer’s last major work—*Ad Cor* (2015)—incorporates superimposition using a method similar to that of *Triptykon*. *Ad Cor* is a singular, multi-movement work in which the performing forces are divided into different groups; each group performs distinct music independently in one of the first three movements, which are then combined to form the fourth and final movement, performed by the full ensemble. He divides the ensemble in a way similar to *Triptykon*. Movement 1 is scored for twelve-part SATB choir, strings, horn, and harp; Movement 2 is scored for a different twelve-part SATB choir, woodwinds, piano, and log drum; and Movement 3 is scored for a solo percussionist who plays while reciting a poem. The music from the first three movements is combined to form the fourth. Since the first three movements are each a different length, the entrances in the fourth movement must be staggered. The Movement-1 music is performed throughout, while the Movement-2 music is introduced in m. 29. The percussion is unique; despite the fact that the soloist’s music is only thirty measures in length, the percussionist plays throughout the movement, providing a backbeat with the log drum.
and articulating various entrances, cutoffs, and instrumental gestures with tam-tam scrapes, vibraslap, and chimes. The music of Movement 3—including the poem recitation—begins at m. 43; its length results in the percussionist being exposed for one final measure after the other musicians have concluded.

With superimposition, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen finds a meeting point between the tightly-constructed works like *Igen*, *Ikke blot hende*, and *Konstateringer* and those whose focus is the combinatorial treatment of varied musical materials, like *Plateaux pour deux*, *Tricolore I-IV*, *Symphony*, *Antiphony*, and *Repriser*. Through this compositional technique, minimal materials are pitted against one another in both complimentary and oppositional ways and are turned into full-length works. In *Three Stages*, previously-stated musical elements are interwoven into the contrapuntal fabric to symbolize Kierkegaard’s “three stages on life’s way”; in *Ad Cor*, different timbres, gestures and texts are pitted against one another to express multiple, contradictory emotional states simultaneously; in *Triptykon*, the ensemble is divided in order to pit different basic, real-world elements—wood, metal, and skin—against one another. The *Green* quartets form a balanced pair, as the tongue-in-cheek atmospheres of “New Ground” and *Green* seem to complement one another, while the brusque, aggressive atonality of “No Ground” becomes softened by the naïve simplicity of the D-major vocal work. In each piece, the preliminary musical material is transformed into something brand new through the simple process of combination.

### 5.5 Formal Asymmetry

While symmetry of formal structure (and in some cases, pitch) plays a major role in the composer’s oeuvre, several works are extraordinarily asymmetrical. The quintessential example
is *Symphony, Antiphony*, which is structured in two parts of comically unequal length; “Symphony” lasts two-and-a-half minutes, while “Antiphony” is almost ten times as long. The three-movement chamber work *Mirror Pieces* is similar; the first two movements, seven and ten minutes each, are followed by one that lasts thirty seconds. A couple of vocal works also exhibit this characteristic. *Konstateringer* has a bipartite structure; the first part lasts six movements, each about forty-five seconds in length, while the second part lasts about one minute total, with the final movement about twenty seconds in length. Similarly, the longest movement of *Eksempler* is three minutes, whereas the shortest lasts only four seconds; this is also the movement which concludes the piece. Like the other formal approaches described in this chapter, these asymmetrical structures serve to elude one’s expectations of growth and development throughout the course of a given musical work. In these pieces, basic musical materials are presented bluntly, without ornament or transformation. The formal asymmetry amplifies the novelty of this matter-of-fact presentation.
Chapter 6: Extra-Musical Influences and Aesthetic Considerations

6.1 Visual Arts

As stated in Chapter 2, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen comes from a family of visual artists—his grandfather was a painter, his father a sculptor, and his spouses and children have all been actively involved in the visual arts. The composer was extremely open about this influence on his music; many of his works are best understood when viewed through this particular lens. The earliest, clearest example is of course the *Tricolore* series, which Gudmundsen-Holmgreen explicitly describes as “sculptures in sound,” and which he compares to the work of visual artists such as Robert Morris and Poul Gernes. This sculptural quality is apparent in several of his vocal works, particularly his superimposition pieces: *Three Stages, Song/Play/Company*, the *Green* string quartets, and *Ad Cor*. The technique of superimposition allows the listener to engage with musical materials from a variety of perspectives, a sort of aural version of a mobile—one is able to observe these musical objects independently as well as in combination with one another. Part 1 of *Konstateringer*, for which the composer devises a system to complement the process of formal transformation present throughout the six stanzas of Hans-Jørgen Nielsen’s poem, can be interpreted similarly, as multiple perspectives from which one can observe a handful of basic ideas. The quality of stasis exhibited in works such as *Four Madrigals from the Natural World* and *Igen* is comparable to the static quality of works of visual art. The latter is similar in style to the composer’s instrumental works, due to the combinatorial processes employed. Indeed, the earlier instrumental works have repeatedly been compared to Robert Rauschenberg’s combines. In *Symphony, Antiphony*, for example, musical gestures from a

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86 Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, *Tricolore 1, 3 and 4*, 3.
variety of styles are treated as found objects, juxtaposed against one another in different ways, much like the assemblage technique used by Rauschenberg throughout the 1950s. Not only are their techniques similar, but their basic materials as well. With Rauschenberg, “[the] canvas became a surface for the accumulation of ordinary objects instead of a window or a ‘worldspace’ distinct from everyday life.” Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s found objects are equally ordinary—scrap of material that suggest style and time period as opposed to specific, pre-existing works of art. As Jan Jacoby describes:

He always discovers that the most concrete of musical things, small modules and objects found in the musical surroundings (often in widely different spheres of musical culture) can radiate with warmth when they are enclosed in a coolly constructed musical design…Thus disregarding the innate logic of his material, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen succeeds in isolating it from its original emotional and ‘anecdotic’ content, and reshapes it into emotional building bricks, so to speak. The warmth in his music is the heat of friction, the friction between incompatible ‘musics’ and the friction of his own love/hate relationship with the expressiveness thus imprisoned.

In both artists’ works, these found objects are unaltered, appearing in a concrete form that allows them to retain their individuality within the larger framework.

Another link to the visual arts is the composer’s exploration of color. In his work, sonorities and timbres are at various times partitioned and combined, like paints on an artist’s palette. Again, the Tricolore pieces are the clearest example, as each is fundamentally about layering three different timbre-sonority combinations on top of one another. In Triptykon he expands this approach, adding musical gestures to the mix, but the exploration of timbre is still

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present due to the division of the orchestra between strings and winds and the partitioning of the percussionist’s musical resources into the categories of metal, wood and skin. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen has in fact compared this piece to a visual triptych: a three-panel painting. The composer’s interest in musical colors extends to his vocal works through similar combinatorial pieces like *Igen* as well as through his experiments with the tone grid in *Eksempler* and *On One Note*. Each of these works explores a wide array of sonorities, either freely or systematically, which include familiar triadic harmonies, stable perfect intervals, discordant clusters, and, in the case of *On One Note*, microtones.

Perhaps the most relevant point of comparison between Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s work and the visual arts is the composer’s preoccupation with structure and proportion. This obsession with structure takes various forms throughout his oeuvre. The ostinatos in *Four Madrigals from the Natural World* result in clearly-defined structures comprised of sections of equal length. This proportional symmetry is expanded to a larger degree with the superimposed musical structures of *Triptykon* and *Three Stages*, in which materials from entire movements are layered on top of one another without alteration. This attention to structure is also exemplified in the pitch symmetry and formal mirroring used in *Igen* and *On One Note* as well as the chiastic form of *Ikke blot hende*, whose formal symmetry is anchored in the foundational symmetrical structure of the tone grid. Given a single germinal note, a symmetrical series of intervals provides the pitch content for an entire work; in several of the composer’s vocal works, it is the symmetry of the

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pitch collection that allows for the upper and lower voices to engage in dialogue with one
another through their shared intervalllic vocabulary.  

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s formal approach is, however, not simply limited to
symmetrical or proportional structures, as we have seen in the extreme asymmetry of a handful
of his works. He describes his “quest for the perfect form” in terms of balance:

…I feel the classic need for balance (it has nothing to do with the balance in
music of the classical period, but is like a basic need). Balance for me isn’t
ABA/ternary forms or such, but is comparable to a balancing act. I feel that my
pieces are like a tight-ropes act. One may be a clown on a tight-ropes, ‘fall’ down
innumerable times, wear big shoes and a strange hat. But yet there is something
very elegant in the fact that the clown stays on the tight-ropes. Among other things,
that’s the situation in which I find myself with the strange instrumental
combinations that I have gradually tried out: we get closer to the offensive or
‘embarrassing’ part.  

For him, balance comes not from stability or unity, but from juxtaposition. By pitting contrasting
materials against one another in such a way, he pushes combinatorial possibility to its limit while
somehow maintaining a sense of order or vague comprehensibility. In their antagonism,
dissimilar materials actually become complementary. For the composer, this contact between
contrasting materials is not meant to be hostile, but rather revealing:

I’ve picked out things that you wouldn’t believe would do each other any good.
But that’s also the point, that they’re not, as with Bach, arranged according to any
harmonic system where everything has to fit. This doesn’t have to be good, but it
has to fit together, and I have to find things that fit together in an interesting way.
They have to move around one another, to illuminate each other so that they
breathe together…

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90 This is certainly the case in Ikke blot hende, Gammel med i meditation, and the grid-based movements of On
One Note.


92 Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, På Tvært, streamed online, produced by Birgit Tengberg, trans. Else Torp and
Paul Hillier (Copenhagen: Tengberg Media, 2016).
In his work, contrasting musical objects act as a backdrop for one another, gradually revealing the true shape and character of the objects themselves. Throughout this process, dissonance and consonance, tranquility and wildness, sincerity and ridiculousness are all revealed to be two sides of the same coin. These juxtapositions appear to be more explicit in his instrumental pieces, as his vocal ensemble works in general tend to be more unified in style. However, this approach is used in pieces such as the *Green* quartets and *Three Stages* to produce striking stylistic collages.

The physical dimension of sculpture is also apparent in the composer’s music. For an artist who deals with sound, Gudmunsen-Holmgreen’s work is surprisingly tactile. His string writing often calls for *saltando*, *col legno battuto*, and *col legno tratto* bowing; Bartók pizzicato; and a technique in which the players gradually increase the application of bow pressure on the string until the pitches become distorted and eventually screech to a halt. His wind writing incorporates extended techniques like playing with the lips and tongue obstructing the aperture of the mouthpiece, blowing unpitched jets of air through the instrument, tongue slaps, and percussive effects with the tongue and the keys of the instrument. He at times calls for percussionists to play cymbals and drums with their knuckles and fingernails. His last series of string quartets, *All in One*, assigns percussion instruments to the string players and calls for them to stomp their feet in various rhythmic patterns throughout. While more subtly manifested in his vocal music, there are comparable examples in his treatment of consonants, incorporation of articulate and aggressive whispers and use of closed-throat singing (a parallel to the bow-pressure effect described above in his string writing), not to mention the sheer virtuosic physicality found in several of the vocal works. Like Rauschenberg’s tactic of adding layers of
material to his canvases which leap out at the viewer and bring his paintings into three-dimensional space, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen explores the topography of traditional instruments by calling on his performers to engage with physical materials in unconventional ways.

6.2 Absurdism

Since the late 1950s, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s most significant literary influence has been Samuel Beckett, whose conception of the tragic meaningless of existence, along with a significant amount of facile humor, seems to have deeply resonated with the composer. His impact is most apparent in *Je ne me tairai jamais. Jamais* and *Trois poèmes de Samuel Beckett*—both settings of Beckett texts. The former, written for a speaker, chamber ensemble (which, in addition to the more conventional string, brass, and woodwind instruments, contains a police whistle and car horn), and twelve-part choir, is a study in monotony and futility. As described by the composer, “Predominantly the chorus sounds worn out or totally tired. As if you imagine an asylum trying to do choral singing.”93 The choir spends the entire sixteen-minute work singing the same line of French text, which translates to “I will never be silent. Never.” They deliver the text in fatigued clusters on approximated pitches and infantile-sounding major scales marked “innocent, childish,” and, later, “optimistic.” A tenor from the choir attempts to deliver the full text in a spoken voice but is interrupted by the entire ensemble blasting a dissonant chord $fff$. Regarding this work, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen writes, “music usually tries to be convincing and powerful. This work is about impotence. It tries to say something, but fails totally.”94

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explanation is a key to understanding the role of absurdism in his work; while his later choral pieces are, on the surface, drastically different, they share the general philosophy of this Beckett setting. Throughout his oeuvre, he avoids universal statements (or even explicitly emotional statements) by consistently interfering with them as they emerge in his compositions:

I’m definitely the kind of composer who is ready to sabotage my own statements. It’s something completely fundamental—that I think our statements are dubious under all circumstances. In order to underline that situation you can let the music wobble. Not many want to say that they let their music wobble, because then they think that it will be bad. But the fact of wobbling can become a virtue.\(^95\)

The composer tends to treat all of his musical gestures with suspicion. This sentiment is perhaps most explicitly affirmed in Part 2 of the appropriately-titled *Konstateringer (Statements)*, in which a series of deliberate proclamations are asserted but then undermined in the final movement—a diatonic setting of the text “I make statements, and that is all.”\(^96\) An important early example of this sort of self-sabotage is *Mester Jacob*, in which a soft, whimpering serialist landscape is subtly undermined by a well-known children’s song (commonly known by the French title *Frère Jacques*) played by the violin in extreme augmentation throughout the nine-minute work, an absurdist cantus firmus.

Another clear connection to Beckett lies in the composer’s more monotonous works. The *Igen* choruses, which stem from his absurdist “non-opera” *Sol går op, sol går ned*, share the tedium and directionlessness of *Waiting for Godot*. With *Tricolore IV*, which is far more minimal in its musical materials, the composer pushes the boundary of what qualifies as a musical work of art through the mere presentation of three sound combinations overlapping one another in

\(^95\) Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, *På Tvært*.

\(^96\) This is the translation in the English-language version of the piece; a more accurate translation of the original poem would be the more direct phrasing “I state, and that is all.”
various ways. This is related to the visual arts, but Beckett’s influence is also keenly felt.
Likewise in the cello-percussion duet *Plateaux pour deux*, in which two objects—one inherently musical, one inherently not—interact with one another. The cello’s attempts at soft-spoken, lyrical expressivity are constantly undermined by abrasive car horns, each of which is only capable of playing one pitch at a loud dynamic. The two instruments are so drastically different, it is in their very nature to contradict one another. These provocative pieces are also related to the tenets of the Fluxus movement, whose happenings and performance-art pieces sought to elevate the banal to the level of high art.

The composer also employs strange combinations of instruments and musical materials in his *Green* string quartets. *New Ground Green* starts out as an absurd musical statement due to the incorporation of perhaps the most well-known ground-bass work in the Western world: Pachelbel’s “Canon” in D major. The piece begins with an immediate wink from the composer in the form of a modification to the original ground bass—an additional measure which extends the length of the ground to an asymmetrical five-measures. The entire piece consists of a kind of playful reworking of Pachelbel’s piece, as if removing the stitches from a piece of clothing and reassembling it with added patches and a modernized color scheme. Add to that the percussion instruments and deconstructed part-song from *Green*, and the result is completely bizarre. The materials that were “unstitched” in *Green* and String Quartet No. 10 become completely outlandish when combined with one another. Similarly, *No Ground Green* combines the atonal frenzy of String Quartet No. 11 with the simplistic diatonicism of *Green* to an even more combative effect. However, at the conclusion of each of these combination pieces, the
instrumental music fades away and all that is left is the concordant part-song from Green. A wry smile at the end of a confusing and silly engagement.

The absurdist element is also exemplified in the vocal quartets Sound I and Sound II, which essentially function as studies related to Song/Play/Company. (The titles Play and Company establish yet another connection to Beckett, as they are also titles of a play and novella by the author, respectively.) Both pieces follow a similar trajectory, with sounds—consonantal in Sound I and vocalic in Sound II—emerging and gradually increasing in variety, texture and dynamic until they arrive at a playful, metrically-regular “groove.” After that section runs its course, the music gradually reduces in texture, frequency and dynamic until the very end, at which point both pieces conclude with a moment of musical sabotage. In Sound I, an actual pitch is introduced by the Soprano and Alto only six measures from the end, only to be contradicted by the Tenor, who, three measures later, glissandos down to produce a soft half-step dissonance with the original pitch. The piece is concluded by the inner voices, who forcefully “shoosh” the ensemble:

Example 6.1, “Sound I,” mm. 90-93
A similar gesture concludes *Sound II*, which ends with a widely-spaced quarter-tone sonority unlike any of the pitched music that has preceded:

![Example 6.2, “Sound II,” mm. 126-130](image)

It is important to note that there is clearly an element of both irony and humor in each of these works. Although Samuel Beckett’s work can be quite comedic at times, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s brand of absurdism appears at surface level to be even more so, at times even carefree, containing less existential struggle and more acceptance of the human condition. In reality, his work is simply a renunciation of the grand gestures that permeate so much of the Western canon and the modernist tendencies of the twentieth century:

Pessimism has invaded me completely. There are Utopians who expect a new world if one only does this or that. I consider Utopias strange, captivating, stimulating for our spiritual activities—but completely impossible. One can place man on a pedestal and consider his invention and creativity to be almost divine, or one can look in vain for anything that resembles such a vision. I consider man relatively helpless and at the mercy of forces he can hardly understand. I am a pessimist because we have made so many mistakes. I am a little bit depressed on behalf of mankind. Socrates apparently had no success in convincing us to act sensibly. ‘Weaned’ in this way, I have become used to a proper skepticism concerning the high-faluting style. I don’t sing along with the *Hallelujah* chorus.⁹⁷

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Danish composer Karl Aage Rasmussen makes a relevant observation: “people have to express themselves, and to express something involves – however briefly – overlooking contradictions. The problem is to speak truthfully without always claiming to represent Truth itself.”\textsuperscript{98} The composer uses absurdism, juxtaposition and comedy as tools to disempower traditional, rhetorical musical gestures that elicit a kind of reverence or sentimentality in the listener.

\textbf{6.3 Objectivity}

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s skepticism of the “high-faluting” style has been present throughout his career, as his 1960s works attest. He appears to have initially attacked this problem by drawing inspiration from the visual arts, particularly artists who aimed for objectivity in their paintings and sculptures. This connection is at once made apparent in the titles of his early works, which are similar to those of modernist art pieces. Consider some of the titles of works by Poul Gernes, the Danish artist whose stripe paintings inspired the composition of the \textit{Tricolore} series: \textit{Circles}, \textit{Circle painting}, \textit{Square painting}, \textit{Stripes}, \textit{Target-painting}, \textit{Composition in four parts}. Compare these to the titles of several Gudmundsen-Holmgreen works: \textit{Plateaux pour deux}, \textit{Plateaux pour piano et Orchestre}, \textit{Terrasse i 5 Afsatser}, \textit{Solo for Electric Guitar}, \textit{For Piano}, \textit{For Violin and Orchestra}. These vaguely-descriptive titles provide minimal information while establishing the most basic, practical parameters of each piece. The genre labels “plateaux” and “terrasse” even carry a physical/spatial connotation which connects them more explicitly to the visual arts. Other works are given slightly more descriptive titles which reveal more of the

composer’s intentions with each individual work and, in some cases, intentionally signal their inclusion in sets of related pieces composed over an extended period of time: Repriser, Re-Repriser, Piece by Piece, Turn, Double, Mirror Pieces, Mirror II, 6 Enkle Danske Sange, Four Madrigals from the Natural World, Song/Play/Company, Eksempler. Even these are relatively vague, as they lack descriptions of specific instrumentation, musical process, form, length, or poetic authorship. His later works possess titles that are not quite as closely related to the visual arts, but which combine a sense of objectivity with a tongue-in-cheek playfulness characteristic of the works themselves: Chacun Son Son (meaning “to each his sound,” a pun on the French chacun son goût, or “to each his own”), No Ground Green and New Ground Green (both titles refer to their relationship to a repeated ground bass and combination with the vocal quartet Green), All in One (a reference to the Shakespeare sonnet quoted within the work as well as the fact that this piece consists of three separate string quartets all performed simultaneously), Company (a combination of the vocal piece Song and the instrumental piece Play), On One Note (based on Purcell’s Fantasia upon One Note), Sound I and Sound II (which deal with objective sounds extracted from their subjective, expressive context), and Convex/Concave/Concord (descriptions of the three sections of the piece). The titles describe basic parameters of the work without referencing any sort of musical style or emotional perspective. The most diminutive title in his catalogue consists of a simple contraction: “og,” the Danish word for “and.” The composer’s program note for the piece reveals his thought process concerning the titles of his works, objectivity in general, and the philosophy behind his combinatorial compositional style:

The word OG has a wonderful lack of personal opinion on what to think and what to do. But it has the function of bringing together: ‘Det og det og det…” – This, and this, and this. The function is one of addition that could easily be seen as a main feature in my own
composing. Different kinds of voices on top of each other are often found in my music—a polyphony parallel to the astonishing meetings of creatures in real life.  

Many of the vocal works exhibit this objective approach. *Tre Sanger til Tekster af Politiken* emerged as a result of the composer’s aversion to setting pre-existing poems to music—a stance which would change later in his career: “In the 1960s I hated this approach to setting texts – this idea of taking words, giving them new colour and meaning, emphasizing deeper content. I found that the meaning of a very fine poem was completely clear already, together with its sound.”

The texts, all taken from the Dec. 10, 1966 issue of the broadsheet newspaper *Politiken*, describe the rejection of a motion by the Roskilde City Council, a governmental debate over a finance bill, and the centenary of the shipping line DFDS. The music, similar in style to that of *6 Enkle Danske Sange*, is completely removed from the meaning of the text.

Given the composer’s attitude regarding setting text to music, it is not surprising that his early forays into choral composition include settings of concrete poetry in which the text is interpreted based on its physical properties rather than its literal meaning. The first four pieces in *Eksempler* provide a valuable case study. The focus of the first work—*Ikke blot hende*—is form, which results in a symmetrical musical structure based on the chiastic structure of the Hans-Jørgen Nielsen poem. In the next piece—*Morgen*—attention shifts entirely to pitch combinations as the composer explores a variety of unconventional trichord clusters. *Børn kender overmagt*, which lasts only three musical phrases, is a grid-based study in the efficient incorporation of

\[
\begin{align*}
&Barn rødkindet \\
mor stærk \\
barn hjælpeløs \\
mor omsorgsfuld
\end{align*}
\]

Similar textual treatment can be found in Part 1 of *Konstateringer*, in which words are simply assigned pitches and durations, and the piece unfolds following a prescribed set of rules. *6 Enkle Danske Sange* exhibits a similar objectivity—the sing-song melodic approach and harmonic simplicity seem mostly unrelated to the meaning of each of the texts.

In a handful of works, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen creates original texts derived from pre-existing musical material. The text of *On One Note*, for instance, consists entirely of absolute pitch names,\(^\text{101}\) nonsense syllables, beat numbers, and segments of the composer’s original text “to play one note is good.” It is a piece of absolute music devoid of any deeper textual interpretation. The same can be said for the deconstruction pieces *Sound I* and *Sound II*, in which phonemes are extracted from John Dowland’s *Flow my tears* to provide the textual basis for these little studies. In these works, as well as *Green*, concrete sounds are isolated from their original expressive context and simply examined objectively.

*Ad Cor* is unique in its incorporation of two extremely expressive and contradictory texts based on the Old Testament Song of Songs and the Medieval hymn *Salve mundi salutare*:\(^\text{102}\)

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\(^{101}\) The Scandinavian countries use the German pitch-name system.

\(^{102}\) These texts are both set in the Buxtehude cantata of the same name from which Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s *Ad Cor* is derived.
Movement 1: Wound!

you have wounded my heart,
my bride.
In this wounded heart may your love gain entry,
my love.

Movement 2: Joy!

Hail to thee,
my love.
I greet you with a joyful heart.
Embracing you is a joy.
With a lively heart I call to you,
truly, dearest heart, I love you.

These, however, are followed by the percussionist’s delivery of a poem by Ursula Andkær Olsen which explicitly negates the sentiments expressed in the first two movements:

Movement 3: I laugh at you mockingly, intimacy-lovers
I laugh at you mockingly, solicitude-lovers
I laugh at you, love-lovers

I don’t want your authenticity
I don’t want your tastefulness
I don’t want your true feelings

I want to BATHE in true sentimentality
I want to be CLEANSED in true sentimentality
My body SCREAMS for sentimentality

a hard, smooth material
I’d be molded into

now is the time

I SHALL LIFT UP MY COUNTENANCE [UPON THEE]¹⁰³ AND GIVE THEE SHIT

THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH MY FEELINGS

I am completely without empathy
it happens to me frequently
I am not evil
I just can’t feel anything/anyone

¹⁰³ These bracketed words from the original translation are not included in the piece.
In Movement 4, the first three movements are combined in an effort to allow all three sentiments equal footing. The composer chooses not to pick a side.

6.4 Nature

A major element unifying most of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s vocal works is a focus on nature. This is apparent as early as *Eksempler* (1970), with the penultimate movement’s vivid descriptions of the forest landscape in which an old man is meditating, but nature becomes a much more consistent theme beginning in the 1990s. *Skabelsen – Den 6. Day* (1991), for violin and double choir, is a setting of an excerpt from Anders Sunesen’s (c. 1167 – 1228) *Hexaëmeron*, a recounting of the six days of creation. The excerpted Latin text consists of a massive list of animals that were brought into being on the sixth day of creation, ending with the creation of man. The score for the theatrical adaptation of *The Odyssey*, *Blæs på Odysseus*, is filled with musical depictions of the north, south, east, and west winds, storms, and the sea. The music in one scene even concludes with a quotation of the famous Medieval rota *Sumer is icumin in*, music that cannot help but elicit thoughts of nature to one familiar with the piece. String Quartet No. 9, “Last Ground,” opens with pre-recorded sounds of the sea, which act as germinal material for the composed music that follows while also periodically returning to interact with it.

*Four Madrigals from the Natural World* and *Sound/Sight* form a set, since they share two movements. The works consist of settings of six Les Murray poems, each of which focuses on a different creature from, or environment in, the natural world. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s settings of these poems incorporate madrigalisms that are intended to produce characteristic

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104 “Bats’ Ultrasound” comes from Murray’s collection *The Daylight Moon*; “Comete” comes from *Subhuman Redneck Poems*; the remaining four poems come from *Translations from the Natural World.*
sounds of the animals that are depicted. This is particularly true with the *Four Madrigals*, which are more representational than the outer movements of *Sound/Sight: Spermaceti* and *The Gum Forest*. The whistles and whispered text in *Bats’ Ultrasound* are a musical depiction of echolocation, while the Soprano and Tenor soloists arpeggiate and glissando back and forth, like bats soaring through the air. *The Octave of Elephants* includes a Bass ostinato meant to represent the lumbering gait of the gargantuan beasts, and their trumpet calls are mimicked through the use of cluster chords that glissando up and down in parallel motion. The music of *Cattle Egret* has a more anxious tone, with rapid, staccato text delivery in the upper voices and a contrapuntal cacophony that recreates the disorganized excitement of a flock of birds pecking at the swarm of insects which torment a herd of cattle. In *Comete* the music adopts a more relaxed atmosphere, with pedal tones sung through gradually-transforming vowels and counterpoint that flits about melismatically to depict a woman’s hair trailing behind her like the tail of a comet.

Movement 2 of *Three Stages*, titled “In the Woods,” is a haunting forest soundscape, complete with birdcalls which mimic the nightingale, blackbird, crow, chaffinch, titmouse, dove, oriole, owl, and cuckoo, as well as Clement Janequin’s *Le chant des oiseaux* and several other songs and poems about the birds and the seasons (for a complete list, see Chapter 3, pp. 64-65). There is a comparison to be made between these materials and those that comprise the city soundscape of Movement 1, “In the Streets,” which include Danish street cries (transcribed and catalogued by Vagn Holmboe), shouted profanity, vocal reproductions of automobile noises, a protest chant, a Danish folk song, and excerpts from newspaper articles. There is an obvious equivalence between the two soundscapes, as though the composer is intentionally comparing the wildness of the woods to the wildness of the man-made environment. The implication is that
the natural world, for all its strangeness, is actually less wild than the “civilized” world, whose soundscape is far more chaotic and harsh.

The incorporation of wood instruments in Green appears to be related to the work’s extra-musical reference to nature, as the angklung, claves and guiro are appropriate compliments to the William Cornysh poem “To the greenwood must we go.” However, the composer also incorporates these instruments in contexts which appear completely unrelated to the natural world, as in Triptykon, On One Note (which also calls for the Japanese binzasara), and Ad Cor (in which the log drum plays a foundational role). Indeed, nature plays a major role in Gudmundsen-Holmgren’s work in general, even when there is no explicitly-stated connection. He has described multiple instrumental works using the term “jungle baroque,” implying a kind of immense wildness related to the uncultivated natural environment. In Musikken er et monster—the feature-length documentary on the composer—he describes nature’s influence on his work, in particular the influence of landscapes of the Danish island of Samsø: “Speaking for myself, I know that the hills of Samsø and the sea’s mumbling along the shoreline are such decisive moments of daily life that they’re in my subconscious and constantly liable to surface in some form or other.”

For Gudmundsen-Holmgren, there is a close connection between nature and death—an embracing of the life cycle that unifies all living creatures and the environment they inhabit. The final movement of Three Stages—“Streets, Woods, – Like as the Waves”—features a musical rendering of Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 60,” evoking the ocean’s waves as a reminder of our collective, relentless trudge toward the grave:

105 Gudmundsen-Holmgren, Musikken Er et Monster.
Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,
So do our minutes hasten to their end;
Each changing place with that which goes before,
In sequent toil all forwards do contend.

A powerful scene in *Musikken er et monster* shows the composer lying on his back in the tall
grasses on the coast of Samsø, reflecting on this very connection:

There’s something deeply moving lying on your back on the ground, thinking
about “ashes to ashes; dust to dust.” It’s nice to think one disappears or that one
perhaps carries on—seeped into the earth, made use of in some manner, and that
one has arisen from that same near-nothingness. There’s something very
encouraging about this.\(^{106}\)

This sentiment is echoed in the *Igen* choruses, which invoke the concept of time—using the
imagery of the rising and setting sun—for the same purpose.

Perhaps this connection to nature is ever-present in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s work;
perhaps his outlandish combinations of disparate musical materials and the peculiarities of his
formal and harmonic constructions are merely a manifestation of the wildness and peculiarity of
the natural world. The composer implies as much: “Sometimes I am told my music is strange, to
which I reply: ‘But doesn’t nature sound strange?’”\(^{107}\)

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\(^{106}\) Gudmundsen-Holmgreen, *Musikken Er Et Monster*.
\(^{107}\) Ibid.
Conclusion

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen is a unique figure among his “Class of ‘32” cohort. Ib Nørholm and Per Nørgård, who also embraced New Simplicity early on, diversified their compositional approaches over the years; Gudmundsen-Holmgreen appears not to have done so. Rather, he was always searching for new ways to grapple with the same philosophical problems. There are echoes of his early compositional strategies in his later works; even in the more virtuosic, post-2000 choral pieces, the fundamental elements of the style are still present. The superimposition technique the composer uses in Three Stages, the Green quartets, Song/Play/Company, and Ad Cor is merely the development of a strategy employed on a large scale several decades earlier in Triptykon (1985). The grid technique he developed in the 1960s, which produced the pitch content for so many of his instrumental works, is employed at least as late as On One Note (2014). The quotation and stylistic collage which permeate the 1960s and 1970s works Mester Jacob, Repriser, and Symphony, Antiphony re-emerge in On One Note and the superimposition pieces. The unconventional, even outlandish, instrumental combinations in Je ne me tairai jamais. Jamais and Plateaux pour deux are tempered to some degree in Green and On One Note, but they return in full force in All in One. The clearest example of the composer’s stylistic consistency is in the comparison of the second movement of Igen, “Tid til,” with that of Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s quintessential New Simplicity work, Tricolore IV. The mere fact that those relentless, mono-rhythmic stepwise-moving thirds return in his work almost forty years later is evidence that the composer never really left New Simplicity territory.

Although New Simplicity as a style is difficult, maybe impossible, to define, the musical and aesthetic values associated with the term are ever-present in the composer’s work. The four
style traits that Erling Kullberg identifies (as discussed in Chapter 1)—Concretism, Absurdism, Stylistic Pluralism, and Påny-Simplicity\textsuperscript{108}—are fundamental to the composer’s aesthetic. His treatment of unchanging musical materials in \textit{Igen} and \textit{Three Stages} and his objective approach in setting the works of concrete poets like Hans-Jørgen Nielsen are manifestations of Concretism. The Absurdist element is obvious in the composer’s fascination with Samuel Beckett and his own Absurdist music drama \textit{Sol går op, sol går ned}. Elements of Stylistic Pluralism appear throughout his oeuvre, in the way he incorporates bluesy chromaticisms into otherwise buttoned-up choral and orchestral pieces, instruments from non-Western cultures like the Indonesian angklung and the Japanese binzasara into Western classical ensemble settings, and Renaissance and Baroque “artifacts” into modern musical contexts. Even Påny-Simplicity, which this author interprets as a kind of Neo-Simplicity, is present in works like \textit{Forårsnat} or \textit{Moving Still}; the melodic writing and harmonic scheme in each of these works are a nod to music of the Danish Golden Age.

Of course, these four general characteristics are simply one author’s observations. Any discussion about Danish New Simplicity is hampered from the start, due to the lack of a unified definition of the style. Perhaps the attempt to formulate a universally-applicable definition is an act of futility, considering that each of the New Simplicity composers seems to inhabit that space differently. The term is, like all musical labels, an over-generalization. However, the style traits outlined throughout this study are intended as a starting point in explicitly defining not only the New Simplicity aesthetic in general, but also the style as manifested in Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s works specifically. It should be clear, by this point, that simplicity, new or old,

plays a fundamental role in the composer’s work. The complex textures, sonorities, and timbral combinations that emerge in his pieces are comprised, almost entirely, of simple materials; his harmonic language is rooted in the use of pedal point, diatonic pitch collections, and unconventional, grid-based sonorities that re-emerge in the freely-composed works; and all of these components are presented using a mostly static, large-scale formal approach based on repetition and combination rather than development. The composer puts it even more succinctly: “poor in material, non-dramatic, without pathos, without expansions and culminations; neither describing nature or moods with lamentations, or being serial. But rather long.”

Why Simplicity?

The one point on which all of the literature on Danish New Simplicity seems to agree is the impetus for its emergence: Modernism. Surely, the tale is a bit folkloric: a group of young composers from an underappreciated Scandinavian country carpool to the ISCM Festival, and the musical landscape is forever changed. But, for Gudmundsen-Holmgreen at least, the experience seems to have been impactful. And after the watershed moment—the premiere of Henning Christiansen’s *Perceptive Constructions*—Gudmundsen-Holmgreen developed a musical style and philosophy that would occupy him for the rest of his life. For these two composers, New Simplicity at first meant provocation. This wasn’t unique to New Simplicity. As George Maciunas, one of the principal proponents of the Fluxus movement, wrote in his *Manifesto*, one of his primary goals was to “purge the world of bourgeois sickness, ‘intellectual,’ professional and commercialized culture, PURGE the world of dead art, imitation, artificial art,

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abstract art, illusionistic art, mathematical art, — PURGE THE WORLD OF
‘EUROPANISM’!”\(^{110}\) Not one for manifestos, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen employed a lighter
touch. What better way to reject the complexity of Modernism than with a piece of “art music”
that uses *Frère Jacques* as its cantus firmus? Of course, it wasn’t just Modernism the composer
was reacting to. In describing the central movement of *Triptykon*, the composer states, “The
movement’s exterior is so simple that I’m sure that most modernists would find it completely
idiotic—and that would give me a certain satisfaction. There is a special appeal in being the
laughing stock of both ordinary people and specialists.”\(^{111}\)

His persistence with simplicity can surely be connected to his love of Beckett, distrust in
grand statements, and overarching pessimism regarding humanity, but it takes other forms as
well. While he has a tendency to sabotage the more explicitly-emotional statements that emerge
in his work, there are moments in several of his pieces that seem naïve, even sweet. *6 Enkle Danske Sange* and *Comete* are clear examples. And his “jungle baroque” style is nothing if not ebullient. The manifestation of New Simplicity in the composer’s work is complicated, and it
would be a mistake to say that all of his music is rooted in pessimism. While he may refuse to
sing along with the “Hallelujah” chorus, he’s clearly not averse to the primal effects of powerful
music (consider for instance, the scene in *Musikken er et monster* in which the composer dances
like a madman to the final movement of *Triptykon*). Gudmundsen-Holmgreen proves that,
although they make strange bedfellows, pessimism and *joie de vivre* can coexist. Indeed, this
philosophical conflict is certainly an element of his New Simplicity works. Consider *Ad Cor*, the


composer’s love letter to, and rejection of, romantic sentimentality. Simple chord structures based on Buxtehude’s original cantata, a pop-music-inspired backbeat played on an African log drum, percussive bowing techniques and scratches in the strings, ornate flutters in the woodwinds, expressive choral glissandos, and a poem mocking the whole ordeal all combine to produce a piece just bursting with ambivalence. Perhaps this is the reason for simplicity; it allows the composer to pit seemingly-contrasting sensibilities against one another, without having to pick a side.
Index of Works Discussed

Since the following works are the primary focus of the document, they are discussed throughout, but substantial analysis specific to individual works can be found on the pages indicated below:

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