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## A portfolio of compositions with commentary

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by

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I have nothing to say

and I am saying it

and that is

poetry

as I need it<sup>1</sup>

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1. John Cage, 1959, 'Lecture On Nothing', in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p. 109.

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Harald Muenz

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# **0. Introduction**

The core of this thesis is my portfolio of compositions. The main questions around the pieces selected for the portfolio have arisen from what I perceived as an aesthetic gap between my music written before and after starting my PhD at Brunel University (January 2006). The focus of my work from 2005 until today has been coming to grips again with such seemingly old-fashioned things like traditional instruments and conventional musical parameters. Compared to my preceding work, this meant reintroducing what I had consciously blocked out for a while, namely European thinking centred on pitches and rhythms, or, more simply put, composition in the proper sense. I was under the strong impression I would have ducked something, had I not once more got seriously involved with these means. I was however trying, in the light of my earlier experimental pieces, to write music in a way that is different from how I would or could have done it earlier. My previous experiences were coloured by prescriptive notions of what music should be, and it was an exciting experience for me to realise what — in a different way — is still possible. Does this automatically mean I have fully returned to traditional, quasi-analogue craftsmanship, namely if, for example, no electronics appear on stage for the performance of a piece? In many of the compositions in this portfolio, I was nevertheless working with computer-generated materials. My assumption is that what is gathered here is in no way detached from what I wrote earlier, just clarifications of where I was coming from and where I eventually wished to go seemed desirable. These finally lead to more general conclusions, beyond my own personal experiences as a composer, about what ‘composition’ could still mean today.

I would not hesitate to characterise my ideas about music as conflicting: they have been informed by artists like John Cage and Helmut Lachenmann, Maurice Ravel and Franco Evangelisti, Alvin Lucier and Clarence Barlow, to name but a few. Thus, I like to consider my music to be related to historical contexts that are often seen as irreconcilable. Following this introduction in Chapter One, I describe from my personal perspective the musical relations to historical contexts I feel close to. I will attempt to go further into some of these influences, while also trying to point out any emergent contradictions. Here I would like to explicitly state that this text should by no means be mistaken for a manifesto *against* experimental music. (This would ultimately discredit my own work, too.) On the contrary, my account of the etymology and history of the term ‘experimental’ are targeted against a watered-down mainstream experimentalism, which along with its target audiences is going from strength to strength and therefore is highly marketable. I am arguing that applying the



term ‘experimental’ in such a context ultimately betrays the aims and objectives for which the mothers and fathers of Experimental Music once stood up for.

Commentaries on my own compositions are provided in Chapter Two. My music has been recently described as ‘complex’ and ‘polyhedral’.<sup>2</sup> One reason for this may be found in the fact that my compositional endeavours are nourished by a great many sources, motives and aesthetics, which are themselves also perceived as extremely disparate. As an artist, I feel totally free to play with all kinds of allusions, associations and contexts, so I am not prevented from referring to any ideas, however diverse. This chapter should be regarded as a condensed overview of the questions and ideas my compositional work is rooted in. Analyses will only be provided for selected passages which I regard as typical for my way of working, in particular for some technical or compositional procedures that I have started to use in the music written for this portfolio.

The final Chapter Three tries to identify some general technical-aesthetic issues my compositions are concerned with. It makes an effort to summarise how things possibly fit together and attempts to give a modest outlook towards the future of my own work and, very immodestly, towards new music in general. My guiding question has been to define what could be my own personal niche within the new music scene. These are remarks by a composer and not a musicologist, so some of my speculations are probably just poking around in the dark. When it comes to art, I am always happy raising more questions than giving any final answers since art is one of the last fields in our administered and commercialised Western societies in which ultimately nobody else can tell you what to do or not to do, which is priceless in every sense.

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2. Cf. Stefan Fricke, ‘Polygon’, 2011, [liner note], in *Harald Muenz. nearly — fast*, Darmstadt, Coviello Contemporary (COV 61117), 2012, [CD]; Bob Gilmore, ‘Making a friend’, 2011, [liner note], in *Harald Muenz. nearly — fast*, Darmstadt, Coviello Contemporary (COV 61117), 2012, [CD]; Florian Neuner, ‘Der Kölner Komponist Harald Muenz’, »*SprachProben*«, Producer Carolin Naujocks, Berlin, Deutschlandradio Kultur, 08/11/2011, 0.05 – 1.00, 2011, [radio broadcast]; Torsten Möller, ‘Harald Muenz: nearly — fast’, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 02/2012, Mainz, Schott, p. 81.



# **1. Conflicting Histories: Musical Background and Context**

The talk about experimental music, if it can be presumed<sup>3</sup> to make sense at all, could however only mean a way of composing which by itself has the features of an experimental design and therefore cannot anticipate its own results before they are brought to performance. Cage's *Concert for Piano*, for example, and his *Music Walk* [...] might be called experimental works in this sense.<sup>4</sup>

In the years from approximately 1992 to 2005, my music mainly dealt with artistic ideas which were trying to call into question widely accepted notions about composition, score, notation, composers, the concept of the work and ultimately music itself. This is evidence for how highly I have always valued an experimental approach towards composition in my musical thinking. I clearly still adhere to such ideas even today. Therefore, an attempt to clarify the origins and meaning of the term 'experiment' seems like a good point of departure. After making the leap from science to music, the relation between artistic and scientific use of the term will be considered. I shall set out the basic ideas of the American Experimentalists who grew up around John Cage as well as criticism of the use of the term. I will summarise how the contact with the American experimental movement became important for my own work, and finally discuss the conclusions I have drawn from these influences, both technically and aesthetically.

### **Contextualisation of my own work**

I feel strongly that the rampant contemporary 'experimental scene' is not really pertinent to what I am doing as an experimental composer. In the following, I will explain why I find recent experimentalism often superficial, and I will criticise its use of the term in a meaningless way. As a response to this, I have adopted a dialectic view which claims that, in the light of a widely promoted, funded and accepted mainstream experimentalism-on-the-surface, one should behave in an anti-cyclical manner, which means that I have again begun to concentrate more on the inner-musical game. I am aware that such a perspective can be quickly dismissed as conservative or even naive – I would rather characterise this approach

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3. Unless otherwise stated, all translations into the English are mine. The original German word *einbilden* is very ironic and ambiguous here: to imagine/to persuade oneself/to be smug about something.

4. Heinz-Klaus Metzger, 1959, 'Gescheiterte Begriffe in Theorie und Kritik der Musik', in *Die Reihe* 5, Wien, Universal Edition, 47.

as a logical consequence, since it is the result of an analysis of the current situation and anything but laziness.

My approach to experimentalism departs from seemingly extreme but in the end plainly and simply forceful artistic situations such as Cage's *4'33"*. I prefer to take the most radical (from the Latin *radix* = root) manifestations of the experimental thought as points of reference since they arguably express the thought in its purest and most crystalline form. Anything that comes after these tabula-rasa-positions and wishes to call itself 'experimental', including Cage's own oeuvre, needs to be measured against these poles of a radical definition of the term.

Under the later heading of 'Criticism', the reader will see that already in the early 1960s watered-down manifestations of the term 'experimental' were circulating and already heavily criticised in those days. One could argue that it is legitimate to neglect the word's original meaning (which is often perceived as narrow – I would just call it 'clear-cut') since so much has happened in the meantime, but is this really the case? Despite the fact I go to concerts, sit on international juries, see what students and colleagues do, and am generally well versed in the contemporary music scene, I am not aware of any music over the last 30 years that has touched or disturbed me in a similarly impressive manner as some early ground-breaking pieces I will describe later. Moving in new directions is obviously both possible and necessary, but then I find it difficult to refer to the glamorous name of a past movement although I no longer defend its original aims.

For me, experimental music is a concept of modernity that implies resistance to consensus and accepted mainstream. After 60 years of history, a consensual experimental mainstream has now been established and even sponsored. It is the subject of festivals, targeted competitions, university courses, etc.<sup>5</sup> My perspective on this is dialectical: if one feels the need to be experimental but a critical mass of composers represented by these institutions classifies themselves as 'experimental' or 'avant-garde' as well, then a reflective counter-position to this mainstream should be adopted. I have colleagues who mistake the resulting,

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<sup>5</sup> One may think of venues like Café Oto in London, the former Podewil in Berlin, Stadtgarten or reiheM in Cologne, The Kitchen or Experimental Intermedia in New York, Bang on a Can and the Bang on a Can Summer Festival, the SPOR festival Copenhagen, the Borealis Festival in Bergen, the Mex series in Dortmund, etc.

seemingly conservative attitude for naive whereas I believe that those who still believe in *épater le bourgeois* are themselves naive. They do not take into account the fact that it is precisely this breaking of conventions has become a convention itself, and every ‘serious’ experimental composer today is expected, in particular within his or her own circles, to conform to this ideal of being unconventional. It is particularly unhistorical if one pretends that being ‘experimental’ could still — like in the 1950s and 60s — rely on using or avoiding certain materials or techniques. There seems to be a misunderstanding between a genuine experimental approach and the mere, purely positivist demand for innovation. Finally, if the rational aims and utopias of the early experimentalists are widely ignored, the attribute ‘experimental’ is essentially reducible to a mere capitalist brand name. The individual points mentioned will be explained in more detail in the rest of the chapter.

### **The claim of an ‘Experimental tradition’**

Three months before his premature death, the Northern Irish musicologist Bob Gilmore formulated what for him was the key defining element for Experimental Music: ‘It seems to me that, logically speaking, an experimental approach to the arts, like in the sciences, needs to be able to embrace both success and failure as a necessary part of its function. An experiment that could only have a positive outcome, could only be successful, I will argue, is not really an experiment at all.’<sup>6</sup> In other words: the idea of relying on experimental strategies that have proven to be successful and therefore are already part of an introduced ‘tradition’ is irreconcilable with the concept of an experimental approach. By this definition, such experimental music which deserves the name must go out on a limb and embrace the possibility of failure and losing it all — even on stage.

It is unfortunate that in his ‘Preface to the second edition’ of his groundbreaking book *Experimental Music: Cage and beyond*, even Michael Nyman himself claims there is a ‘sense of unified Anglo-American experimental *tradition*’.<sup>7</sup> He further emphasises this by saying he feels the need for someone to write a volume *Son of Experimental Music*.<sup>8</sup> However, a few

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<sup>6</sup> Bob Gilmore, cit. in ‘Orpheus Instituut: Bob Gilmore (1961 – 2015)’, [online video], [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQvv\\_SV9Tww#t=152](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lQvv_SV9Tww#t=152), at 2’04”, (accessed 10 January 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and beyond* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, xvii. Italics contained in the original.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

lines earlier he still put the word in scare quotes.<sup>9</sup> Later he adds that, at the time of writing his book, in ‘1972 what I chose to call “experimental music” was a minority sport’,<sup>10</sup> and that since then ‘some have colonized a mainstream market which would have been unthinkable when the book was written.’<sup>11</sup> In particular if an artist refers back to John Cage as one of their important predecessors, it would be a *contradictio in adiecto* to follow (!) an ‘experimental tradition’. In the final analysis, this would mean betraying the aims of the historical experimentalists such as Cage who founded this movement in the 1950s (cf. the section *Historic commitment* below). Claims that, in the meantime, we have moved on from the 1960s and an ‘experimental tradition’ has been established are logically absurd in themselves. Certainly time has passed in a chronological sense, but it is difficult to simply dismiss the fact that, originally, experimental music entered the scene as ‘an act the outcome of which is unknown’<sup>12</sup> to begin with. Thus the true essence of being an experimental composer is very much a *conceptual* one, whereas the artistic decisions accompanying it — including materials and tools used — will always be subservient. In all their overwhelming diversity, such decisions may be due to historical or even accidental circumstances (cf. in the case of Cage’s *Music Walk*) but are certainly not constitutive of being experimental. There is a substantial difference between ‘passing the torch on’ — in the sense of being true to a certain spirit and riding on the coat-tails of a perceived ‘experimental tradition’ — and perpetuating a certain successful expressive repertoire of things that work because they have done so in the past of Experimental art. Any given technique is not automatically and forever ‘experimental’ in itself. Particularly what has worked then and has thus become part of a global repertoire has already been digested and therefore does not ‘experiment’ any more.

Calling oneself ‘experimental’ is consequently also about the historic responsibility towards the artists who were experimental before us. If artists wish to be ‘new and provocative’, then they should precisely target taboos and fetishes that exist in our *current* societies. They are very unlikely to be the same as those which concerned us more than 50 years ago (nowadays nudity on stage, for example, would not have the same shock factor as back then). The musical scene of mainstream experimentalism has created new fetishes and taboos, or digital

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<sup>9</sup> ‘the “tradition” started in the US’ Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>12</sup> John Cage, ‘Experimental Music: Doctrine’, 1955, in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p. 13. Also cit. in Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 1.

gadgets and interdisciplinarity are now being seen by some exponents of an ‘experimental tradition’ as the very markers for the degree of innovation of their art. (How I see technology as related to fetishes and taboos will be explained later.)

For all those reasons I would call any experimentalism that claims to be part of a tradition a contradiction in itself. Reflecting once again about one’s own creative activity is a central claim of experimental music as an artistic practice, whereby just producing ‘weird stuff’ would seem neither a very convincing nor an attractive alternative to me. In the following, I would therefore like to investigate the origins and etymology of the word ‘experimental’ (which I believe everybody should have done before simply applying the term to their work). In addition, I want to call attention to the original values which John Cage as the central protagonist of ‘Experimental Music’ once championed.

### **‘Experiment’: some etymology**

As the principal entry for ‘experiment’, the *Oxford Dictionary of English* gives ‘a scientific procedure undertaken to make a discovery, test a hypothesis, or demonstrate a known fact’,<sup>13</sup> followed by a second meaning: ‘a course of action tentatively adopted without being sure of the outcome’. Interestingly, the latter formulation comes rather close to Cage’s definition of ‘experimental music’ I will consider later. The first entry for the German word *Experiment* in the German *Duden* gives a definition similar to the *Oxford Dictionary*’s one, then adding under 2) an ‘[audacious] attempt, venture; audacious, insecure endeavour’.<sup>14</sup>

An etymological analysis clarifies how these diverse meanings of the term fit together. The English noun *experiment* can be retraced to the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century Old French *esperment* (‘practical knowledge, cunning, enchantment; trial, proof, example, lesson’)<sup>15</sup>, whereby this noun is derived from the Latin verb *experiri* (‘to try, to learn by experience’)<sup>16</sup>. Digging further into the Romanic side of the semantic field is telling. If we strip off the prefix, we

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13. ‘Experiment *n.*’, in Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (eds.), *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12<sup>th</sup> edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008. Available online as: *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed 25/09/2012).

14. ‘Experiment’, in Günther Drosdowski et al. (eds.), *Duden Deutsches Universalwörterbuch*, Mannheim, Dudenverlag, 1989, p. 473.

15. ‘Experiment (n.)’, in Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001 – 2012, <http://www.etymonline.com> (accessed: 16/08/2012).

16. ‘Experiri’, in Ernst Habenstein, et al., *Grund- und Aufbauwortschatz Latein*. Stuttgart, Klett, 1979, p. 50.



arrive at an undocumented but presumed<sup>17</sup> Latin verb *perire* or *periri* ('to make an experience, to try'<sup>18</sup>), which is a compound itself made up from the preposition *per* ('through, completely, to destruction') and the verb *ire* 'to go'.<sup>19</sup> Its literal meaning, 'to go through', is at the root of the Latin *periculum* 'an attempt, risk, danger'.<sup>20</sup> This has survived in the contemporary Italian *pericolo*<sup>21</sup> ('danger') as well as in the English terms *peril*<sup>22</sup> and *to perish*.<sup>23</sup> Harper's etymologic dictionary also identifies this as 'a cognate with G[ree]k *peria* "trial, attempt, experience"'.<sup>24</sup>

The present perfect of the deponent verb *experiri* reads *expertus sum*.<sup>25</sup> This could nowadays not only be translated as a verb form but as a complete phrase: 'I am an expert', in the sense of 'I have become an expert by trying out something'. The current Italian term *perito*, which has the same *periri* root, is used as both an adjective ('one who is particularly skilled in an art or science') or noun ('expert') and is even conferred as an academic title.<sup>26</sup> It embodies the kinship of research with risk and is the more academic synonym for the Italian *esperto*, which again shares the *experiri* root and the same meanings with the English noun/adjective *expert*.

It is most relevant for our definition that a close connection between striving to obtain knowledge and the danger of loss seems to have existed for a long time in the linguistic field between *experiment*, being an *expert* and the inherent *perilous* risk. However, 'experiments' have not always been a fundamental part of scientific research. The activity *to experiment* has been shown to have been derived from the noun from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>27</sup> A subsequent seventeenth century Latin-English dictionary has 'an Experiment, Tryal' for the noun<sup>28</sup>.

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17. 'Perito (2)', in Nicola Zingarelli, *Lo Zingarelli. Vocabolario della Lingua Italiana*. 12<sup>th</sup> edition, Miro Dogliotti and Luigi Rosiello (eds.), Bologna, Zanichelli, 1994, p. 1315.

18. Loc. cit.

19. 'Perish', in Harper, *ibid*.

20. 'Peril (n.)', in Harper, *ibid*.

21. 'Pericolo', in Zingarelli, p. 1313.

22. 'Peril (n.)', in Harper, *ibid*.

23. 'Perish', in Harper, *ibid*.

24. 'Peril (n.)', in Harper, *ibid*.

25. Habenstein, loc. cit.

26. 'Perito (2)', in Zingarelli, p. 1315.

27. 'Experiment (n.)', in Harper, *ibid*.

28. 'Experimentum', in Elisha Coles, *A dictionary, English-Latin and Latin-English: Containing All things Necessary for the Translating of either Language into the other*, London, Printed by John Richardson for Peter Parker ... and Thomas Guy, 1679, [no pagination]. Available online on: *Early English books online*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> (accessed 16/08/2012).

Francis Bacon is usually considered as having formulated the epistemological shift from medieval thinking towards modern research methodologies: in the 82<sup>nd</sup> chapter of his major philosophical work *Novum Organum* he first criticises the traditional method from the middle ages, when scholars, instead of undertaking their own practical research, referred back to texts of great philosophical authorities of the past such as Aristotle. Second, Bacon classifies the method of deducing new results exclusively by one's own mental-logical cogitation as ideology.<sup>29</sup> He suggests a third, different approach, namely 'the opening and laying out of a road for the human understanding direct from the sense, by a course of experiment orderly conducted and well built up'.<sup>30</sup> Bacon's then groundbreaking perspective certainly does not consider the scientist a sleepwalker, but rather someone who carefully prepares an experimental situation that may serve as a springboard for further investigation.<sup>31</sup> This is not too far from a popular contemporary view: 'an experiment differs from pure observation in that a well-defined situation is first prepared. Subsequently, the behaviour of the prepared system will be observed'.<sup>32</sup>

### **Fluid definitions: 'Experiment' - 'Experimental' - 'Experimental Music'**

As soon as we depart from the scientific notion, the use of the term 'experimental' becomes nebulous. In the arts, it now seems to be used in an excessive manner. It remains unclear whether the tiered approach towards definitions found in the Oxford reference suite of dictionaries depends more on the respective target audience or on the authors of the entries. Whereas the *Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art* admits it is 'an imprecise term [...] sometimes used virtually synonymously with "avant-garde"',<sup>33</sup> *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary* simply talks about something that is 'radically new and innovative' in an

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29. '[...] logical invention [...] her answer is well known; she refers you to the faith you are bound to give to the principles of each separate art.' Francis Bacon, 1863. *The Works, Vol. VIII.*, trans. J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis and D. D. Heath, Boston, Taggard and Thompson, 1863. Available online as: 'THE NEW ORGANON OR TRUE DIRECTIONS CONCERNING THE INTERPRETATION OF NATURE, Francis Bacon 1620', [http://www.constitution.org/bacon/nov\\_org.htm](http://www.constitution.org/bacon/nov_org.htm) (accessed 05/06/2011).

30. Loc. cit.

31. '[...] the true method of experience [...] first lights the candle, and then by means of the candle shows the way [...]' Ibid.

32. 'Ein Experiment unterscheidet sich von der reinen Betrachtung dadurch, dass zunächst eine genau definierte Situation präpariert wird. Anschließend wird das Verhalten des präparierten Systems beobachtet [...]' German Wikipedia, 'Experiment', <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Experiment> (accessed 15.06.2010).

33. 'Experimental art', in Ian Chilvers and John Graves-Smith, *A Dictionary of Modern and Contemporary Art*, 2nd edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009. Available online as: *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed 25/09/2012).

artistic context.<sup>34</sup> *The Oxford Companion to Music* restricts this ‘with regard to music, [to] making some radical departure in technique’.<sup>35</sup> Apropos of the latter, rather popular notion, Michael Nyman accurately remarks ‘it would be incorrect to define experimental music [...] in terms of the newness or strangeness of the sounds it uses’,<sup>36</sup> giving Feldman as an example for an experimentalist who always composed for conventional instruments to be played in a traditional manner.

The *New Grove*’s article on ‘Experimental music’ is acknowledged as being taken over from *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*; hence, its definition — ‘radical opposition to and questioning of institutionalised modes of composition, performance, and aesthetics’<sup>37</sup> — can be easily applied to the specific context of the New York School. As we are looking for a definition of the term in music, it seems indispensable to bring up John Cage’s seminal utterance from 1955 again: ‘the word “experimental” is apt, providing it is understood [...] simply as of an act the outcome of which is unknown’.<sup>38</sup> Cage’s 1958 ‘lecture on composition which is indeterminate with respect to its performance’ confirms ‘that composition is necessarily experimental.’<sup>39</sup> Thus experimental action is extended onto the last stage in the musical production chain, that of the manifestation of the work when it is being practically realised.

This definition seems miles away from Theodor W. Adorno’s who praises ‘control’, ‘logic’, and ‘consequence’ as the fundamental value criteria for ‘good music’ in his *Philosophy of new Music*:

The objective consequence of the basic musical concept, which alone lends dignity to good music, has always demanded alert control via the subjective compositional conscience, at the expense of passive perception of sensual sound, alone defines the

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34. ‘Experimental [...] 2. (of art)’, in Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (eds.), *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 12th edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008. Available online as: *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed 25/09/2012).

35. ‘Experimental’, in Alison Latham (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Music*, online-only revised edition, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011. Available online as: *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed 25/09/2012).

36. Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 49.

37. Cecilia Sun, ‘Experimental music’, in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012. Available online as: <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed 02/10/2012).

38. John Cage, ‘Experimental Music: Doctrine’, 1955, p. 1.

39. John Cage, ‘Composition as Process. II. Indeterminacy’ 1958, in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p. 39.

stature of this perception, in contrast to mere ‘culinary enjoyment’. Insofar as modern music as an intellectual conception contemplates anew the logic of consequence, it falls into the tradition of the art of the fugue, as practised by Bach and even by Beethoven and Brahms.<sup>40</sup>

It was, of course, precisely this Germano-centric philosophy based on masterworks and rational coherence that the composers of the New York School wished to get rid of. Cage asked his famous question ‘Are sounds just sounds or are they Beethoven?’<sup>41</sup> Feldman enlarged this issue by linking it to technical procedures:

It appears to me the subject of music [...] has always been its construction. [...] Only by ‘unfixing’ the elements traditionally used to construct a piece of music could the sounds exist in themselves — not as symbols, or memories, which were memories of other music to begin with.<sup>42</sup>

Liberating music from any resemblance with tradition by treating it independently in separate parameters was, however, also the declared aim of the early Darmstadt composers. When Adorno in his 1961 lecture at the Darmstadt summer courses, which should later become the base for his essay ‘Vers une musique informelle’, formulated a definition of the experimental, he seemed to be under the impression of Cage’s recent *Ferienkurse* appearance.<sup>43</sup>

Experimental music should no longer just be a music that does not deal in stamped coins, but one which cannot be foreseen in the production process itself.<sup>44</sup>

Adorno poses the focus of indeterminacy on the entire *Produktionsprozeß*, too, which seems indeed nearly a paraphrase of Cage’s earlier definition. In the same article Adorno partly retracted his critical view about rule-based composing from his text ‘Vom Altern der Neuen

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40. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomster, New York, The Seabury Press, 1973, p. 12.

41. Cage, *ibid.*, 41.

42. Morton Feldman, cited in Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 50.

43. ‘Who, following a brief Donaueschingen visit in 1954, came to Darmstadt for the first time in 1958’. Lachenmann, Helmut, ‘Composing in the Shadow of Darmstadt’, 1987, trans. Richard Toop, in *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 23, no. 3/4 (September/December 2004), p. 44.

44. ‘Experimentelle Musik soll nicht länger nur solche sein, die nicht mit geprägten Münzen haushält, sondern eine, die im Produktionsprozeß selbst nicht sich absehen läßt.’ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Vers une musique informelle’, in *Gesammelte Schriften vol. 16*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1961, p. 523.

Musik'. However, the music aesthetician could probably not see things in any way other than dialectically, and so, in an essay on contemporary literature, he talks about 'the defamatory word experiment [...] Only through experimenting and not by staying safe does art still have a chance'.<sup>45</sup> Hence around 1960, Adorno still had the feeling that disparaging connotations of the term 'experimental' were in the air. Ferdinand Zehentreiter confirms Adorno was unable to consider reconciliation between constructivism and the need for spontaneous expression.<sup>46</sup> Approximately a decade later, in his *Aesthetic Theory*, the Frankfurt philosopher formulated this even more critically; this could be seen as an early admonition of what was to arrive through a purely trendy use of the term:

The violence of the new, for which the name 'experimental' was adopted, is not to be attributed to subjective convictions or the psychological character of the artist. When impulse can no longer find pre-established security in forms or content, productive artists are objectively compelled to experiment. This concept of experiment has, however, transformed itself in a fashion that is exemplary for the categories of the modern. Originally it meant simply that the will, conscious of itself, tested unknown or unsanctioned technical procedures. Fundamental to this idea of experimentation was the latently traditionalistic belief that it would automatically become clear whether the results were a match for what had already been established and could thus legitimate themselves. This conception of artistic experimentation became accepted as obvious at the same time that it became problematic in its trust in continuity. The gesture of experimentation, the name for artistic compartments that are obligatorily new, has endured but now, in keeping with the transition of aesthetic interest from the communicating subject to the coherence of the object, it means something qualitatively different: that the artistic subject employs methods whose objective results cannot be foreseen.<sup>47</sup>

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45. '[...] das diffamierende Wort Experiment ist positiv zu wenden; nur als experimentierende, nicht als geborgene hat Kunst überhaupt noch ihre Chance [...]' Theodor W. Adorno, 'Voraussetzungen. Aus Anlaß einer Lesung von Hans G. [sic] Helms', 1960, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften vol. II*. Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1974, p. 440.

46. Ferdinand Zehentreiter, 'Jenseits des "Alterns der neuen Musik"'. *Ausdrucksästhetische Korrespondenzen zwischen Theodor W. Adorno, Claude Lévi-Strauss und Brian Ferneyhough*, in Ulrich Tadday (ed.), *Musik-Konzepte 140. Brian Ferneyhough*, Munich, edition text + kritik, 2008, pp. 4 – 18.

47. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (eds.), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London, Continuum, 2002, pp. 23 – 24.

Here Adorno acknowledges a crucial terminological shift. Initially for the Darmstadt avant-garde, ‘experimental’ simply meant that the *procedures* applied by artists during the compositional process were formerly unknown or unused. In fact nowadays, even for composers who otherwise totally dismiss chance operations, a limited use of random procedures has become acceptable at a ‘pre-compositional’<sup>48</sup> stage. In the case of serial music, we got extremely coherent works of art. Whether or not composers interfere with the experimental processes they use (whether random or not), these will always lend a non-emphatic voice to the music. Perhaps in these cases title choice by composers such as ‘study’ or ‘etude’<sup>49</sup> can be seen as anticipatory excuses for not shocking the audience too much by the unfamiliar expression of the outcome. However, Cage’s radicalisation made the difference. By extending the concept of the experimental ‘unknown’ onto the ultimate manifestation of the work of art and making the finality of the result unpredictable he succeeded in undermining the notion of the fixable work itself — something where European ‘aleatorism’ fell — deliberately — short.

### **Differences between artistic and scientific practice**

Much experimentation in the natural sciences takes place at university level, and artists attempting to use a scholarly vocabulary, voluntarily or not, put themselves forward for a comparison between their practice and scientific laboratory settings. The Anglo-Saxon university system has actively tried to put artistic and scientific work on the same level under the common blanket label of ‘research activities’. Consequently, music theory and praxis are both being taught at university level, whereas in the framework of German Higher Education there is still a clear divide between the historic-analytic aspects of the subject on the one hand (accordingly musicology is the only discipline taught at universities) and music practice on the other (which is taught exclusively at conservatories called ‘*Musikhochschulen*’).<sup>50</sup> But what is more, research activities (‘*Forschung*’) are clearly confined, from both sides, to university level. In fact, until very recent *Musikhochschulen* did not even have the right to award doctorates at all, and still nowadays in practical disciplines like composition or

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48. The term ‘pre-composition’ seems to have become accepted for an early step in the compositional process, which is characterised by experimenting (!) with one’s materials. It may be asked specifically in this context, whether it makes sense to attribute such a low value — that of not being part of the composing process proper but happening ‘before’ (!) it — to this often very creative and serendipitous state.

49. Cf. Pierre Schaeffer’s series of ‘Études’ or Stockhausen’s early ‘Elektronische Studie’ nos. 1 and 2.

50. This is traditionally also the case in most continental European countries, namely in France and Italy with their *Conservatoires* and *Conservatori* respectively.

musical performance PhDs are not permitted. For a long time these differences within German Higher Education, alongside wide-spread ignorance about the details of university systems outside the country, have led to the question whether composers holding PhDs (who in most cases studied at Anglo-Saxon universities) can be considered artists at all, or whether they rather are failed composers who wound up as musicologists. Such divisive assumptions have been made obsolete in the UK and the US, or at least they make less sense.

As far as a traditional understanding of research is concerned, there are certainly clear distinctions between the artistic and scientific implementations of experimental setups. At first glance, both may use experimentation in order to produce results that were formerly unheard of or unthought of. One should be careful, however, not to put the approaches in these two domains on an equal level in an undifferentiated manner. Although there are obviously no prerequisites set in stone for producing art, it should be reasonably assumed that musicians who nowadays refer to their artistic practice as ‘experimental’ normally have had some experience with Cage’s works and writings. Indeed, Cage provides a good illustration of the fact that it is becoming increasingly difficult to agree on a common canon of (master)works every professional in the field considers important and therefore should be known. Perhaps one could safely posit that Schoenberg, or Webern made important contributions to 20<sup>th</sup> century art music (which is already a restriction of the entire field), but we may still lack historical distance from the post-war period. Already in the cases of Boulez, Stockhausen and Nono, somebody raised in a non-western European background could claim that the whole line down from the Second Viennese School towards serialism was historically overrated.<sup>51</sup>

Traditionally, scientists seemed to conduct their experiments primarily with the goal of producing accountable, hard evidence. Nowadays, one must even already be careful with this assumption. At least in the humanities, postmodernism has long since arrived and along with it came the principle of ‘participant observation’ in ethnology and cultural anthropology, which tries to expressly embrace the subjectivity of the researcher; findings in these subject areas are now sometimes published in story or diary format rather than as ‘objective’

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51. Cf. the recent discussion about a possibly biased public reception of Darmstadt, in Martin Iddon, *New Music at Darmstadt*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 21.

scientific articles.<sup>52</sup> It would be an oversimplification to talk about *the* sciences in a generalising manner, since experimental methods tend to vary substantially between disciplines. One only has to consider a molecular biologist in the lab, a linguist doing bibliographic research, or an anthropologist working in a field setting to get a feeling for the diversity of methods employed. However, the way scientists admit their own subjectivity regarding the topic being researched will still be different from the way artists are involved with their work. Artists often act intuitively to achieve unpredictable outcomes, but if one is to take Cage's thoughts seriously, the composer's subjectivity should be explicitly excluded, as opposed to a nineteenth-century tradition (e.g. still pursued by Schoenberg, Berg and Webern) when the arts were decidedly searching for this. Therefore, the question of objectivation looks more like a reversal of paradigms than a concomitant development within the two domains, at least as far as Cage's experimental approach is concerned.

Experiments in the sciences should normally be designed in such a way that their results may be reproduced within the scientific community for validation purposes. This inherent safety net addresses another major difference between scientific and artistic research, particularly to Cage's radical model. It would be neither necessary nor even desirable that the outcomes of any artistic experiment would be possible to be repeated another time by someone else in exactly the same manner. This is in stark opposition to the requirements for any scientific experiment.

### **Criticism of 'Innovationism'**

I consider the criterion of 'innovation' to be an unquestioned fetish within the new music scene. Challenging this still seems virtually taboo.<sup>53</sup> Even the philosopher Harry Lehmann, advocate of a 'New Conceptualism' in music, cherishes the 'guiding principle of novelty,

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52. Cf. e.g. the narrative account about a continuous two-years field research on religion and politics in Southern Italy's Basilicata region: Thomas Hauschild, *Magie und Macht in Italien. Über Frauenzauber, Kirche und Politik*, Gifkendorf, Merlin, 2002. (Also translated into English: Thomas Hauschild, *Power and Magic in Italy*, trans. Jeremy Gaines, New York/Oxford, Berghahn, 2011) The author has been teaching in HE since 1992 and is currently a Professor of Social Anthropology at Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (Germany).

53. The concept of 'progress', which is closely linked to that of 'innovation', was a central topic in Germany, especially in Heinz-Klaus Metzger's influential writings. Cf. 'Der Begriff des Modernen: Fortschritt und Regression', 1962, in Rainer Riehn (ed.), *Musik wozu. Literatur zu Noten*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1980; Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (eds.), *Musik-Konzepte 100. Was heißt Fortschritt?*, Munich, edition text + kritik, 1998.



advancedness or contemporariness'<sup>54</sup> in contemporary art, even though he relates it primarily to 'new "aesthetic levels"'.<sup>55</sup> Lehmann's theoretical model is based on the idea that, in the course of music history, 'work', 'medium' and 'concept' has been successively uncoupled from each other. Therein lies the idea that, over the course of history, artists are increasingly liberated from constraints. Thus, for those new music composers still wrestling with looking for something new, 'freedom' could not just mean to break away from the taboos of post-war modernism but at the same time from those of postmodernism as well. Similarly, for Michael Rebhahn the 'quality judgment'<sup>56</sup> about an artist is closely linked to 'the *innovative* work of art'<sup>57</sup> and the 'relevance of his work for the aesthetic discourse'.<sup>58</sup> The judgements of Rebhahn<sup>59</sup> and Lehmann,<sup>60</sup> their distinction between 'Art Music' and 'Contemporary Classics', seems artificial. 'Well made' but conventional art has always existed throughout history, and the music of our time is no exception. In view of future developments, the art historian George Kubler already made this statement in 1962, around Conceptual Art's hour of birth, under the heading of 'Finite Innovation':

Radical artistic innovations may perhaps not continue to appear with the frequency we have come to expect in the past century. It is possibly true that the potentialities of form and meaning in human society have all been sketched out at one time and place or another, in more or less complete projections. We and our descendants may choose to resume such ancient incomplete kinds of form whenever we need them.<sup>61</sup>

At the very latest after postmodernism, which in Lehmann's system is treated as a closed epoch that is already behind us, 'innovation' — defined in terms of a label of quality for

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54. Harry Lehmann, 2012, *Die digitale Revolution der Musik. Eine Musikphilosophie*, Mainz, Schott, 2012, p. 93.

55. Ibid.

56. Michael Rebhahn, 'No problem! Approaches towards an artistic New Music'. Transcription of a conference talk at 'New Perspectives for New Music', Harvard University, Department of Music, 13 April 2013, <http://hgnm.org/other-events/hgnm-conference-new-perspectives-on-new-music>, 15, (accessed: 30.03.2015).

57. Ibid.

58. Michael Rebhahn, 'I Hereby Resign from New Music', lecture given at the 46<sup>th</sup> International Summer Course for New Music Darmstadt, 20 July 2012, trans. Wieland Hoban. Cf. the original article in German 'Hiermit trete ich aus der Neuen Musik aus', in *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*, vol. 22, Mainz, Schott, 2014.

59. Ibid.

60. Harry Lehmann, 'Im Windschatten der digitalen Revolution. Neue Musik – Kunstmusik oder Zeitgenössische Klassik?', in *neue musikzeitung*, Regensburg, February 2015, p. 3.

61. George Kubler, 'Finite Invention', in *The Shape of Time. Remarks on the History of Things*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1962, pp. 123 – 130.

continuous progress — should have been generally shelved. In this respect we are in a different historical situation today compared for example to the discussion about ‘New Simplicity’ in the 1970s. It is not only irrelevant whether someone writes for violin or produces something digital (copying is obviously not bound to the medium),<sup>62</sup> but also whether meaning and aesthetic content are basically new. In particular, it is secondary for the *sensual* experience of music whether it is ‘innovative’ or not. Ultimately, after Modernism, American Experimentalism and Postmodernism, Lehmann’s alleged ‘content aesthetic turn’<sup>63</sup> itself would be no fundamental innovation since conceptual thinking represents a historically re-emerging artistic attitude but not a definable style or a delimited historical period.

Although one may notice a certain fetishisation of outward innovation inherent to the concept of ‘progress’ in post-war modernism, in the end the ‘novelty’ category should have been overcome nowadays, and certainly by post-modernism at the latest. (Anyway, the term seems rather to belong to the world of fashion than to the arts.) Nyman’s verdict on the topic — already quoted above — is trenchant (‘it would be incorrect to define experimental music [...] in terms of the newness or strangeness of the sounds it uses’<sup>64</sup>), and his state witness for this, Morton Feldman, is irrefutable. Therefore, the question how much the means and appearance of an artwork are novelties cannot be relevant anymore.

### **Art as an ‘erratic’ experience**

The requirement for continuous self-monitoring of one’s own work that scientific researchers are used to would be problematic to apply to any artistic discipline. It would conversely seem difficult to base science to the same extent on associative memories as it is the case in the arts. In fact, composers can often be relatively unaware of what they are actually instigating. This unwitting state may go on even until after a work is completed. On the contrary, being completely absorbed by a piece which seems to move on following its own rules while it is being written — ‘being inside a piece’ — is normally considered to be crucial by a composer over the duration of the working process. This suggests artists *need* to arrive, to a certain extent, at a sleepwalking state of mind when working creatively. Personally, I would

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62. The word play refers to Johannes Kreidler’s famous *bon mot* ‘Wer für Geige schreibt, schreibt ab.’ (‘Anyone who writes for violin, is copying.’) Cf. Johannes Kreidler, ‘Musik mit Musik’, in *Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik*, vol. 22, Mainz, Schott, 2012, p. 100.

63. Lehmann, *Die digitale Revolution*, p. 90 – 94.

64. Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 49.

probably find it undesirable to step back and be my own exegete of something that I am still completely involved in. (This indeed seems virtually impossible.)

If, at an early stage in the process, compositional experience suggests a certain procedure to achieve a particular outcome, this is quite often not set in stone and may well be varied or even completely abandoned. Ongoing changes in the experiment design may happen, in particular if one is still searching for ways to arrive at the best musical outcome. Initially, an idea may have been only vaguely at the back of one's mind and has then been shaping itself over the course of subsequent elaborations. In an extended understanding of art, any changes in the research focus, or methodological or procedural errors (which would be deemed unacceptable or outright failure in the scientific sphere), may in turn develop their own dynamics and yield new results. Although this way of working might be called inconsistent by an outside scientific (or musicological) observer, the result may still be of high artistic value. In contrast to such an open approach, one may as well initiate artistic experimentation under the auspices of a sand-box format, a free-floating playground, just to see which out of several outcomes best fits one's imagination. Finally, for an artist it is neither mandatory to accept a result which has been achieved by experimenting in any unconditional manner,<sup>65</sup> nor to keep it unpublished if it demonstrates something entirely different from what was anticipated. The experiment might merely be a way to get results one would not have obtained otherwise.

### **A game with anticipations**

Both artists and scientists must inevitably rely on achievements of their predecessors. Pretending to reinvent the wheel is impossible in the scientific as well as in the artistic domain. Meyer has shown for the first time that we enjoy music against a background of expectations on detail level as well as with regard to form and style.<sup>66</sup> Expectations allow us to appreciate Beethoven's experimentation with the sonata form, which he had inherited in a slightly different way from Haydn and Mozart, or to notice that Liszt, in his late piano pieces,

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65. I never went so far as to agree to Adorno's statement that 'correcting the fortune' was the warning symbol of works of art on-the-surface: 'The extremely objective critique of semblance incorporates an illusory element that is perhaps as irrevocable as the aesthetic semblance of all artworks. Often in artistic products of chance a necessity is sensed to subordinate these works to, effectively, a stylizing procedure of selection. *Corriger la fortune*: This is the fateful writing on the wall of the nominalistic artwork.' Theodor W. Adorno, 2002. *Aesthetic Theory*, Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (eds.), trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, London, Continuum, pp. 221 – 222.

66. Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1956.

crosses the line of traditional progressions from functional harmony which we have internalised. This also demonstrates how closely music is linked to its own tradition and repertoire. Over the course of time, composing music has often meant competing with historical models, and thus with the history of composition itself — at least with its virtual canon of masterworks — and if only under the form of a negative relationship in order to dissociate oneself from it. Any such game with preconceptions would normally not be tenable from a scientific perspective.

This leads to another turn. Dealing with listeners' expectations along these lines works on the basis of contradicting an inner-musical logic, which is established by a given piece itself, but is also partly codified by traditions and thus a cultural factor. Adorno, on the other hand, coined the paradox that failure to create one consistent work on the composer's side is inevitable for any successful piece of music, but then the risks inherent in musical experimentalism are passed down to the audience. Artistic research often yields surprises not only for its author but also for the aurally observing listener. This is also a result of the composer's natural drive to step up clashes between the listener's expectations and their non-fulfilment.<sup>67</sup> But if we consider audiences who attend experimental music events, we can probably accept as a fact they do take for granted or even expect that composers will thwart their expectations. We may assume that the artistic experimental search for something unexpected could raise the level of attention and intensify the perception of an audience by the challenges involved. 'Surprise' would then be a positive term for the form of disappointment that is normally expected by any alert musical audience. The question is whether introducing simple 'shock effects' on the surface level, which ultimately concertgoers expect from experimental music events anyway, can be called profound artistic research. Where would the research aspect be in predictable and undifferentiated 'experiments'?

In the past, composers could work against the framework of tonality *from within*. This led to a highly differentiated game of expectations and their denial, including some mannerisms or clichés that emerged over time. Today tonality as a given factor has long since ceased to

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67. If we accept e.g. Meyer's view that musical meaning is always derived from a denial of expectations, creating (or possibly avoiding?) these becomes downright the biggest challenge for any composer. Cf. Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotion and Meaning in Music*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1956, pp. 35 – 38.

exist. This makes the situation essentially different.<sup>68</sup> Any attempt to define ‘the listener’s’ expectations would be the impossible enterprise to define one common background canon of music against which ‘people’ listen. It is unclear against which part of the audience certain experimental attempts can be directed. The stereotype of a diffuse Western tradition could in turn refer to: classical music finishing with late romanticism; academic new music of the historic-serial Darmstadt type; post-war neoclassical styles; or, more in general, to any genre of new music which has become too watered down or digestible for the ears of its critics. Depending on the composer’s own vantage point, all these could be classified as being too moderate. Thus, playing the professional experimental revolutionary seeking out new and shocking techniques and effects in our diversified musical world (which has long since digested currents like fluxus) does not really make sense any more. In the view of what has already been accomplished quite effectively in experimental art movements of the 1950s and 1960s, this would indeed seem like the re-invention of the wheel.

### **Historic commitment**

It was again Michael Nyman who drew a very clear delimitation between experimental and avant-garde music, or as he calls it: the ‘Anglo-American experimental tradition’ and ‘European modernism’ (the latter including Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Iannis Xenakis, or Harrison Birtwistle).<sup>69</sup> In identifying the confrontation of these two currents, Nyman confirms that their differences constitute above all a sort of cultural clash.<sup>70</sup> The thinking of the American Experimentalists has been characterised by an explicit negation of Western European preconceptions about music and art in general. From this perspective, experimentalism could mainly be considered as a countermovement against deeply rooted European ideas — or should one say: preconceptions? — about composition and music-making. Cage’s attempts to get rid of what was perceived as exaggerated determinacy and control mentality took place during the heyday of Darmstadt serialism, which informed much Western art music in the 1950s. Cage should not so much be considered as the founder of a genuine American aesthetic but as one exponent in a long line of others (like Carl Ruggles or

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68. Also the argument that tonality is still a taboo doesn’t work any more since it has been re-introduced by many composers since the 1970 at the latest, e.g. in *Neue Einfachheit* or *Spectralism*.

69. Nyman, *ibid.*, p. 1. It is however odd to find Sylvano Bussotti, author of many open and graphic pieces, among the composers listed here by Nyman.

70. Quoting Alan Watts, Nyman points at the ‘differences in the basic premises of thought and in the very methods of thinking’, *ibid.*, 1.

Ruth Crawford Seeger) who went beyond the more folkloristic attempts by composers like Aaron Copland or Leonard Bernstein.

Nyman highlights some of the characteristic values supposedly shared by the European avant-garde considering each of the three components in the hierarchical production chain separately:<sup>71</sup>

The (self-image of the) composer:

- ... ‘Takes himself seriously’.<sup>72</sup>
- ... ‘Feels a responsibility to make, rather than accept’.<sup>73</sup>
- ... Has a ‘concern about what people will think’.<sup>74</sup>
- ... ‘Wishes to be considered great’.<sup>75</sup>

The (work of) music:

- ... Must compete with the idea of producing a ‘masterpiece’.<sup>76</sup>
- ... Is ‘forming understandable structures’.<sup>77</sup>
- ... Is ‘a *unique* object of contemplation’.<sup>78</sup>
- ... Is ‘a thing upon [...] which attention is focused’.<sup>79</sup>
- ... ‘Resists any active participation’.<sup>80</sup>

The listener:

- The reception of masterpieces is based ‘on the closed cycle, on passive contemplation, on purely aesthetic enjoyment’.<sup>81</sup>

For Nyman, this is in opposition to some fundamental convictions shared by the American Experimentalists:

The (self-image of the) composer:

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71. In the following, I have tried to retrace the original quotations by Cage and Boulez which have not been clearly referenced by Nyman.

72. John Cage, ‘Lecture On Something’, [1952?], in John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p. 130.

73. Loc. cit.

74. Loc. cit.

75. Loc. cit.

76. John Cage, ‘Composition as Process’, [1952?], in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, p. 46; and Pierre Boulez, ‘Sonate, que me veux tu?’, trans. David Noakes and Paul Jacobs, in *Perspectives of New Music*, vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 1963), p. 34.

77. John Cage, ‘Experimental Music: Doctrine’, 1955, in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, p. 13.

78. Boulez, *ibid.*, p. 33.

79. Cage, ‘Experimental Music: Doctrine’, p. 13.

80. Boulez, *ibid.*, p. 34.

81. Loc. cit.

- ... Feels a responsibility to accept the results of his procedures.<sup>82</sup>
- ... Should not assess the compositional act ‘in terms of success and failure’.<sup>83</sup>

The (work of) music:

- ... ‘Is a way of being in the world, becomes an integral part of existence.’<sup>84</sup>
- ... ‘Is not so much art as it is life.’<sup>85</sup>
- ... ‘Is an ethical category, no longer merely an aesthetic one.’<sup>86</sup>

The listener:

- ... (As well as composers and performers) should behave like a sound tourist.<sup>87</sup>
- Thinking should not have a chance to turn listening ‘into something logical, abstract, or symbolical.’<sup>88</sup>
- Their attention moves towards acoustic observation including the environment.<sup>89</sup>

At a closer look, each set of arguments cannot easily be assigned exclusively to composers in one group or the other, e.g. Cage certainly took himself seriously,<sup>90</sup> and for Stockhausen his own music was probably as much ‘an integral part of existence’. Mauricio Kagel would be another interesting exception to this Darmstadt cliché. Nevertheless, these straw man fallacies instantly trashed paramount unquestioned ‘standards’<sup>91</sup> of Western European music, namely long-established, seemingly eternal values of some ‘composers of the post-Renaissance tradition’.<sup>92</sup> Even in the words of one of these (Pierre Boulez) from that period experimental music ‘becomes an integral part of existence’<sup>93</sup>. The hierarchy in the musical world was broadly accepted as a hallmark of excellence for ‘great music’ — with the composer at the top who conceives logical and fully determined pieces of music to which specialised performers must dedicate a substantial amount of their life to be able to meticulously

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82. Cage, ‘Lecture On Something’, p. 130.

83. Cage, ‘Experimental Music: Doctrine’, p. 13.

84. Boulez, *ibid.*, p. 34.

85. Cage, ‘Juillard Lecture’, in John Cage, *A Year from Monday*, London, Calder & Boyars, 1963, p. 101.

86. Boulez, *ibid.*, p. 34.

87. Cage, ‘Experimental Music: Doctrine’, p. 13.

88. Cage, ‘Juillard Lecture’, p. 98.

89. Cage, ‘Experimental Music: Doctrine’, p. 13.

90. Cage confirmed this publicly on the 21<sup>st</sup> June 1992, only a few weeks from his death, in a talk he gave in the Sala del Buonumore of Florence’s Conservatorio L. Cherubini, when he stated about his piece *4’33’’*: ‘I didn’t think people would take it seriously. But I was serious.’ Transcription of the interview by Michele Porzio published in Giampiero Bigazzi, Giampiero (ed.), *John Cage* [special issue in the series:] *Sonora. Itinerari oltre il suono*, San Giovanni Valdarno (Italy), Materiali Sonori Edizioni Musicali, 1993, p. 15.

91. *standArts* eventually became the title of a piece of mine from 1996. In it a clarinet player must sight-read sequences of totally iconized notation from a laptop. Thus, like in a sort of musical Pavlov experiment, I was trying to spontaneously evoke their new music ‘standard’ reactions.

92. Nyman, *Experimental Music*, p. 1.

93. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

reproduce what the composer had imagined when writing the score — seemed to be deeply shaken. More such straw figures included the status of composers striving to create their own recognisable style allowing listeners to identify the music as theirs, very similarly to a commercial branded article, as well as that of players who supposedly felt comfortable in the slave-like role of a will-less virtuosic executant for all requests of the composer. The status of the fixed work was shattered by employing indeterminacy as a method of renouncing language-like content (although not all determinate music is necessarily language-like) and setting situations that allowed ‘sounds themselves’ to happen within. Finally the listener's role as a willingly consuming recipient was affected. Cage seemed to go in general for the opposite of European traditions, and nevertheless created ‘something’, even if ‘you don't have to call it music’<sup>94</sup>. (In the meantime it may however be asked whether Cage has not become more of a brand than any European composer.)

For Heinz-Klaus Metzger, one of the leading German post-war defenders of and writers about Cage, the direction of this heritage was quite clear. Metzger never tired of repeating that the rank of a composer should not be measured by what he creates but by what he does away with. Metzger explained this view of political Utopia in a 1992 obituary radio roundtable for John Cage:

Cage was one, I'd put it this way: a genius of abolition, as to what he abolished major things, as for example construction, coherence in music, the whole fad of order. He debunked the occidental ideology of art and the entire aesthetics based on necessity, order, coherence as superstition through the introduction of chance operations. He showed already in 1951, in the *Music of Changes*, that the pure workings of chance provide results that are more interesting and complex than the entire grandiose serial constructions *en vogue* at the time, which indeed came from ingenious constructors. This is quite extraordinary. He abolished the score then, beginning with the *Concert for Piano* from 1957/58, no coordinated interaction in an ensemble any more, but individualist anarchism of limited cooperation. He abolished all traditional ways of playing the instruments.<sup>95</sup>

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94. Cf. Neuner, Florian, “‘You don't have to call it music’”. Abschaffung: Veränderungen des Musikbegriffs nach John Cage’, in *Positionen*, vol. 90, February 2012, pp. 16 – 20.

95. Heinz-Klaus Metzger, ‘Aus einem Rundfunkgespräch anlässlich des 80. Geburtstags und zum Tod von John Cage’ *Deutschlandsender Kultur*, 05.09.1992, [radio broadcast with Heinz-Klaus Metzger, Dieter Schnebel,



Whether or not the sound configurations in *Music of Changes* are more interesting than those of *Structures I*, many of Cage's artistic interventions have still not lost their relevance since many of the beliefs he questioned have quite happily continued to survive the last 50 years; trying to shatter them is therefore certainly not a conservative way of going 'back to the roots' but a continuously ongoing task. Although the general awareness today of the historic commitment of the 1950s American 'experimental' movement has been partly diluted or may even seem obsolete to some, its original aims have not been discredited.

Arguably, experimental and avant-garde composers were closer to each other than one would expect. The fact that in most of Cage's music the performers are not allowed to act completely freely on the materials seems paradoxical. It is well known that Cage was not favourable to improvisation when his music was to be performed and wished to exclude improvisation during performances of his music. Even such widely undetermined pieces as those in his series of *Variations* need to be carefully worked out, a score prepared beforehand and minutely practised and rehearsed for performance by the player. The rules set by the composer, even where they are rudimentary, must ultimately be obeyed like in any other traditional score. This seems to be a contradiction within Cage's aesthetic project of 'freedom'. Although, in the light of his extensive use of chance operations, one may still be reluctant to call Cage a control freak. We may assume that the battle 'Darmstadt' versus 'New York' must have partly arisen from prevailing circumstances of the time. When Cage was asked much later, in 1990, whether 'experimental' and 'avant-garde' were two distinct categories in new music (as claimed by Nyman in his 1972 *Experimental Music*) or rather two terms for the same thing he answered laughingly 'I think they are very close together, almost as close as chaos and chance.'<sup>96</sup>

Nonetheless my own music has also always been clearly opposed to a concept of (free) improvisation. My compositions are ultimately about the desire to create musically binding results, which means that my scores are notated in a precise manner giving concise

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Frank Schneider, Jakob Ullman and Walter Zimmermann], in Heinz-Klaus Metzger, *Die freigelassene Musik. Schriften zu John Cage*, Rainer Riehn and Florian Neuner (eds.), Vienna, Klever, 2012. Cf. also Neuner 2012, p. 16.

96. Cit. in 'Zufall als Spielregel' [from an interview with Arlene Schloss first published in *die tageszeitung*, Berlin, 25.6.1990], in Angela Lammert and Hubertus von Amelunxen (eds.), *Iannis Xenakis. Kontrolle und Zufall*. Berlin: Akademie der Künste, 2011, p. 68.

instructions to the performers even when graphical notation is involved, e.g. in my series of 7 *Graphical sheets* from 1996 – 97.

## Criticisms

### Early criticism

Although it must often still have had negative connotations, experimentalism must have already lost some of its original explosiveness in the early 1960s. In his 1962 polemic ‘The Aporias of the Avant-garde’, Hans-Magnus Enzensberger, himself an experimental writer and theorist, launched a widely noted serious criticism claiming that:

A biologist who performs an experiment on a guinea pig cannot be held responsible for its [the guinea pig’s] behaviour. [...] Precisely the moral immunity, which he enjoys, suits the avant-garde. [...] The elements it borrows from science serve as an excuse. With the term ‘experiment’, it condones its results, takes back its ‘actions’ and pushes off any responsibility onto the recipient. All boldness is accepted as long as nothing happens to [the avant-garde] itself. The terms of the experiment shall insure it against the risk of all aesthetic production. It serves as a trademark and a magic hood at the same time.<sup>97</sup>

Here, the term even assumes a moral aftertaste by becoming synonymous with the extraordinary and extravagant. Instead of composers hiding their experimental steps from the pre-compositional phase before they finally fixed it in a determined final score (because they feel embarrassed that the notion ‘experimental’ could suggest something provisional, incomplete, half-done, or rough, something being produced by an unskilled or incompetent person, or because they are trying out things in a completely arbitrary way), they proudly start to hawk it around. We have seen Adorno warning, in his 1970 *Aesthetic Theory*, the term could become just fashionable,<sup>98</sup> a brand name for the unusual or a general label for a mix of ‘the categories of the modern’.<sup>99</sup> In an experimental approach for its own sake, Adorno saw a double-edged, both blunt and sharp sword. On the one hand, only works that are ‘useless’ — among which presumably most experimental music can be counted — escape from the verdict of providing mere entertainment,<sup>100</sup> but, as Mathieu Saladin points out:

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97. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘Die Aporien der Avantgarde’, 1962, reprinted in *Einzelheiten I + II*. Hamburg, SPIEGEL-Edition 2006/2007, pp. 273 – 274. In this quotation, ‘it’ always refers back to ‘the avant-garde’.

98. Cf. footnote 37. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, pp. 23 – 24.

99. Adorno, *ibid.*, p. 23.

100. ‘Insofar as a social function can be predicated for artworks, it is their functionlessness.’ Adorno, *ibid.*, p. 227.

[This] autonomy, if it is exacerbated, risks at the same time cutting the work off from social reality, dooming, in turn, the effectiveness of the presumed critique: the work then wallows in a ghetto and becomes inoffensive.<sup>101</sup>

In his composition classes, Helmut Lachenmann has never tired of criticising any form of blind experimentalism as attempts to escape to an ultimately idyllic refuge: the composer builds a delimited protective fence around his music (and himself) by restricting his expressive means to one constantly maintained material-situation which appears in complete isolation. The result is a kind of sterile laboratory scenario, and, paradoxically, a perfect idyll emerges even from some formerly provocative material, thus creating an auto-poetic subsystem through conscious segregation from any other musical reality or musical context.

By 1972, the ludic aspect of the experimental seems to have come to its breakthrough when the German author Helmut Heißenbüttel,<sup>102</sup> who is usually counted among experimental writers himself,<sup>103</sup> criticises how:

At first, the experimental simply seems to be the other, the unfamiliar, but also the suspect. The perspective seems consistent and clear but the accuracy of the term used in this manner is lacking. What is intended, what is to be interpreted or attacked? Does the use of the term make sense or does it only represent a kind of fashionable jargon [...]?<sup>104</sup>

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101. Mathieu Saladin, 'The Fetish Character in Experimental Music', 2012, p. 6, [http://www.festival-meteo.fr/documents/TACET/INFLUX/INFLUX%20ARTICLES/13\\_SALADIN\\_EN\\_1006.doc](http://www.festival-meteo.fr/documents/TACET/INFLUX/INFLUX%20ARTICLES/13_SALADIN_EN_1006.doc) (accessed 20/08/2012).

102. In 1965, Karlheinz Stockhausen had used excerpts from his 'Einfache grammatische Meditationen' in his *Mikrophonie II*.

103. He was in opposition to the writers of 'Gruppe 47' (which, among others, included Heinrich Böll) who generally never abandoned a traditional narrative way of 'story telling'.

104. 'Das Experimentelle scheint zunächst einfach das Andere, das Ungewohnte, aber auch Verdächtige. Die Blickrichtung scheint einheitlich und eindeutig, die Treffsicherheit des so verwendeten Begriffs jedoch gering. Was wird gemeint, was soll interpretiert oder angegriffen werden? Hat der Gebrauch des Begriffs einen Sinn oder stellt er nur eine Art Modejargon dar, so wie man in Frankreich eine Saison hindurch den Superlativ: 'C'est Bayreuth' verwendete?' Helmut Heißenbüttel, 'Keine Experimente? Anmerkungen zu einem Schlagwort', 1972, in *Zur Tradition der Moderne: Aufsätze und Anmerkungen 1964 – 1971*, Neuwied and Berlin, Luchterhand, p. 128.

In further explaining the need for both interpretation and attack within experimental works of art, Heißenbüttel demands that the artist take a critical and even aggressive stance. This is incompatible with the non-binding, arbitrary nature of some alleged ‘experimental’ productions. When established improvisation groups only reproduce a fixed style they have already codified over and over again or if mere formulas are reeled off, surprising outcomes are excluded from the outset. The same is true for composers: is there any new quality added if they just solidify what they have already been testing earlier over and over again, or is perceptual awareness in this case even being taken *away*?

### **Sounds becoming themselves**

As an important criterion for the ‘new in this music’,<sup>105</sup> Christian Wolff coined the famous phrase that ‘sound come[s] into its own’.<sup>106</sup> This passage is repeatedly quoted by John Cage, most prominently in *Silence*,<sup>107</sup> and I have referred to the fact earlier on these pages myself. Mathieu Saladin analysed the inherent risk of turning the concept of ‘freeing sound’ into a mere fetish by making it a pure ‘ideology of sound in itself’.<sup>108</sup> In fact, for a certain time in the 1990s, the Wandelweiser group from Berlin became a fashionable talking point in Germany’s new music scene for their habitually long and soft pieces containing only few individual notes separated by very extended periods of silence. After having heard several concerts of the group (whose stagings more and more resembled a religious service) as well as talking to some of their protagonists, I was regularly left with the impression that the performances were not so much about the — sparse — sounding events but about devotional sectarianism by confining clear boundaries in the sense of ‘who is not with us is against us’.

Aesthetically, the group clearly linked themselves to composers who, in their own works, were either featuring very soft musical events (namely Morton Feldman and late Luigi Nono) or exploring individual tones (like Giacinto Scelsi) but predominantly to John Cage as the high-priest of ‘Silence’. Wandelweiser founding member Antoine Beuger outlined the self-image of the group in a manifesto, described by a fellow member as an ‘important essay’ for

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105. Loc. cit.

106. Christian Wolff, ‘Immobility in Motion. New and electronic music’, 1957, in Christian Wolff, *Cues. Writings & Conversations*, Cologne, MusikTexte, 1998, p. 24.

107. John Cage, ‘History of experimental music in the United States’, in *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, 1961, p. 68.

108. Saladin, *ibid.*, p. 7.

the group's concept about the relationship between 'the noise of the world' and silence, and the function of tone within that continuum<sup>109</sup>:

After Cage had composed his silent piece 4'33", his life — and not just his life — has changed. It became a life in the sense of 4'33". A life to fulfil the truth claim, which had taken possession of him through the 4'33" event.<sup>110</sup>

With as much pathos Beuger mentions the importance of 'practising non-intentionality; always finding ways how music can happen as pure clang.'<sup>111</sup> He continues, 'The cut into the noise, which in the sense of nature is completely arbitrary (each cut is equally likely), raises, as a historical event, a claim to truth,' however, Beuger emphasises, 'the claim is to be *a*, not *the* truth ... and pushes a new perception, a new feeling, a new thinking.'<sup>112</sup> When he writes about 'a composing which opens to the event, meaning: the encounter with the real',<sup>113</sup> Beuger could well be referring to Lacan's concept of 'The big Other'<sup>114</sup> but this is not acknowledged anywhere. It is to be hoped that these modes of expression are really about truth and not just blown-up, pseudo-philosophical hocus-pocus.

The Wandelweiser group does deliberately dissociate their own restful music from the perceivably motoric one of others. While the slightly ecclesiastic character of celebrating their music was maybe already generally foreshadowed by Cage's own often guru-like self-fashioned image, the negative connotations assigned to the noisy sounds of the real world stand in clear opposition to the ideas of the American composer who did *not* dismiss his acoustic environment, such as traffic sounds, as disturbing in the first place. He even explicitly welcomed any sound entering his apartment from New York's 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Cage's

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109. Michael Pisaro, 'Wandelweiser', [web blog], 2009,

<http://erstwords.blogspot.com/2009/09/wandelweiser.html>, (accessed 29/08/2012).

110. Beuger, Antoine, 'Grundsätzliche Entscheidungen', 1997, [http://www.timescraper.de/\\_antoine-beuger/texts.html#Antoine\\_Beuger\\_\\_](http://www.timescraper.de/_antoine-beuger/texts.html#Antoine_Beuger__) (accessed 27/07/2014).

111. Loc. cit.

112. Loc. cit.

113. Loc. cit.

114. Evans claims that 'The big Other designates radical alterity, an other-ness which transcends the illusory otherness of the imaginary because it cannot be assimilated through identification. Lacan equates this radical alterity with language and the law, and hence the big Other is inscribed in the order of the symbolic. Indeed, the big Other is the symbolic insofar as it is particularised for each subject. The Other is thus both another subject, in his radical alterity and unassimilable uniqueness, and also the symbolic order which mediates the relationship with that other subject.' Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, London, Routledge, 1996, p. 136.

worldly way of dealing with our sonic environment has instead strongly influenced my own ideas about listening and acceptance of ‘disturbing’ sounds.

Without mentioning the Wandelweiser composers, the musicologist Peter Niklas Wilson commented on the polemics arising around its members in a commentary for the journal *MusikTexte*, the subtitle of which, ‘The Scelsi-Feldman-Nono-Cult’, has become a famous dictum in the German-speaking new music scene ever since.<sup>115</sup> Wilson sees the fragility of works such as Nono's late String Quartet, Scelsi's *Quattro pezzi per orchestra*, or Feldman's *Second String Quartet* as a revival of ‘sacral longings’<sup>116</sup> which were taboo for a long period under the auspices of modernism. Wilson complains that these needs are not being admitted, and even glossed over by their own adherents who elevate the fragility of some of the music by these three composers into a political counter-proposal ‘against the dulling of the senses in the capitalist media culture’.<sup>117</sup> Wilson refutes this argument with reference to the similarly sensitive, but back then far less popular works by Lachenmann or Spahlinger.<sup>118</sup> Ultimately, Wilson writes, it is being ‘denied [...] that also new music is not immune from the emanations of a zeitgeist, the signum of which is “New Age”’.<sup>119</sup> I would conclude from this that the zeitgeist fights back even more forcefully through the back door if you perceive the real world as hostile and try to block it out, instead of eventually fighting for a better acoustic environment as a composer.

In his appraisal of the new in new music mentioned earlier, Christian Wolff concludes that ‘one finds a concern for a kind of objectivity, almost anonymity’.<sup>120</sup> Even when I am myself treating sound ‘as an entity in itself’,<sup>121</sup> my own music is certainly neither suitable as a vehicle for putting the listener in a pseudo-religious devotional state nor do I aim to achieve ‘the denial — to the point of ambivalence — of a cultural pre-formation of musical material’.<sup>122</sup> I do not wish to mystify the concept of ‘sound being itself’ into a substitute for religion. I rather consider it experimentation with human perception by using enticing

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115. Peter Niklas Wilson, ‘Sakrale Sehnsüchte. Der Scelsi-Feldman-Nono-Kult’, in *MusikTexte* 44, April 1992, p. 2 – 4.

116. Thus the title of Wilson's article in English.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

118. *Loc. cit.*

119. *Ibid.*, p. 4.

120. Wolff, *loc. cit.*

121. Saladin, p. 1.

122. Saladin, p. 3.

physical and psychoacoustic phenomena. Consequently, music for me is not a means for escaping from the world. Concentrated listening is an immersed, beautiful and pleasant, alert and clear state of mind that cannot be achieved otherwise. Therefore, one of my declared aesthetic goals is preparing the conditions to allow the listener to achieve a state of alert aural observation.

In this context, it seems necessary to clarify that listening to sounds as musical tones is different from listening to them as sounds.<sup>123</sup> ‘Sound’ does not equal ‘music’ and ‘music’ does not equal ‘sound’ — we should not directly compare the two, because they work on two different levels. One may say that music is not sound, rather it is what is ‘heard in’ or ‘through’ sound. I find it surprising and almost disconcerting that this rather obvious explanation is taken into consideration so little. As Andy Hamilton demonstrates ‘sound’ and ‘music’ are two completely different categories on acoustic, aesthetic and acousmatic grounds: sound can be defined technically by acoustic parameters whereas this ‘is not a sufficient condition for music’,<sup>124</sup> since ‘music is organized sound’ with musical sounds being essentially tones.<sup>125</sup> Something that is called ‘music’ must have aesthetic ends ‘to enrich and intensify experience — that is, that not all music could be background music’.<sup>126</sup> He claims, ‘there is a nascent category of genuinely non-musical soundart’,<sup>127</sup> for which he already develops a four-part internal classification.<sup>128</sup> Therefore, for Hamilton ‘soundart’ and ‘music’ should be kept distinctly separate.<sup>129</sup>

## Is Cage just a ‘cult’ figure?

The impact New York experimentalism has had on European composers of the avant-garde tradition can presumably be measured not only by the transfigured enthusiasm of its epigones but also by the harsh reactions of some of its opponents. Still in 1999, in a volume entitled

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123. Andy Hamilton, ‘Music and the Aural Arts’, in *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 47, No. 1, January 2007, p. 59.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

125. *Loc. cit.*

126. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

127. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

128. These are *significant sound-design* (e.g. mobile ringtones), *non-significant sound-design* (e.g. engine noises), *documentary soundart* (e.g. R. Murray Schafer’s works), and *non-documentary sonic composition* (e.g. Bernard Parmegiani’s work). *Ibid.*, p. 62.

129. *Ibid.*, p. 63.



*MYTHos Cage*,<sup>130</sup> its editor Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, himself a prolific writer and complex composer, states in a resentful essay about ‘Cage's compositional legacy’:

John Cage is not so much one of the big challenges in art but rather one of the most massive misunderstandings in 20<sup>th</sup> century music. [...] At the end of ‘new’ music nothing arises but an amateur myth.<sup>131</sup>

Mahnkopf's view is not only that of a musician who has undergone professional training at a Musikhochschule, he also states ‘Cageism’ is mainly a matter of intellectuals, hardly of the musicians and even less so of the ‘listeners’.<sup>132</sup> From his vantage point, composers lose their professional standing, if they seriously confess to Cage. Someone like Heinz-Klaus Metzger who is essentially not a practical musician is free to adopt a more dispassionate perspective.

Mahnkopf's key criticism is directed against an ideology that stylises and transfigures Cage into a guru-like shining light. He calls the reception from the 1980s onwards ‘a religious one, at the very least a substitute for religion’.<sup>133</sup> This is Mahnkopf's explanation for why ‘a man who possessed so little musicality and [...] had vanishingly little idea about music’<sup>134</sup> could gain so much attention. Focusing on the German scene, he states that Cage has become hardly more than the tiny little projection surface<sup>135</sup> for the reciprocally oversized guilt of Auschwitz. In Mahnkopf's view, ‘Cage is the bad conscience of the German residual culture.’<sup>136</sup>

Unfortunately, Mahnkopf's article is often extremely polemic, and its central section presents a somewhat arbitrary selection of illustrious personalities whose presumed relation to Cage is being critically addressed in individual paragraphs dedicated to Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, Hans Zender, Heinz-Klaus Metzger, Reinhard Oehlschlägel, Daniel Charles, Stefan Schädler, and Jean-François Lyotard. These consist mainly of citations Mahnkopf has carefully compiled for his purpose, e.g. Zender is quoted as considering Cage one of the most serious musicians he ever met followed by Mahnkopf's polemic question, whether all the other

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130. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (ed.), *MYTHos Cage*, Hofheim, Wolke, 1999.

131. Mahnkopf, ‘Cages kompositorische Hinterlassenschaft’, in: *ibid.*, p. 127.

132. *Ibid.*, p. 129. The single quotes around the ‘Hörer’ are in the original.

133. *Ibid.* p. 134.

134. *Ibid.* p. 129.

135. *Ibid.* p. 128.

136. *Ibid.* p. 131.

among the many musicians Zender must have run into were so much less serious in failing to reach this superlative.<sup>137</sup> Much as one might sympathise with some of Mahnkopf's analyses, the parenthetical remark must be allowed whether so much poison does not rather originate from the insight that Cage's radical anti-Eurocentrism completely undermined the arguments of convinced Darmstadt modernists. Is it not precisely this kind of patronising and intolerant claim to be the sole representation of the truth by some modernists that Cage's silent storm once broke against? Aiming beyond Mahnkopf's polemic, Florian Neuner asks the legitimate question if this frontline is still appropriate, and whether in music, similarly to the visual arts, finally deserves a more differentiated discussion of conceptualism.<sup>138</sup> When Mahnkopf still asks in 1999, 'whether non-historical play with sound is fit for being art at all',<sup>139</sup> his text could also be regarded as the arrogant narrowness of a self-proclaimed avant-garde 'deconstructivist' for whom Cage has completely dropped out of art. Even his heritage, for Mahnkopf, is only worthy of being classified as 'art' (in inverted commas) when Cage's 'very intentional' ego found his personal fulfilment.<sup>140</sup>

But apart from the bad taste which *ad hominem* arguments always leave in one's mouth, Mahnkopf probably has a point in 'Zur Kritik der performativen Künste' (the third part of his essay) where he criticises that the reception of Cage has fetishised the idea of random<sup>141</sup> by contenting itself with chance being used during the course of generation<sup>142</sup> but neglecting the fact that random should also be experienced as such by the audience. 'In order for random to be felt as random, it must possibly be heard, that the accidental could also be different',<sup>143</sup> — in the very same instant, I would add. This was, in fact, a problem I was struggling with myself for many years. I tried to solve it, *inter alia*, by using random score synthesis in real time on stage. Musicians had to sight-read the results *ad hoc* from a laptop screen. However even then, the very manifestation of the music they were just hearing appeared to be a fixed one for the listeners, since they had no possibility of a timely comparison with potential different versions.

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137. Ibid. p. 134.

138. Florian Neuner, 'You don't have to call it music'. *Musikbegriffe nach John Cage*, producer: Carolin Naujocks, *Deutschlandradio Kultur*, 10/01/2012, 0.05 – 1.00, [radio broadcast]. Cf. Neuner, Florian, "You don't have to call it music". Abschaffung: Veränderungen des Musikbegriffs nach John Cage', in: *Positionen*, vol. 90, February 2012, p. 17.

139. Mahnkopf, *ibid.*, p. 134.

140. Ibid., p. 144. 'Kunst' is indeed set off in quotation marks in the original.

141. Ibid., p. 148.

142. Ibid., p. 149.

143. Ibid., p. 151.

Perhaps Mahnkopf's most important claim is that it has always been a capital error to subsume Cage under the heading of 'music'<sup>144</sup> rather than to address him — as Mahnkopf concedes in a slightly patronising way — as 'one of the great forerunners of the performative arts'.<sup>145</sup> One must certainly agree that performativity, in general, is neither rebellion, nor criticism or objection,<sup>146</sup> and also Cage's 'anarchism' (again in inverted commas) was fundamentally apolitical,<sup>147</sup> with the consequence that it could be easily integrated socially.<sup>148</sup> But these are straw figures which do not automatically speak against Cage's own artistic output and ideas, but rather argue against his appropriation by some disciples. In fact Mahnkopf concludes that 'It is necessary to snatch Cage from his supporters'.<sup>149</sup>

In sum, Mahnkopf's criticism is that Cage has the right ideas but is a lousy musician without any composerly craft, as opposed to his colleague Feldman, who is repeatedly praised by Mahnkopf,<sup>150</sup> especially for his feeling for harmonies, timbres and the right timing.<sup>151</sup> The perceived difference of demonstrating a 'composerly' attitude or not was right at the origin of 'The Cage shock' as Martin Iddon explains in his thorough analysis of the events at the 1958 Darmstadt Summer Courses where Cage delivered his famous three lectures: 'The fundamental distinction, then, was not between serial method and chance operations at all, but rather between Europeans, who wanted to *be* "composers" through the operations of their wills and compositional desires, and Americans, who were willing to allow music to occur unpurposively.'<sup>152</sup> Indeed, the impression of Feldman's pieces remains that of being carefully controlled by ear in almost all traditional musical parameters (pitches, timbre and pacing, as acknowledged by Mahnkopf<sup>153</sup>) although, in his writings and interviews, Feldman has mostly done everything to verbally conceal how he actually composed his music, e.g. by referring to abstract extra-musical sources of inspiration like oriental carpets. Thus he created a myth around the compositional process nurturing the old cult of the irrational and out-of-control magic of its operation which had already been followed by famous European composers of

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144. Ibid., p. 142.

145. Ibid., p. 143.

146. Ibid., p. 146.

147. Ibid., p. 129.

148. Ibid., p. 146.

149. Loc. cit.

150. Ibid., p. 152.

151. Ibid., pp. 153 – 154.

152. Martin Iddon, *New Music at Darmstadt*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 21.

153. Mahnkopf, loc. cit., 153 – 154.

the past who were known for their excellent craft but never seriously taught any students and carefully deleted all sketches for their works (e.g. Brahms or Ravel come to mind as paramount examples).

Cage consciously made his random techniques totally visible and obvious, to the point that these could seem provocative for any composer trained in a conservatory (e.g. his use of paper imperfections or transparent sheets, or his delegating of musical decisions to the *I Ching* or, towards the end of his life, to a DOS computer programme written for him by Andrew Culver).

## Key personalities and pieces

### **Influences on my own work**

Although I had already liked John Cage and his music before I went to Johannes Fritsch's (1941 – 2010) composition classes at the Musikhochschule in Cologne in the late 1980s, it was certainly him who brought me into real close contact with experimental music and the thoughts of the New York School. Cage as its emblematic figure changed my way of thinking about music forever. However, I was never as much drawn into Cage's allegedly Zen-orientated philosophy of non-involvement as I was attracted to his 'silent' but strikingly fundamental criticism of how in Europe music and the entire musical scene are perceived. Fritsch for his part was imbued with Cage's thoughts. When he invited me in 1996 to join his *Feedback Studio Verlag*, I became even more aware of the partly anarchic ideas that were behind the outwardly seemingly amateurish appearance of Fritsch's *Feedback Studio* composers' initiative.<sup>154</sup>

Talking to fellow composers and colleagues, I sometimes hear them saying they adore Cage's ideas but in fact do not enjoy his actual musical oeuvre as much.<sup>155</sup> I reckon this view is too limited. Cage never calls our pre-conceptions and assumptions into question on just conceptual or philosophical grounds, but he does indeed shake us out of our comfortable worldview in and through his music. In other words: Cage's output cannot realise its full potential if one denies its sensual side. Behind this may well be a psychological avoidance of an experience one is — still — afraid of, even though going through it might have a therapeutic effect. Helmut Lachenmann once advised against contemporary ignorance towards Schoenberg through 'adoringly conventionalising him as an ultimately boring

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154. The idea of random errors being part of a work of art lived on to a large extent also in the *Feedback* publications. Until the early 2000s, when this had already become an absolute editorial standard even for the tiniest publisher (and would have been a significant simplification in terms of workload), Johannes Fritsch was still reluctant to use a computer himself and insisted on using his old-style mechanical typewriter. Sometimes he refused to correct any obvious typos caused by his dinosaur machine, or he deliberately stained the proper flawless look of the final *Feedback* editions that went to buyers by the hidden charm of a manual strikeout or some 'accidental' stripes and stains on the facsimiles. Typeset sale editions often contained handwritten additions on purpose. This form of 'noble dilettantism' (or personalising factor, as Fritsch would have put it) was certainly directed against a world of perfectionism, of 'more appearance than essence'. However, one thing I never really shared was Fritsch's personal deeply nostalgic vein as a composer towards all sorts of (what I would call:) kitschy music. Carter Williams remembers that, in conversations, Fritsch often used the word "kitsch" to describe some of his own music.

155. E.g. Ben Johnston shares this view: 'The ideas of John Cage, more than his music, interest me very much.' Ben Johnston, 'Seventeen Items', 1980, in Ben Johnson, *Maximum Clarity*, Bob Gilmore (ed), 2006, p. 149.

classicist'.<sup>156</sup> James Tenney had a similar aim when quoting Cage's own words about Erik Satie:

More and more it seems to me that relegating Satie to the position of having been very influential but in his own work finally unimportant is refusing to accept the challenge he so bravely gave us.<sup>157</sup>

As Tenney further writes, Cage's 'work encourages us to re-examine all of our old habits of thought, our assumptions, and our definitions'.<sup>158</sup> Without mystifying Cage's art (e.g. as an exclusively meditative experience), listening to his music has often had a cleansing effect on my mind and perception. The challenge put forward by Cage is that he asks questions that are apparently very simple but may have far-reaching consequences. Until about 2005, I had tried to take on musically an issue that could be formulated as 'Could composing (or music, or art) once again also be something completely different?' My feeling has always been this may lead to a dead end if you embark on it on only theoretical grounds. The fact that I took the outright denial of consensus about what is still accepted as 'musical' quite seriously — within my music and not just as a polemical hypothetical verbal speculation — has quite often led listeners to believe my music was either made in an incompetent way or insufficiently inspired.

Since about 2005, I have pursued similar questions under the aegis of how they may work within less repulsive guises. I have clearly been influenced by Cage's concept of form. This is not at all to say that I am now e.g. consequently adding developmental formal principles to my music, but these now belong to my compositional gamut again which, at the same time, comprises more static concepts (such as those called 'ergodic'<sup>159</sup> by James Tenney); for example in *dietro V avanti*, both possibilities come together within the same piece (see the analysis in Chapter 2). Exclusively focusing on stat(ist)ic formal procedures would lead

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156. 'Es gehört zur Ignoranz des Musikdenkens unserer Tage, [...] daß es Schönberg zum im Grunde langweiligen Klassiker zurechtverehrt und die serielle Musik als rührende Verirrung und als gescheitert übergeht.' Helmut Lachenmann, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung*, Wiesbaden, Breitkopf & Härtel/Insel, 1995, pp. 95 – 96.

157. John Cage cited in James Tenney, 'John Cage and the Theory of Harmony', 1983, p. 5, <http://www.plainsound.org/JTwork.html>, (accessed 26/01/2012).

158. Tenney, *ibid.*, p. 4.

159. Cf. James Tenney, 'Form in 20th Century Music', 1969 – 70, p. 11, <http://www.plainsound.org/JTwork.html>, (accessed 26/01/2012).

precisely to the ludic experience described as ‘idyllic’ by Lachenmann (see the ‘Early criticism’ section above).

### **John Cage: 4'33" (1952)**

I am probably not the first or only person to be impressed by 4'33", but it certainly is the piece of experimental music that has struck me most of all. What interests me about this creation is not only Cage's idea of introducing non-intentional sounds into my music, but the inherent general conceptual radicalism behind this. For me, 4'33" is the most extreme borderline case, the most radical and total realisation of how it is scarcely possible to conceive music. As both a wake-up call and a reminder of where — how far or how close respectively — the ultimate edge ends behind which the abyss of non-music opens up, this piece has virtually always been behind my musical thinking.

4'33" is one rare example for those extreme but forceful cases of art that literally push boundaries. I consider 4'33" to be as crucial for the time-based arts as works like Duchamp's *Fountain* or Malevich's *Square* paintings are for the visual domain. However, Cage's concept does not imply a simplistic verdict on the lines of ‘one *must not* write any music any more’ after 1952, the year when 4'33" was premiered. In our après-post-modern world such absolute prohibitions would seem like dated relics from another era, and ultimately patronising. This is perhaps analogous to Adorno's well-known and widely misinterpreted statement that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.<sup>160</sup> (In fact, Adorno later put his statement in perspective by stating because of Auschwitz no ‘gay/serene art’ can be imagined any more.<sup>161</sup>) Without attempting to oversimplify by putting Auschwitz on a level with 4'33", what Adorno probably intended may be applied to Cage's concept in a similar way: even if an artist's or a listener's understanding of music will not have changed for ever, a certain naivety should vanish after their personal 4'33" experience.

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160. ‘The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: *to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric*, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today.’ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft’, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 10.1: *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft I*, ‘Prismen. Ohne Leitbild’, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1977, p. 30.

161. ‘Der Satz, nach Auschwitz lasse kein Gedicht mehr sich schreiben, gilt nicht blank, gewiß aber, daß danach, weil es möglich war und bis ins Unabsehbare möglich bleibt, keine heitere Kunst mehr vorgestellt werden kann.’ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Ist die Kunst heiter?’, 1967, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften vol. 11*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1974, p. 603.

Again this obviously only applies after having *listened* to Cage's piece, and not just having read *about* it. It would be difficult to simply ignore the strong conceptual implications that go beyond the perceptual manifestation of *4'33"* in a performance and just to pretend it had never existed. The piece may not only comprise any event, acoustic or not, but any other existing work of music in general.<sup>162</sup> *4'33"* also confirms the idea that during the listening process ultimately everyone makes their own piece, depending on their musical and aural experiences. Thus *4'33"* brings in the listener's personal background and their individual auditive associations. It may well be understood as an attempt to free listeners' minds, and therefore *4'33"* may still be experienced as a challenge to someone who usually has a mainly consumerist approach to music. Audience members often feel a kind of disintegration of the traditionally fixed hierarchy between composer, performer and audience.<sup>163</sup> If listeners wish to attentively listen to it at all, *4'33"* may turn them into a more active part of the performance. Players are more involved in an actively shaping than in a passively reproducing way.<sup>164</sup> Drawing on responses after performances of the piece it is, in my experience, still able to stir up animated discussions, which nowadays unfortunately are happening rather rarely after musical performances.

Kyle Gann states 'For Cage *4'33"* did not need a performer any more. Ultimately it became simply "an act of listening"<sup>165</sup>. This refers to the categorical shift from re-ception towards per-ception, which we have already seen in Andy Hamilton's distinction between the two concepts of 'music' and 'soundart'. In *4'33"* the focus is placed on alert observation of the sound phenomenon per se. Instead of listeners following any acoustic structures put into effect by the composer, *4'33"* requires their pure attentive presence. From here we can draw direct connections to sound installations and James Tenney's or Alvin Lucier's music. My concept of 'Acoustic Situations' builds on this concept (see the dedicated section below).

It is interesting that the perceptual approach of observing an acoustic phenomenon can, very occasionally, even be found in Lachenmann's music where he presents acoustic phenomena like idyllic islands, e.g. the ostentatious powerful beatings in his *Accanto* resulting from three

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162. The alternative title *0'00"*, which Cage gave to a second version of *4'33"* (publ. New York, C. F. Peters, 1962), would be an even more liminal case, had Cage not explicitly stated 'that the action cannot be the performance of a "musical" composition and that no two performances can involve the same action.' Gann, *No such thing as silence: John Cage's 4'33"*, p. 196.

163. This is also described by Nyman: 'Experimental music emphasises an unprecedented fluidity of composer/performer/listener roles'. Nyman, *Experimental Music*, pp. 22 – 23.

164. Ibid. p. 14.

165. Gann, *No such thing as silence: John Cage's 4'33"*, p. 186.



clarinets playing dyads<sup>166</sup> or the ‘voided anthem’<sup>167</sup> with its plain natural piano resonances in *Allegro sostenuto*<sup>168</sup>. Aural observation and traditional contemplative listening flow together in these ‘acoustic situations’.

The set of convergence between aesthetic and everyday perceptions in *4'33"* represents a culmination of artistic coincidence between art and life. Fully aspiring to worldly content, it constitutes a model for music that does not treat the two separately. In his seminal volume on the so-called ‘silent piece’,<sup>169</sup> Kyle Gann has impressively shown that Cage was interested in more than a simple provocation or just putting away a Euro-centric notion of music. In a first instance, Cage tested the concept outwardly by letting environmental sounds enter his music, but then it took him several years to arrive at the terminal version of his ‘silent piece’ (a strange fact for this otherwise rather prolific composer).

### **Alvin Lucier: *I am sitting in a room* (1970)**

Alvin Lucier’s piece is another model for what I would call an ‘Acoustic Situation’. The natural resonances of the performance space enhance step by step the corresponding frequency bands within the accumulated recordings of human speech, thus transforming it into purely musical sounds. *I am sitting in a room*’s live-performance with the composer himself speaking his legendary text<sup>170</sup> was another radical experience that shaped me in becoming an experimental composer. The visually impressive setting consisted of two Revox reel tape machines and a ca. 30-meter-long tape loop stretched out across the entire performance space by the aid of numerous guide rollers and supports.

Acknowledging Lucier’s all-embracing approach towards the world of ambient sounds, James Tenney described the composer as someone who deals ‘with virtually the whole range of natural acoustic phenomena, including sound transmission and radiation [...], reflection

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166. Bars 137 – 142 and 146 – 149, in Helmut Lachenmann, *Accanto. Musik für einen Klarinettenisten mit Orchester*, [study score PB5109], Wiesbaden, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1976 pp. 34 – 37.

167. ‘4) unterbrochen und umgelenkt durch eine Art “entleerte Hymne”, Rezitativ aus Rufen in verschieden resonierende, darunter auch “schall-tote” Räume’, in Helmut Lachenmann, ‘Allegro sostenuto. Musik für Klarinette/Baßklarinette, Violoncello und Klavier (1987/88)’ [programme note 1989], in Helmut Lachenmann, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung*, p. 398.

168. Bars 263 – 267 in Helmut Lachenmann, *Allegro sostenuto für Klarinette, Violoncello und Klavier*, [score KM 2407/LP], Wiesbaden, Breitkopf & Härtel, 1989, p. 32.

169. Kyle Gann, *No such thing as silence: John Cage's 4'33"*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 2010, pp. 167 – 187. The different versions were published in this special edition: John Cage, *4'33"*. *John Cage centennial edition*, [score], Frankfurt / London / New York, Peters, 2012.

170. On 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1995 at Großer Sendesaal of *Deutschlandfunk* in Cologne.

[...], diffraction [...], resonance [...], standing waves [...], feedback [...], beats [...], and speech',<sup>171</sup> and most of these can be experienced, in an exemplary manner, in *I am sitting in a room*.

When explaining his attempt at an 'aesthetic characterisation'<sup>172</sup> of soundart and music, Andy Hamilton, reserves an extra excursion for music and speech. After pointing out that despite the fact 'both impose a structure on sounds',<sup>173</sup> he admits that '[c]learly the issue is a complex one', further emphasising that speech deserves and becomes *aesthetic* (as opposed to semantic) attention only in particular contexts (such as theatre or poetry readings) when we also focus on the voice and its delivery.<sup>174</sup> The idea of not setting a text to music but using speech itself *as* the musical sounds has always fascinated me. All of its separately identifiable spheres — analysed as semantic, expressive and diagnostic in Meyer-Eppler's terminology,<sup>175</sup> are enhanced and enriched in an enchanting manner all at the same time. Even if my own music in the domain of Aesthetic Phonetics was triggered by the *I am sitting in a room* experience but rather by Cage's text readings, Lucier's piece was certainly a further confirmation and encouragement to continue in the same direction.

In *I am sitting in a room*, Lucier clearly experiments with two different mental imprints. On the one hand, 'music is essentially an art while speech is not',<sup>176</sup> and '[t]here is speech that is art'<sup>177</sup> on the other. An ambiguous transitional state of mind occurs during the unfolding of the transformational process in Lucier's piece. It succeeds in leaving us somewhere in between two modes of perception, which are normally kept separate: the speech-semantic and the musical one. Arguably the most serendipitous moments in *I am sitting in a room* happen just during this prolonged state of in-betweenness.

Lucier once confessed in an interview that he had tossed out his initial idea of using musical instruments for the piece, 'because it felt too "composerly"'.<sup>178</sup> This felt old-fashioned to him

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171. In Alvin Lucier, *Reflections. Interviews, Scores, Writings 1965–1994* (2nd edition with index), Cologne, MusikTexte, 2005, pp. 16/18.

172. Hamilton, 'Music and the Aural Arts', p. 54.

173. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

174. *Loc. cit.*

175. Cf. Georg Heike, *Phonologie* (2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition), Stuttgart, Metzler, 1982, p. 7.

176. *Loc. cit.*

177. *Loc. cit.*

178. Alvin Lucier, 'Every room has its own melody. Interview with Douglas Simon', 1980, in Alvin Lucier, *Reflections. Interviews, Scores, Writings 1965–1994*, p. 90.

since, after his beginnings as a neoclassical composer, he was in the meantime ‘[t]hinking of sounds as measurable wavelengths, instead of as high and low musical notes.’<sup>179</sup> Lucier’s account could be taken as an example for the categorical shift, within his musical thinking, as illustrated by Hamilton. The concept can also be traced back to Cage, however Lucier substitutes physical or acoustical phenomena unrolling in time for controlling processes via random operations.

I have always felt quite close to these different anti-traditional approaches towards composing. My pre-2005 attitude was more oriented towards Cage’s chance-driven concepts, whereas in my more recent compositions Lucier’s influence could be identified, e.g. in the central section of *dietro V avanti* or in >>*schönes klavierstück*<< (see Chapter 2 for further explanations) where sounds are not forced into dramatic time-structures orchestrated by myself as the composer but the music is allowed to unfold in its own time thus constituting an Acoustic Situation. I was hoping to set the listener’s perception free by putting the emphasis on what happens within the sounds that unfold in the here and now, directing the listener’s attention in a particular way to the phenomena of sound and time.

### **Franco Evangelisti (1926 – 1980)**

In the spirit of the 1950s and 1960s, experimentation was perhaps still practised quite systematically and with the aim of exploring musical research questions. Similar to Edgard Varèse (who nowadays is much better known) Franco Evangelisti’s output as a composer comprises only circa ten compositions. Following Cage’s appearance in Darmstadt, Aleatorism quickly became fashionable,<sup>180</sup> e.g. in Boulez’s *Troisième Sonate*, in which aleatoric alternatives for the player appear as a softening of the strict serial thought; or in Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück XI*, where:

The performer looks at random at the sheet of music and begins with any group, the first that catches his eye; this he plays, choosing for himself tempo (small notes always excepted), dynamic level and type of attack. At the end of the first group, he

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179. Ibid., 88.

180. As Metzger put it: ‘Everyone just incorporated their little variabilities in the score.’ Heinz-Klaus Metzger, ‘Franco Evangelisti und der Fortschritt’, 1999, in Harald Muenz (ed.), *hin zu einer neuen Welt. Notate zu Franco Evangelisti*, Saarbrücken, Pfau, 2002, 19.

reads the tempo, dynamic and attack indications that follow, and looks at random to any other group, which he then plays in accordance with the latter indications.<sup>181</sup>

Evangelisti is a particular case. After his origins in the late 1950s as an uncompromising serialist, he made a serious attempt to reconcile structuralist techniques with American experimentalism. Unlike Boulez or Stockhausen, Evangelisti did not just open small aleatoric windows for variants inside what is otherwise a conventional serial composition. He wished to embrace the consequences from the profound shock Cage had given to the idea of the *work* itself. In his string quartet *Aleatorio* (1959), he ‘challenges the idea of the work from inside’.<sup>182</sup> Players do not just take different routes or change the order of otherwise fixed constellations, but each time the piece is being performed, its configurations should change *fundamentally*, making the work, as we know it, disappear.

Evangelisti was absolutely convinced that our 12-tone equal tempered tuning system is irretrievably worn out and unusable, and he was always reluctant to repeat any experiences which he thought he had already completely exhausted. He had a vision about the new possibilities electronic means could potentially bring for the future of music, but after his experience in Cologne’s WDR Studio, he did not pursue the path of electronic music on fixed media any further. With substantial technical support by Gottfried Michael Koenig Evangelisti had realised the short tape composition *Incontri di fasce sonore* (1956 – 57), an abstract sine tone piece, which immediately convinced an Italian writer on electronic music to subsume him under the headline of ‘Cologne’s electronic purism’.<sup>183</sup> But Evangelisti had already understood that the absolutely precise realisation of strict serial music was now possible, and — as his close friend Heinz-Klaus Metzger reports<sup>184</sup> — he hoped to be able to employ the new electronic means in an open way, striving for a reconciliation between compositional control and liberty for the performer. Regrettably technology at the time was far from being ready for this anticipation of live-electronics. In his *Spazio a cinque* for voices and groups of percussion from 1959 – 61 electronics may be added *ad libitum* to transform the instrumental sounds in real time. Evangelisti gives no further specifications as to what

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181. From the foreword of Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Klavierstück XI*, [score], Vienna, Universal Edition, 1956.

182. Heinz-Klaus Metzger, ‘Franco Evangelisti und der Fortschritt’, in Harald Muenz, (ed.), *hin zu einer neuen Welt. Notate zu Franco Evangelisti*, Saarbrücken, Pfau, 2002, p. 19.

183. Armando Gentilucci, *Introduzione alla musica elettronica*, Milan, Feltrinelli, 1969, p.52.

184. Heinz-Klaus Metzger, ‘Franco Evangelisti und der Fortschritt’, in Harald Muenz (ed.), *hin zu einer neuen Welt. Notate zu Franco Evangelisti*. Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2002, p. 19.

kind of ‘accorgimenti elettronici’ one should use. He would probably have liked access to computer labs, which were not available to him at that time.

His music theatre work *Die Schachtel* (1962 – 63) was the next step towards what we would call a ‘multimedia opera’ nowadays, but around this time Evangelisti eventually got frustrated by the heavy restrictions imposed by the electronic means available to him. Approximately between 1959 – 1979,<sup>185</sup> during his own silence as a composer, he collected his forward-looking ideas in his writings (collected under the title *Dal silenzio a un nuovo mondo sonoro*), which remains an important testimony for Evangelisti’s pioneering research spirit. Here he outlines his conviction that music, as it had been conceived for centuries in Western Europe, has definitely come to its end. He stopped composing for nearly twenty years and hoped to achieve part of his vision through strictly rule-based improvisation by dedicating himself to the *Gruppo d'Improvvisazione di Nuova Consonanza*.

## **An example from my pre-2005 music**

### ***deChiffraGE (1993)***

*For sight-reading speaker and random-controlled laptop computer*

To illustrate from what extreme aesthetic point of view I arrived at the music presented in this portfolio, an example for an earlier piece of mine will be discussed: *deChiffraGE* attempted to jettison everything that had to do with music in the first place thus becoming a radical point of departure for my composing more than twenty years ago. As the capital letters within the title insinuate, it was conceived as a Cage homage.<sup>186</sup> *deChiffraGE* holds an important position in my perception of myself as a composer, because it contained two main directions that would have become important in my subsequent music: firstly, it looks like a piece of laptop music which however avoids using the computer for creating beautiful

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185. The book appeared first in German translation as ‘Vom Schweigen zu einer neuen Klangwelt’, in: Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte 43/44. Franco Evangelisti*, Munich, edition text + kritik, 1985, pp. 40 – 168. Semar editore in Rome published the original Italian version in 1991. Although Ferruccio Busoni’s *Sketch of a New Aesthetic of Music* from 1907 already entertained the possibility of generated electrically sounds, considered sixth-tone systems and new musical scales, and highly inspired both Edgard Varèse and Evangelisti, Busoni as a composer, however, never went as far.

186. The premiere of the German version took place in the commemorative concert ‘Not wanting to say anything about John’ on 4<sup>th</sup> December 1993 at Kunstverein Cologne organised by the Cologne chapter of the International Society for Contemporary Music (KGNM) with Marcus Windhagen as the speaker. In the meantime numerous subsequent performances have taken place, English, Polish, Czech, and Italian translations have been made, and I still continue to perform the piece publicly today.

sounds.<sup>187</sup> Secondly, the sonic outcome is situated in the intermediate region between music and language. In fact, the idea of using de-semanticised speech itself *as* the main musical events has not let me go any more ever since.<sup>188</sup>

In *deChiffreAGE*, a text is turned into the plaything of a chance-steered algorithm.<sup>189</sup> Since the engine does not understand any words, any previously provided text is first dis- and afterwards reassembled regardless of its content. A human speaker must spontaneously sight-read the resulting chance agglomerations live from the laptop screen. The performer is required to present the recreated awkward-to-read text in reading style that is as natural as possible. This may, and inevitably will, lead to *ad hoc* interpretations of the material (the monitor is not visible to the audience), which will depend much on the individual associations and the linguistic proficiency of the performer. The computer imposes arbitrary capitalisations on the text and adds random punctuation. These are meant to additionally affect the intonation of the reading. The result for the listener is a multifaceted perceptual situation oscillating between broken semantics and phonetics.

The formal course of a performance is as follows: a pre-existing text of one's own choice may be fed into the software. This text is subsequently dismantled following built-in rules. In sequence, it becomes mess-shaken on the level of individual phones, then at syllable level, then at word level. Finally a short extract from the original text appears, just starting from anywhere, even in the middle of a sentence, but now all words are separated by rather long pauses between them (during which the laptop screen turns black). These successive material stages are the smallest common denominator for all performances of *deChiffreAGE*. A fixed time grid within the *deChiffreAGE* software controls the points in time at which transitions happen from one material stage to the next, as well as rest lengths and the end of a performance, which is always 7'30" long. Under this framework, the computer creates the specific detailed contents always afresh in real time. The process makes sure that,

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187. For other examples cf. Harald Muenz, 'Live random concepts and sight-reading players — the role of the computer in the era of digested digitalism', *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, February 2010, pp. 81 – 87.

188. Cf. *Das Zungenbuch* in this portfolio and also Harald Muenz, 'Begrenzungen überschreiten – die Ästhetische Phonetik als Brücke zu einem anderen Umgang mit Musik als akustischer Kunstform', *MusikTexte 103*, Cologne, 2004 (November), pp. 63 – 65.

189. The software was written in the programming language *BASIC*.

semantically, the piece becomes always increasingly meaningful. Nevertheless, listeners will still be unable to understand the original semantics of the text.

In *deChiffreAGE* one may experience by the senses what recent neurolinguistic research has managed to prove: perception of both speech and music happen in parallel at the same time and are scattered over different areas of the brain, and ‘the two domains may have a substantial degree of overlap’.<sup>190</sup> The word-semantic level of speech, which is in the foreground in everyday conversations, is drastically obfuscated in the piece, and the brain oscillates back and forth between different modes of perception. Listeners reported that they kept questioning themselves during a performance whether they heard linguistic snippets (in the sphere of word-semantics), or music (in the sense of a pitched articulatory signal). When I conceive the course of the 7½ minutes that *deChiffreAGE* lasts, it was an important element to make the listener arrive in this ambiguous floating state of mind. Although the piece is clearly influenced by Cage’s rewritten texts,<sup>191</sup> *deChiffreAGE* goes further by applying chance operations to the original text during the performance itself (*in real time* on stage, that is). The whole setting is utterly paradox: whereas the performer is presented with a notated score — and therefore the piece is *not* being improvised — the work itself as well as its performances are open. Despite the fact that some traditional core determinants for music and composition are withheld, a piece does still exist. This means that some apparent ‘eternal’ musical commons (and compositional clichés) are possibly *not* indispensable for constituting a piece of music.

Ensuing from Nyman’s three-fold systematics of composer – performer – listener, which were explained earlier, *deChiffreAGE* also became crucial within my conception of an ‘anti-music’ at the time for the following reasons (In brackets I include some questions, that arose around *deChiffreAGE* inspiring me to compose later speech-sound pieces):

The composer:

- ... Does not initiate a ‘logic of coherence’. (What is the carrier of ‘meaning’?)

The (work of) music:

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190. Aniruddh D Patel, *Music, language, and the brain*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 86.

191. Cf. e.g. Cage’s several *Writings* through *Finnegans Wake* or his *Roaratorio*.

- ... Is different every time but shares recognisable features on each run. (What constitutes — the essence of — a work?)
- ... Is notated in detail but cannot be fixed once and forever. (How variable can a score be without losing its purpose?)
- ... Does not employ any notes or common musical sounds; speech serves as the sole musical material. (What is the borderline for speech to be perceived as ‘musical’?)

The performer:

- ... Does not need to be a trained musician, anyone who can read text from a monitor may perform the piece. (What makes a performer a musical performer?)
- ... Needs to be highly flexible when sight-reading on stage but at the same time the piece is not an improvisation. (How not to lose the binding character of a music during improvisation?)
- ... Cannot practise the piece, and thus fix it in rehearsals beyond general familiarisation with the situation. (How to escape stereotypical interpretational twists?)

The listener:

- ... Makes the piece; ‘sense’ only appears in each individual listener’s mind. (What are minimum features for constituting a coherent piece in a listener’s mind?)
- The communicative function (of speech) is destroyed. (How much can verbal communication, based on aural transmission, be reliably successful?)

In my attempt to radically exclude any possible fixations that would normally occur over the course of practising and rehearsing a piece, it was originally my intention to substitute the text that is available in the computer software for a new one before each performance. In the meantime, I always stick to the same one: the beautiful obituary for John Cage that Helmut Lachenmann wrote in 1992 for *MusikTexte* has proven to fit the course of being disassembled in *deChiffraGE* perfectly. It even contains a self-ironic break of the performance situation of the piece, when Lachenmann accuses Cage’s disciples for having ‘seized’ the American composer. He concludes that no one should usurp Cage but, instead of complaining about his



death, one should ‘sit at one’s piano — or anyplace else — and be silent for four minutes and thirty-three seconds — or how long ever — or do something else (for example work)’.<sup>192</sup>

It is hoped that *deChiffreAGE* is not only full of negations, but also offers a new type of richness through the exploration of the perceptual borderline between speech and musical modes of perception. Two extended versions of *deChiffreAGE* had their premieres in 2004 and 2010: under the titles *de[ux]ChiffreAGE* and *d(r)e(i)ChiffreAGE* now two or three speakers, respectively, face each other, each one with a laptop running *deChiffreAGE* in front of them. The underlying original text is in common but its transformational stages will be run through separately on each computer, though the temporal succession of these stages is the same on all laptops (due to the inbuilt fixed time grid explained above). The speaker-performers are asked to establish dialogues from the text material that is generated independently on their computer screens. Although incidental to each performance in their specific development new forms of meta-semantics emerge. The pragmatics of discourse organisation add a new level of grotesque, quasi-scenic interaction which makes this version more reconciliatory and accessible for an audience than the original solo version.

Over the course of the experiences made in rehearsals and concerts with different versions of the piece, I arrived more and more at the impression of having touched upon the edge of an abyss behind which music comes to a real standstill. In terms of composition, I certainly still define ‘something’ (in terms of the setting, the process involved, the time structure, etc.), yet it seemed impossible to proceed any further in this direction. After several years I asked myself, whether this kind of delegating decisions can really still be a form of liberty.

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192. ‘Dankbarkeit gegenüber einem großen provozierenden Geist und beispielgebenden Praktiker radikaler Befreiheit, kreative Ehrfurcht weckend, weil dieser — John Cage — selbst voll kreativer Ehrfurcht war gegenüber Kreatur und Kreativität: darüber reden, müßte heißen: reden über die Vielfalt der Formen, in denen er uns (‘uns’ darf man bei ihm sagen) so wunderbar gestört und so lehrreich verstört hat. Sein Erscheinen in Europa hat seinerzeit Turbulenzen ausgelöst, auch in mir. Auf der naiven Suche nach ‚Ordnungen‘ empfand ich sein Wirken als Bedrohung und erkannte es spät erst als entscheidende Bewegung. Gehaßt habe ich die auftrumpfende Selbstsicherheit seiner Jünger hierzulande. Mir schien, daß die Ratten beim Verlassen des sinkenden Schiffs ihn zu ihrem Fänger mißbrauchten, als er just von jenem Eisberg zu uns herüberlachte, auf den die gute alte Fregatte ‚Kunst‘ inzwischen aufgelaufen war. Aber ich lernte auch zu lernen, und aus der Irritation wurde schöpferische Unruhe und Ruhe, und auf deren Rückseite sedimentiert sich bis heute persönliche Dankbarkeit. Sein Tod braucht keinen Verlust, sein Verlust darf nicht den Tod bedeuten. Er taugt nicht als Ikone - gar neben Luigi Nono oder Giacinto Scelsi — im Konferenzzimmer des ‚Hotel Abgrund‘ (Georg Lukacs über die Philosophen der Frankfurter Schule) — schon deshalb nicht, weil's für derlei zu spät ist —: Wer Cage liebt, der möge sich vor sein Klavier — oder sonst wohin — setzen und vier Minuten dreiunddreißig Sekunden — oder wie lang auch immer — schweigen — oder sonst was tun (zum Beispiel arbeiten).’ Helmut Lachenmann, ‘Er taugt nicht als Ikone’, in *MusikTexte* 46/47, Cologne (December 1992), p. 93.

Freedom for the player should have meant, they should not just be the executing body of another person's instructions (which would be the case in the case of fully standard notated score music), but I started noticing some dissatisfaction among performers. Those who were not entirely enjoying the approach felt, that they were not prepared or did not have the expertise to make the kind of decisions required in real time. Consequently, they did not perceive these pieces as acts of liberation but, paradoxically, felt more inhibited on stage than usual. In fact, it seems hard to just 'jump' into this practice for only one piece on a programme, since it requires internalising a fundamental change in one's playing attitude rather than merely learning a new style to which one may then switch rather smoothly. Consequently, it seems one always needs specialised players who are familiar with performing this kind of music.<sup>193</sup> But with this type of musicians in mind, one is rather carrying coals to Newcastle since they presumably have already reached the necessary level of freedom within their everyday musical practice. As a result, I got some interesting musical experiences I could not have achieved otherwise, but ultimately, my endeavours could be seen as another example for the futility of using music as a model for social upheaval in general.

From the extreme aesthetic point of view in *deChiffreAGE* it was a long way to arrive at the pieces in the current portfolio. In the years following *deChiffreAGE*, I created many other compositions in which I did not wish to have total control over the final result. Often I accepted the outcomes of any set chance procedures without interfering with them, the idea behind this (allegedly promoted by John Cage) still being that of freeing me as a composer as well as performers, and audiences. Examples are my pieces for computer and soloists *standArts* (with solo clarinet) and *The SelfComposer* (with oboe), in which, again, the computer takes over the synthesis of a musical score, where it is not possible to intervene once the process has been started.<sup>194</sup>

In my more recent pieces presented in this portfolio, my use of chance operations was restricted to pre-compositional stages: I used them as a source for getting ideas, or creating a

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193. The pool of musicians around Anton Lukoszevieve's ensemble Apartment House may serve as an example for such a group.

194. They are further explained in: Harald Muenz, 'Live random concepts and sight-reading players — the role of the computer in the era of digested digitalism', *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, February 2010, pp. 81 – 87.

bigger variety of materials I would not have thought of otherwise. However the fundamental difference now is that any random or algorithmically generated outcomes now always undergo a rigorous editing process. This does not mean that I am rectifying all apparent oddities but rather going through the results, interpreting them for either retention or bringing them out in an even clearer way. (Some of the procedures will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.)

## **Personal Summary**

The following is an attempt to summarise what I have drawn personally from the American experimental movement. Cage accepted every possible outcome providing that his pieces were performed by correctly following all of his instructions. Today, I could not do this any more even if I wanted. But there was a period in which I really felt I was not morally allowed to fall aesthetically behind the historic commitment of *4'33"* since Cage had in this work apparently realised his own definition of 'experimental music' quite radically. I have come to see art as one of the last activities in human life where one's personal liberty in decision making is limited only minimally, and if musical composition is really meant to constitute an *artistic* activity, I would not want my personal choices to already be fully determined at the outset.

On the other hand, if in a work of art simply *anything* may happen, e.g. every sort of sound event may happen at each given moment — in short: anything goes — the result is that all these elements cancel each other out. They become equally unexpected, simply arbitrary and finally indifferent. Cage is the perfect example of an extreme case who exemplifies how much conscious compositional intervention can be taken back, and, at the same time, which minimal aesthetic threshold needs to be retained, below which the results fall prey to banality. His music did not go astray when he was about to push boundaries radically, which, in my view, is a way to artistic freedom. The subtle ways in which Cage has mostly been able to avoid aesthetic platitudes testify his artistic greatness.

### **‘Acoustic Situations’ - Working with human perception**

The conviction that instrumental concert music of the usual design had come to an end long since has played a central role for my compositions ever since *deChiffreAGE*. In many of my pre-2005 compositions, I wished to depart from a traditional notion of composition. I was not after developing and cultivating a personal style any more — in the sense of a recognisable musical idiom, or a marketable brand — therefore a diverging concept seemed to better fit my conception of exploration and trial. Hence I started to substitute the term ‘Acoustic Situations’ for ‘music’. This term has a double meaning for me. Many times my musical ideas go literally back to acoustic phenomena, which are explored through compositional means. More importantly, however, it refers to the different way of listening compared to the

traditional one when one listens to music and when I am focusing acoustic and psychoacoustic phenomena that happen within a sound.

I like to entertain the utopian idea that sound could stand in a space like a sensuous form, almost like a sculpture,<sup>195</sup> which I do not consider as being in conflict with my idea about the intangibility of music (quite the opposite). My ‘Acoustic Situations’ are proposals for the audience to listen to a very specific sound constellation and to scan it aurally *instant by instant*. During these moments, the course of time perceived by each individual listener — traditionally called form — is no longer patronised by any dramatic strategies of the composer, and it is hoped that listeners, during the act of listening itself, could start to perceive how they are perceiving.

As a composer, I am trying to link the piece-like flow we know from conventional music with the perceptual concepts that were recently systematically described by Andy Hamilton. What is relevant for my work is especially his notion of an independent ‘non-musical aural art’, which coexists in parallel with what we traditionally call ‘music’. In light of the new ‘soundarts’, Hamilton defines the inherent concept of the latter as ‘a practice involving skill or craft whose ends are essentially aesthetic, and that especially rewards aesthetic attention — whose material is sounds exhibiting tonal organisation.’<sup>196</sup>

The classifications introduced by Hamilton could prove helpful for thinking about my further directions as a composer. The concept of Acoustic Situations has led me to focusing on human perception. I have long since been convinced that a main task of music, conceived as a sonic art in time, is reviving the senses. In my pieces written before 2005, I was also very prone to what Hamilton calls ‘documentary soundart’.<sup>197</sup> I felt a certain proximity to the objectified view of sound similar to that of an acoustician or a sound engineer. It was my aim to strip music of all unnecessary, ‘art-ificial’ embellishments. Very purposefully, the musical results frequently resembled test set-ups from a physics laboratory that took place as a public performance.

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195. Peter Ablinger also uses the term ‘Musik als Plastik’ (‘Music as a sculpture’). Peter Ablinger 2006, ‘Sagen und Zeigen. Variationen einer Differenz’, in *MusikTexte 135*, November 2012, p. 16.

196. Andy Hamilton, *Aesthetics & Music*, London, Continuum, 2007, p. 52.

197. Hamilton, ‘Music and the Aural Arts’, p. 62.

## Being experimental is about an approach

The outward appearance of my experimental approaches from 1992 – 2005 was trying to distance myself decisively from traditional music by the use of extended techniques, open form, graphic or computer generated notation. However, being an experimentalist has never been defined by mere technical attributes. It is telling to realise that Nyman included extremely different ‘styles’ among experimental music. Besides the indeterminate open systems by the authors of the New York School and their adherents, he also singled out the closed systems of the minimalists, Steve Reich, Terry Riley, and Philip Glass, dedicating an extra 32-page chapter to them.<sup>198</sup> From a continental European avant-garde point of view this may seem odd — perhaps with exceptions such as Reich’s early works (e.g. *It’s gonna rain*) — however, it would be a *contradictio in adiecto* if there was an experimental ‘style’ that could be linked to the use or not of any specific technology, techniques or materials. Neither does the corollary automatically apply. Using a computer, or asking for any particular playing techniques are in the meantime part of the tried and tested requirements for professional instrumentalists. They do not make the question about the aesthetical background against which they are used irrelevant.

Thus being experimental should not be tied up with any specific material or style since it is rather an approach towards composition and music in general. True experimentalism, for me, should be characterised by a scrutinising approach towards art to begin with, but then also towards anything that has a tendency to constitute an artistic mainstream. This also implies, in particular, staying alert and punching holes in possible conventions and mannerisms which a certain mainstream ‘experimentalism’ has already created itself. At the same time, it may well be that what is being experimented may also pass unnoticed under the surface, especially if one researches heavily into specific aspects while leaving others unchanged compared to earlier achievements. It seems to me, the latter is the case with most of the compositions in this portfolio. The commentaries may highlight how strongly any notion about ‘the experimental’ depends on one’s own perspective. In spite of the fact that the semantic field of the word ‘experimental music’ now stands for a vast and unclear body of work, there is a tendency to exclude such music from belonging to the experimental field which does not

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198. Chapter ‘Minimal music, indeterminacy and the new tonality’, in Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and beyond* (Second edition), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 139 – 171.

employ playing techniques of the avant-garde, or avails itself of conventional notation again (especially traditional note heads and clearly articulated rhythms). In my recent music, the spheres of instrumental techniques and notation are nearly entirely unaffected, which lends an outwardly ‘traditional’ appearance to some of my scores. What *is* being challenged experimentally are the methods how I come to this music, or better: the approach of the composer towards the work has changed. Chapter 2 will exemplify this with the individual pieces at hand.

## **Working with Incalculable Outcomes**

In line with my ideas concerning perceptual challenges, leaps into the unsafe have been a driving force for my music. My use of unpredictable outcomes departs from Cage’s notion that it is ultimately the listener who makes the piece.<sup>199</sup> I always hesitate to write down the music I hear inwardly in an unfiltered way; I believe these creations would not be the most interesting artistic experiences I could deliver. I prefer composing Acoustic Situations which I would *like* to hear in the end but which nobody else is likely to write. Thus I am not just my own amanuensis but also testing unheard music that is able to surprise both myself and the listener. These claims are certainly reminiscent of some of the well-known statement John Cage made repeatedly during his life in different forms.<sup>200</sup>

Technically speaking, I employ random processes in the creation of several of my pieces which come with basic random (number) generators, e.g. the ‘random’- or ‘rand~’-objects in *Max*, or *IC* and *TIC*, the DOS-implementations of the Chinese *I Ching* coin tossing oracle Andrew Culver wrote for John Cage.<sup>201</sup> In recent pieces, I have used computer procedures in which the outcomes of the algorithms are unforeseeable for the user (see the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chapter for these ‘black box operations’).

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199. ‘Most people think that when they hear a piece of music, they’re not doing anything but that something is being done to them. Now this is not true, and we must arrange our music, we must arrange our art, we must arrange everything, I believe, so that people realize that they themselves are doing it, and not that something is being done to them.’ John Cage quoted in Nyman, *Experimental Music: Cage and beyond*, p. 24.

200. ‘I don’t actually hear music before I write it, I write it in order to hear it.’ John Cage in Bigazzi, *John Cage*, p. 15.

201. Andrew Culver’s *IC* simply produces random numbers within a given range, whereas *TIC* provides time ranges in an hh:mm:ss time format. Both programmes are now available from <http://www.newmus.net/filelib.htm> (accessed 20/09/2012).

Another rationale behind my music is that I do not just wish to overcome my own personal limitations but also to launch an attack on the bourgeois idea of good-behaviour, which many perceive to be a prevailing view. Injecting unexpected, even rude elements into my music is an attempt to blow up a stuffy and mild artistic scene from inside. (Ideally, this might even be a small hint of how rigged social structures will begin to crack.)

### **Disillusion with a cult**

In 2000, I had the opportunity to spend three months in Cage's home town of Los Angeles<sup>202</sup> and to really breathe in the spirit of the Southern Californian megalopolis. Although, in theory, it still belongs to the Western world, not only did I feel culturally as far from Europe as never before,<sup>203</sup> but it was also probably for the first time I harboured heavy doubts about Cage's versus my European way of thinking, or, more precisely, a Germanocentric reception of his music. Suddenly there was a strong feeling that many of Cage's choices, which most European exegetes might have claimed to be of a purely aesthetic nature, owed just as much to a great sense of pragmatism to find solutions for concrete and often very mundane practical performance issues. After all, in the 1950s and 60s Cage clearly had to make a living from the art he produced. One famous example is the birth of the 'prepared piano': when no other instruments were available to him, he just put a pie plate inside the piano to achieve greater timbral variety from it,<sup>204</sup> another example is when the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (with whom Cage worked) had run out of money and needed a new van, Cage booked five back-to-back appearances on an Italian television quiz show answering questions in the field of mycology to earn the money they needed. Specifically for these TV appearances he even conceived some well-known pieces, such as *Water Walk*,<sup>205</sup> and performed them in an extremely telegenic way (elegantly demonstrating, at an early stage, what we would call media literacy nowadays). No European avant-garde composer from the 1950s comes to mind who could have achieved this, or would even have thought of doing

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202. This was possible thanks to a grant by the German Foreign Ministry in their artists residency *Villa Aurora* in Pacific Palisades.

203. In fact, I am still wonder where Adorno and Horkheimer found the discipline to write their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in LA of all place, right next to the Sunset Boulevard and Venice Beach under the burning Californian sun.

204. John Cage, 'A Composer's Confessions', 1948 in R. Kostelanetz (ed.), *John Cage, writer*, New York, Cooper Square Press, 2000, pp. 35 – 36.

205. Cage also performed e.g. *Music walk*. For copyright reasons the Italian television RAI has now removed all videos that circulated on YouTube. Cage performed *Water Walk* in January, 1960 on the TV show *I've Got A Secret*. Cf. Harald Muenz, "'Lascia o Raddoppia?'. John Cage im Fernsehquiz der RAI', in *MusikTexte* 106 August 2005, pp. 50 – 52.



something similar in the first place. Finally, towards the end of his life Andrew Culver wrote computer implementations of the Chinese *I Ching* for Cage, which enabled him to produce his late 'Number pieces' quicker and more efficiently so that he could satisfy his commissioners' needs. Thus, the LA experience was clarifying and healthy for me since the Cage myth lost some of its apparent innocence. It became clear to me that one could easily accuse Cage's aesthetics of being linked to a distinctly American kind of *laissez-faire* neoliberalism.

Nevertheless, the New York School's influence helped me to question many of my earlier Western prejudices surrounding new music. These attitudes were partly linked to typical German sensitivities (which I had never completely shared anyway). In the long run however, after a certain radical period, Cage's anti-European concepts did not make me entirely abandon Western ideas, rather I managed to put them into perspective. In contrast to Cage, I am thoroughly 'Old European', condemned to thinking historically and trying to integrate experimental attitude and unknown outcomes into an otherwise rational compositional logic. As is our good fortune, it was often enough Cage who had already thrown the baby out with the bath water for us so that those who came after him could avoid repeating this ourselves.



## **2. Commentaries on the Compositions in the Portfolio**

## >>schönes klavierstück<< (2006)

For piano

Dedication: *For elfriede*

Duration: ca. 4 min.

Premiere: 01/01/2008, Berlin, BKA; Ernst Surberg - piano

### Programme note

My titles often contain a good deal of ambiguity, and as usual I only gave it a name long after the piece was long finished. It certainly was not the guiding principle by which I was composing. The title is purely ironic, of course, and places a question mark behind the music. This is part of my confrontational way of thinking. In German, deliberate lower case letter spelling throughout belongs to the tradition of experimental literature, and reveals a further rupture. Additionally, ‘beautiful piano piece’ is put in quotation marks, which is an allusion to Adorno’s essay ‘Schöne Stellen’ (‘Beautiful Passages’). In German, there is a pejorative term ‘Quintolenmusik’ (‘quintuplet music’) for intricate rhythms in new music, and in the last third of the piece, a quintuplet passage appears; indeed, there the pianist must play the same rapid figure-of-five eight times in a row, and, if possible, eight times in exactly the same identical way as if on a cheap MIDI keyboard, without any dynamics or agogic accents. This banal pentatonic set piece, a commodity figuration, should

sound like a ‘ready made’, as if it had been ‘spliced in’ from some pre-existing tape music. At the same time, the dedication ‘for elfriede’ refers to the fact that ‘beautiful piano piece’ could have become part of an unwritten piece of music theatre, which at the time I was planning and pursuing together with the Austrian poet Elfriede Czurda.<sup>206</sup>

In my music written before 2005, I often had a strong aversion to virtuosic or otherwise opulent music. As opposed to this, most compositions in this portfolio could be generally characterised as of high speed, compact and on the dense side — with the exception of >> *schönes klavierstück* <<.<sup>207</sup> Although written in 2006, this music is distinguished by a massive reduction of material, and can therefore be considered as sitting on the borderline between the ‘old’ and the ‘new Muenz’ around 2005.

### Title

Ludwig Wittgenstein contended that ‘Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen’,<sup>208</sup> but music may still ‘speak’ where words cease to communicate.<sup>209</sup> The term ‘silence’ appeared earlier in the title of my tape composition *schweigenderest*<sup>210</sup>; in this acousmatic composition gaps were realised by erasing sounds by means of superimposing them with hiss noises taken from historic recordings. Related forms of deletions, which are not caused by pauses but by superimpositions with noise, can be found later in my piano duo *unashamed piano playing*.

It is typical for my work titles to contain a certain amount of ambiguity. Being framed by extremely visible quotation marks the title itself already carries a big question mark. >>*schönes klavierstück*<< was however not simply a thread along which I was composing. The music was given the title only after I had finished writing the piece, which has been the case with most of my music. The pun which seems to bluntly anticipate the listener's experience and opinion of the piece by stating this is meant to be a >>*beautiful piano*

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206. The translation of the original German programme note for the CD booklet was completed with the aid of Bob Gilmore to whom I am indebted.

207. >>*beautiful piano piece*<<

208. ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent’ is his seventh and last proposition (and essentially the leitmotif of the whole volume since it is already revealed in the introduction) from Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus. Logisch-philosophische Abhandlung*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1963, p. 115.

209. My skepticism about the possibilities of conversation/verbal discourse is explained under the Aesthetic Phonetics heading in the Chapter on *Das Zungenbuch*.

210. ‘silentrelics’, the non-standard noun-noun compound in the English translation is intentional.

*piece*<< indeed is both self-ironic and a rupture with the taboo of ‘cheap beauty’ among the historical avant-garde.

In turn, the title is also an example of my confrontational relationship with German sensibilities. In fact, the German equivalent to the English saying something is ‘too good to be true’ has the notion that something is ‘zu schön [beautiful] um wahr zu sein.’ The title may also suggest Adorno’s famous radio essay ‘Beautiful Passages’ (‘Schöne Stellen’), in which he tries to explain — with short extracts from pieces by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Wagner, Bruckner, Mahler, Ravel, Berg, Webern and Schönberg — what makes those passages so very special.<sup>211</sup> When studying under Helmut Lachenmann, I was influenced by his ‘auxiliary definition of beauty’ as a ‘refusal of habit’.<sup>212</sup> This concept implies that the composer must not make any direct attempt to achieve ‘beauty’ since such a conscious attitude would lead to marketability and kitsch. ‘Beauty’ may eventually appear as an outcome of the compositional process of its own accord. According to this logic, composers attempting to purposefully write a ‘beautiful’ piece of music would be classified as being after quick and easy success.<sup>213</sup>

### **Form**

The macro-form of this piano piece is an overarching wave-like pulsating rhythm consisting of a series of short events followed by long silences. The individual pitch configurations that the short events consist of use a very limited number of notes and chords, the resonances of which are allowed to unfold in their own time and manner and then to die away without new attack being immediately superimposed on top. Therefore ‘silences’ (represented in the notation by rests) do not stand for a complete *tacet* but mainly for very quiet resonances from the preceding events.

Ineffable gaps between isolated events and volatile ornaments have fascinated me for a long time. Musical flow in the traditional sense should come to a standstill and the focus should be on the resonances of sounds. However, they assume a quiet different role here compared

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211. Theodor W Adorno, ‘Schöne Stellen’, in *Gesammelte Schriften* vol. 18, Musikalische Schriften V, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 2003, pp. 695 – 718.

212. ‘Schönheit als verweigerter Gewohnheit’. Cf. Helmut Lachenmann, ‘Composing in the Shadow of Darmstadt’, 1987, trans. by Richard Toop in: *Contemporary Music Review*, Vol. 23, No. 3/4 September/December 2004, p. 50.

213. This probably applies to all ‘adjectival’ compositional aims in general, e.g. planning to compose a ‘delicate’ or ‘energetic’ piece.

Helmut Lachenmann's piano music, e.g. in *Ausklang* or *Ein Kinderspiel*: By employing this structure, I was still hoping to create suspense, but not yet an *Acoustic Situation*. Thus the ostentatious emptiness of >>*schönes klavierstück*<< can still be compared to what is happening in my much earlier pieces *standArts* (1996) or *Sieben graphische Blätter aus ausPlaste* (1996/97). The standstill that occurs in the central section of the later sextet *dietro V avanti* already fulfils a different purpose (see below). The long pauses between events in the piano piece serve a dedicated purpose by realising a dramatic conception of time.

>>*schönes klavierstück*<< was composed with a psychoacoustic phenomenon in mind that was once described by Bernd Alois Zimmermann writing about 'infinitesimal abysses' in Anton Webern's music. Zimmermann claims that when presented with just a few short and scattered musical events, which are extremely spread-out over long periods of time, listeners tend to 're-contract' them again, thus shortening the experienced time-span of such passages in their minds.<sup>214</sup> This does however not lead to the listener just aurally observing what is going on in the music, since there is still some dramaturgic speculation happening on the side of the composer.

A listener may also experience the fact that the music comes with a lot of time to breathe as a form of 'beauty' in a traditional sense.<sup>215</sup> However this is not something that is easily available in this music. The rather long pauses presented in >>*schönes klavierstück*<< are not simply 'beautiful' on the surface. A listener who just sits back and relaxes will presumably miss something. Many of the piano's rests are pervaded by the sustained decay of a chord or by the very quiet reverberation originating from silently pressed keys. It is also hoped that it is possible to experience the difference between a 'relaxed' long silence and a measured one.

The player should avoid the inherent risk that those long rests are perceived as just void blanks by the audience. In fact, the performer must attempt to play the very few given notes in an extremely intense *espressivo* manner in order to overcome the intentional structural emptiness of the music. For me this is linked to the idea of an avoided — or if one so wishes 'negative' — inward virtuosity.

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214. Bernd Alois Zimmermann, 'Über die neuerliche Bedeutung des Cellos in der neuen Musik', 1968 in Bernd Alois Zimmermann, *Intervall und Zeit*. Mainz Schott, 1974, p. 80.

215. A description to this effect was given in a Concert talk with Rainer Nonnenmann during the interval of my portrait concert at Cologne's Alte Feuerwache, 25/05/2011, in which *fein...auflösend* had its premiere. Unpublished transcription of the recording.

## Tonality



Fig. 1. >>*schönes klavierstück*<<, bar 24, right hand

In bar 24 of the piece a sudden quintuplet passage appears (see figure 1). The pianist must play the same rapid five note figure eight times in a row and to the extent that it is possible in exactly the same way, without any dynamics or agogic accents. This is another pun: in German there is the pejorative term ‘Quintolenmusik’ (‘Quintuplet Music’) for rhythmic complications in typical new music. At the same time, I intended this seemingly banal pentatonic figuration to sound slightly extra-territorial, as if it had been spliced in from a tape of pre-existing music. The harmonic context of the piece helps to achieve this effect as it plays with leading notes which create different degrees of tonality between tonal and non-tonal; e.g. bars 1 – 6 are centred around the tension created between the repeated F5 as the highest note in the right hand against the neighbouring but four octaves lower E1 in the left. Despite the fact that >>*schönes klavierstück*<< is obviously not written using functional tonality, it presents many such leading notes relating to fundamentals. Bringing them out is a matter of carefully weighting chords and resonances on the side of the performer. (The pianist Ernst Surberg, who premiered the piece, brought out these subtleties very beautifully.)

As opposed to these quasi-functional harmonic elements, the quintuplet passage at bar 24 is characterised by a harmonically flat, tension-free pentatonic pattern. In the context of the piece, this ready-made acquires the role of a ‘beautiful’ pseudo-quotation, a sort of stylistic reference that could be part of a well-known trivial piece of music (which — to the best of my knowledge — it is not.)<sup>216</sup> The context of the piece does not resolve this ambiguity, with the listener remaining in a state of tension as to whether they should have recognised this as a ‘quote’ or not. The very last chord in the piece, an E9+/9-/7+ chord (enharmonically spelled in F $\flat$ , obscures the ‘root’ tonality E (fundamental E is here even in the bass) in a way similar

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216. The pianist who premiered the piece, Ernst Surberg, confessed to me it was exactly this feeling that led him to use this snippet from >>*schönes klavierstück*<< for his own piece of electronic stage music he was just writing at the time.



to the final chord in Schoenberg's very short second piano piece from op. 19. (This is actually the only one concrete 'Schöne Stelle' from the past in my piano piece to which one could possibly refer.)

After years of strict refusal, I now see tonality — in the sense of tones relating to a common root — as a universal and not as a taboo. This does not preclude the use of 'atonal' situations; on the contrary, graded degrees of tonality floating in between pentatonic, modal, quartal, free atonal, or twelve-tone have become composable elements in of themselves. Feelings of suspense and resolution are ultimately centred on learned psycho-acoustic phenomena originating from centuries of tradition and practice in harmony becoming more and more 'functional'. In terms of a critical re-evaluation of this tradition, which does not simply wish to indifferently take refuge in quotes, but aims at an inward revitalisation of the tonal phenomenon, I'm interested (in this portfolio, especially in *fein ... auflösend*), how new forms of harmonic tension or relaxation can be handled even though a traditional context is heavily thwarted or missing. It would be too hasty to dismiss the idea of inward harmonic differentiation in today's art music as a conservative approach.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Cf. Michael Rebhahn, 'No problem! Approaches towards an artistic New Music', transcript of a lecture given at the conference *New Perspectives for New Music*, Harvard University, Department of Music, 13/04/2013, <http://hgnm.org/other-events/hgnm-conference-new-perspectives-on-new-music>, p. 13–14, (accessed 30/03/2015). Rebhahn invents a, certainly ironic, dramatis personae of living composers calling this a 'taxonomy' of the contemporary composer. It is however telling that the number one in this classification is 'THE CONSERVATOR – who acts as a preserver of a historical apparatus of musical instruments by establishing a microcosm of sonic *differentiation*; thus he ensures the survival of the artefacts of instrument building.' (ibid, p. 2, my italics). Later in the text he asks: 'How about a New Music, which is not about *differentiation*, but about *difference*?' (ibid, p. 8) With so much aversion against differentiation it might be suspected that Rebhahn has concrete composers, perhaps of the 'complex' type, in mind, but I would argue that there is a long way to go between 'differentiation' and 'hyperdifferentiation'. The latter is rejected by Rebhahn with reference to Harry Lehmann (ibid, p. 15).

## **dietro V avanti (2006/7)**

For flute, clarinet, vibraphone, piano, violin, and violoncello

Dedication: *Agli amici di Alter Ego*

Duration: ca. 15 min.

Commissioned by Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR), Cologne

Premiere: 03/03/2007, Cologne, WDR, Großer Sendesaal, Ensemble *Alter Ego* (Rome):

Manuel Zurria, flutes; Paolo Ravaglia, clarinet; Aldo Campagnari, violin;  
Francesco Dillon, violoncello; Fulvia Ricevuto, vibraphone; Oscar Pizzo,  
piano.

### Programme note

*dietro V avanti* is, again, based on a rhythmic grid being filled in in different ways. As opposed to the later trio *nearly - fast*, here I was very much working with linear developments. The piece plays with aestheticised physical flows and continuous processes, as if it had been put together from liquids in different colours presenting variable fluidities and streaming into mixed directions. The central section constitutes a stark contrast by bringing the restless outward movement to a standstill and focusing on the movements *inside* individual notes. In the sense of an ‘Acoustic Situation’, here I am playing with elements like timbre, vibrato speed or beating effects. As often in my chamber music, instruments in *dietro V avanti* are rarely treated as soloists but mostly like complementary components of one single overall complex sound object.

This can be compared to the blending of the violin part into a particular accordion register in *data compression* as well as to the resulting nested *klangfarbenmelodies* in *fein ... auflösend*, where the principal voice is entrusted, in quick changes, to alternating instruments.<sup>218</sup>

## Genesis

I had worked with the dedicatees of the piece, the Roman ensemble *Alter Ego*, on earlier occasions, and my experience of them has always been as a group of instrumental virtuosi. Our first collaboration happened when they played my cycle *miniaturen*<sup>219</sup> in Rome. On the next occasion we worked together they played the premiere of my *dissieme* (2004) for flute, clarinet, violin, violoncello and live electronics,<sup>220</sup> with the composition already being dedicated to the *Alter Ego* musicians. In early 2006, Frank Hilberg from radio Westdeutscher Rundfunk (*WDR3*) invited me to write a new piece for these marvellous musicians for his ‘Ensemble Europa’ series at Cologne radio’s Großer Sendesaal. *Alter Ego* was initially established as a quintet formation (flute, clarinet, violin, cello, and piano) but shortly after I had received the commission, I was informed by the ensemble that they now had the percussion player Fulvia Ricevuto on board as a new member, and that I should consider including her in the new composition even though the original commission only mentioned a piece for quintet. However, for logistical reasons, the percussionist should only play vibraphone, since this was already used in other pieces on the programme. I agreed to this since I liked the idea of treating the instruments in three pairs: winds (flute/clarinet), strings (violin/cello), ‘short-note instruments’<sup>221</sup> (vibraphone/piano).

## Compositional objectives

Thus *dietro V avanti* was written very specifically with *Alter Ego* in mind. The previous common experiences with these musicians, both dating back to my pre-2005 period, both featured anti-virtuosic tempi, slow pace and an overall relatively low density of musical events over time. For the new piece I wished to take a really different musical approach from

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218. The translation of the original German programme note for the CD booklet was completed with the aid of Bob Gilmore to whom I am indebted.

219. (1995 – 2001) for clarinet, violin, violoncello and piano during the Festival ‘Emergenze’ at the Istituto Svizzero (Swiss Institute) on the 16/03/2000.

220. The piece was a commission by the Italian Institute in Cologne for its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary on the 30/11/2004.

221. ‘Kurztoninstrumente’ was Schoenberg’s global term for all plucked, stringed keyboard, and pitched percussion instruments.

the earlier pieces they had performed. I imagined the music to be particularly fast, lively and light-hearted.

As mentioned in the programme note, I tried to integrate all six players into one single super-instrument. This has also mostly been the case in my other chamber music as well. The idea reaches even back to much older compositions like *franSung* (1998) or *dissieme* (2004). Similar approaches can also be found in other pieces of this portfolio e.g. in *data compression* (for violin and accordion) the string instrument is treated as if it was one multifaceted accordion register; similarly, many melodic lines in the quartet *fein ... auflösend* (see below) are each time assigned to another one of the four instruments. The quick alternation results in nested overarching timbral melodies (*Klangfarbenmelodien*).

### **Title**

The Italian title implies the notion of ‘backward versus forward’ with reference to a modernist aesthetic belief in art that progresses linearly as if running along a time axis that constantly moves forward. I suppose this belief has become historic and obsolete since today it seems impossible to determine which means and materials are aesthetically ‘progressive’ and which ones ‘regressive’. As argued earlier, also the degree of experimentalism in a music cannot be measured by these parameters.

### **Form**

Not having written any fast music for a long time, my personal research in *dietro V avanti* was centred upon the issue how to give so many notes an overarching structure. I planned to confront the imagined frenzy with its opposite, a quite introspective central part bringing the movement to a nearly complete standstill. After I had decided to structure the more virtuosic parts in several logically evolving waves, this led to the further question of what happens to perception if distinctly processual parts are placed in direct opposition to contemplative sections within the same composition. This can be seen in the outer sections (bars 1 – 201, and 274 – 388 respectively), which develop rather linearly as opposed to the extremely static situation in the central part (bars 202 – 273). The Analysis section provided below will further illustrate this with the first part, bars 1 – 201, and the adjacent middle section, bars 202—273.

A simple ternary form is normally not among the expectations for a piece of contemporary music. This is partly why *dietro V avanti* exhibits a quite simple ABA' structure, with the contrasting B part (at rehearsal mark [K]<sup>222</sup>) being characterised by extremely slow movement, *laissez vibrer* and non-targeted events compared to the motoric and developmental A section. The A' part (starting at [O]) is a shortened retrograde version of A, followed by an even more virtuosic stretto (at [S]) and a final short coda (at [X]) in slow tempo again. ABA' has been mainly chosen, since it is a simple way to present contrasting situations, like those happening in *dietro V avanti*, and lends a basic framework to the result.

This macro-formal simplicity means bringing about the bare minimum of form without working in an overly dramatic way on the whole that could side-track a listener from what should be essentially perceived as 'Acoustic Situations' ensuing from the outlined processual versus contemplative sections outlined. The Italian title 'back versus front' refers to a perceptual game between background and foreground. Rhythmic-harmonic grids are established from which different musical patterns emerge. Among these tonal objects appear that are passing results from an ongoing permutation process (more on this later). An audience may and should follow their own associations, which they bring to the resulting individual musical objects. The fixed permutational game should as much as possible keep the compositional interventions on the level of a mere scanning process to permit the audience to concentrate on the respective 'Acoustic Situation'. It was hoped that listeners would be able to focus their attentions mainly on the kaleidoscopically interwoven textures that happen in each individual moment without being distracted from the overarching musical flow too much. Nevertheless, a sense for forward motion does assert itself through the motoric drive of the hammered pulses at the beginning or the clear linear increase in density happening at [C].

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222. Rehearsal marks from the score are always written as capital letters in square brackets in the text.

## Analysis

Pianoforte

*ff sempre, martellato*

Fig. 2. *dietro V avanti*, bar 1, piano part

Initially, a chord in the piano (see figure) is systematically permuted inside a 12-point grid, constituting a backdrop accent structure based on the twelve semiquaver pulses within a 3/4-metre, which are articulated in changing metrical subdivisions. Symmetrical and retrograde structures run simultaneously in the foreground and in the background changing back and forth into their opposites. When this process starts anew at letter [C], an additional net of dotted semiquavers (eight accents in 3/4) is superimposed on top of it. From bar 67 onwards, a further 18-point grid, based on semiquaver triplets in 3/4, is added; at bar 85, semiquaver quintuplets introduce a retarding moment. With the appearance of demi-semiquavers in bar 97, the finest grid resolution is reached.<sup>223</sup>

Composers still in the wake of the loss of functional harmony had tried to achieve harmonic coherence within the same piece; this typically produced one overarching harmonic colour in a piece, often governed by a set of rules.<sup>224</sup> After World War II, Stockhausen introduced the term *Zeitgeräusch* ('time-noise,' or 'noise in time') for a superposition of serially structured rhythms which the listener does not perceive as periodic, since 'they can no longer be reduced to integer ratios and one smallest discernible unit'.<sup>225</sup> As fascinatingly as this principle was adopted in legendary pieces such as *Gruppen*, it just as much led to a devaluation of the harmonic sphere tending towards an overall grey and drab impression clearly expressed by the term 'noise' in *Zeitgeräusch*.

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223. The entire process is similar to what the attribute 'auflösend' ('resolving') in my later work title *fein ... auflösend* is hinting at: different degrees of rhythmic resolutions permitting alternating focuses on the same materials. Similar processes also happen in *nearly — fast* with its superimposed 4:5:6-grids.

224. Examples for this would be the mainly dissonant interval structures in Schönberg or Webern's dodecaphonic works, Hindemith's quartal harmonies, or Berg's melodic and harmonic constellations based on thirds, which permitted him, e.g. in his *Violin Concerto*, to seamlessly integrate even popular Austrian tunes and the famous Bach chorale in the end.

225. Karlheinz Stockhausen, '...wie die Zeit vergeht...', 1956 in Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Texte zur elektronischen und instrumentalen Musik*, vol. 1., Cologne, Du Mont, 1963, p. 124.

## Harmony

Over the course of working on *dietro V avanti*, the harmonic aspect gradually moved to the foreground of my compositional interest. I no longer saw the necessity of reducing the amount of possible harmonic relationships at the outset. All chords do sound more or less ‘wrong’ within 12-tone equal temperament anyway, but at the time of writing *dietro V avanti*, for practical reasons, I had not yet consider abandoning this tuning system. The generalised model of harmonic thought behind *dietro V avanti* is based on the idea of moving in an array generated from two compositional axes: ‘harmonic movement’ (that is how quickly or slowly chord changes happen) and ‘part density’ (how ‘thick’ the harmonies involved are, how many parts they comprise respectively). The available scope ranges from ‘rapidly changing’ and ‘full-voiced’ to ‘static’ and ‘thinned out’.

A corresponding category in the time domain could be called ‘rhythmic movement’ (that is whether rhythmic changes happen slowly or quickly) and ‘pulse density’ (that is, how many pulses per time unit actually exist); e.g. the presence and absence of pulse respectively in the outer sections and central parts of *dietro V avanti* can be considered equivalent processes on the rhythmic level to what otherwise happens in the harmonic domain.

The very first, pulse-oriented section of *dietro V avanti* is harmonically based on an atonal stereotyped ‘triad of new music’<sup>226</sup> in the piano, built from stacked fourths and tritones. I regard this as a relatively neutral, anonymous piece of musical — let alone harmonic — material, which is repeated in a constantly changing rhythmic pattern.<sup>227</sup> With reference to the two just presented parameters of the harmonic array, this initial situation could be labeled as one of ‘no changes’ within a rather ‘dense’ (six-part) chord.

The performance instruction in the score ‘Fin dall’inizio tutti i suonatori sono sempre in posizione d’esecuzione come se suonassero senza interruzioni. Non abbassare lo

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226. This is a chord that could be easily found in Webern’s or Stockhausen’s music. In fact, the ‘recapitulation’ of the beginning of *dietro V avanti* ([Q], bar 316) does not start with my original 6-part chord; it is sarcastically replaced with the initial chord of Stockhausen's *Klavierstück IX* in different inversions.

227. The initial chord in Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück IX* is repeated hundreds of times throughout the piece, mostly in an entirely mechanical pulse.

strumento!’<sup>228</sup> refers to a perceptual game of foreground and background perception, on the lines of the title ‘front versus back’: the piano is constantly strumming the same chord *ff sempre*. It always takes a short time for the listener to switch to focus on the subtle *ppp* repetitions in the background (flute bars 1 – 2, clarinet bars 6 – 7, cello bars 10 – 11, violin bars 13 – 14), which seem to quasi emerge from ‘behind the piano’ when the chord repetitions come to short temporary stops. A similar acoustical masking effect returns later, in a varied form, in bars 132 – 155 between vibraphone and piano on the one hand and flute, clarinet, violin and cello on the other.

The density of the piano chord changes over the course of the first section as notes are omitted from the original chord as if it is being perforated. In bar 21 at [A], the remaining instruments start taking over notes from the piano chord in changing densities (initially only the E $\flat$  and D). Subsequently, continuously changing combinations of notes are picked out of the piano’s harmony. Whereas the pianist is instructed, right from the beginning, to play the chord more and more in *staccato*,<sup>229</sup> the winds and strings begin to sustain some notes.

The increasingly frequent breaks within the original 6-part agglomerate do not only give the impression of the material being perforated, but they also affect the perceived harmonic quality of the remaining chord quite significantly. The process of omitting individual pitches among the six commences at [A]; it is later resumed in the final stretto from [S] onwards. As opposed to the former section, in the latter the chord often occurs in transposed versions. In both cases no change of harmony occurs; in a traditional understanding, all these would be inversions of the original chord. However, despite the fact that only the same intervallic relations from the first chord are employed, the changing degrees of dissonance are perceived as *timbral* variations. The entire idea of playing with the links between harmony and timbre is further explored in my later composition *SCHLÖSCH*.

Towards the end of the first section, starting from the vibraphone’s chord E-F $\sharp$ -C $\sharp$  in bar 43, the missing six notes of the chromatic scale — that is the ones not contained in the original 6-tone piano chord — are added in step by step. This helps to clearly mark harmonically the

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228. ‘From the beginning, all instrumentalists are always be held in playing position as if they were performing without interruption. Do not put down the instrument!’

229. ‘continuamente più corto fino allo staccato della batt. 16’ (‘continuously shorter until the staccato of b. 16’)



beginning of the next section, at [C], as a departure from the first chord again. The starting point is the same, but the same will not remain the same: now, in the ensuing section, the inner structure of the chord, which at first appears unvaried again, is subject to continuous changes.

Technically I realised this by firstly calculating a strictly serial grid made from pitches and rhythms. This was generated by using a 'blind' permutation process the results of which I could not know in detail beforehand. After this net was cast, I looked back at its outcomes and responded to them associatively as a composer, in terms of what they suggested to me musically. As a consequence of this, I was manually hanging self-made objects into the formerly anonymous grid; these objects arise and disappear from the underlying grid process, which does not come to a standstill and continues to progress under the surface, like unexpected flotsam and jetsam. By emphasising things that emerge from the process, my way of working is quite different from that of a 'post-modern' composer who might take these references as starting points.

#### Found tonal objects

The following explanations attempt to describe my typical harmonic thinking, in this piece and beyond, with more clarity. At a certain point (bars 76 - 79 in the final score), the grid process generated tonal chords and rhythmic phrases, which reminded me of a tango. The approach of a composer still clinging to the credo of post-war modernism would have probably been to eliminate or conceal these, whereas I was trying to make them even more prominent. Most *objets trouvés* can be found when the strings are suddenly playing pizzicatos, e.g. emphasising the almost B<sup>b</sup>7/9 chords in bars 69 and 74; or the nearly E<sup>7/9</sup> chord in bar 72; the slightly distorted F<sup>7</sup> chords in bar 81; the D<sup>7</sup> in bar 93; or the clear G<sup>7/9</sup> chord on the first beat of bar 76.

#### Octaves are not taboo

It makes sense to further explain some of my harmonic principles in the context of this central section of *dietro V avanti*. Quite often pure octaves within otherwise dissonant chords are generated by my constructive outlines; as opposed to classic avant-garde thinking, they now are by no means taboo in my music. On the contrary, I rather delight in making them

stand out even more. Some of these even grow into full-fledged overtone fields: bars 106 – 107 show a short overtone scenario based on the fundamental note A (cello pizzicato in bar 106) with subsequent anchor notes C# and E (in clarinet, violin, and vibraphone; later also in the flute) and an overtone glissando on A in the cello. Another similar procedure happens a few bars later over a fundamental D (bar 110 cello pizzicato plus clarinet) with a following outburst of notes from the overtone series on D in the violin (bars 110 – 111) and the flute (bars 111 – 112). The passage from here on plays with the ambiguity between C and C# in violin (bars 111 – 113) and flute (bars 112 – 113), followed by the clarinet (bars 114 – 115): the instruments are very slowly shifting around the two pitches. The vibraphone reinforces this ambiguity by playing an ornament around C (B, C, D $\flat$  in bars 112 – 113), and the cello also now seems to opt for the new fundamental C by playing a glissando in natural harmonics on the 4<sup>th</sup> string (bars 113 – 114), which is subsequently supported by the violin and vibraphone's repeated E-s in bars 114 – 115. However, the C# returns as a fundamental on the 3<sup>rd</sup> beat of bar 115 supported by a sustained fifth C#-G# in the cello plus the major third E# (notated as an F in the vibraphone). The cello glissando from G# upwards introduces certain harmonic ambiguity: its upward trend towards the A, together with the low C#, is a reminder of the earlier A tonality. Semitone trills in the violin (bar 118 – 120) pick up on the fact that no resolution is happening between the two neighbouring notes.

### False octaves

'False octaves' are a harmonic principle derived from my use of octaves in general; they only work if listeners can assume that pure octaves may also naturally occur. The term refers to harmonic constructions in which pitches are set off against each other by a semitone plus or minus an octave, that is they come at a distance of either a minor ninth or a major seventh. In other words, I am using these intervals as if they were slightly compressed (in the case of the major seventh) or stretched (in the case of the minor ninth) octaves. This applies to many of my compositions, and the idea is that of an originally pure interval being out of tune, eventually leading to noticeable beatings. In the later discussed trio *nearly — fast*, the principle of false octaves is extended to other harmonic partials that are detuned with respect to the one actually intended, which results in different types of spectra, often with ratios between partials that change over the course of time. In the quartet *fein – auflösend*, false octaves occur in parallel leadings. In my orchestral piece *SCHLÖSCH* discussed later false octaves occur as pitches that are distributed over several octaves with nothing in between.

Despite the fact that obvious octaves are notated, this leads to them being at least occasionally out of tune, which seems to have to do with the objective difficulties experienced by players to keep the distance of multiple octaves precisely in tune, if they are not otherwise supported harmonically.

False octaves in *dietro V avanti* appear within tonal contexts in the form of dissonant adjacent notes, e.g. in bar 102, 2<sup>nd</sup> beat, an E minor triad is temporarily established as the tonal centre but is, at the same time, ‘stained’ by dissonant adjacent nonchord-notes F (to E), F# (to G), and C (to B). An apparently similar harmonic concept in principle can be identified in Ravel's music,<sup>230</sup> but the French *maître* used neighbour tones rather like dissonant spices or leading notes over a firmly established tonal basis, whereas I am exploring the innate ambiguity of conflicting neighbouring notes, which eventually take over becoming the tonal centre.

The quickly changing 6-part piano-vibraphone chords in the following section (starting at bar 132) are the result of another permutational process, this time based on superimpositions of major and minor thirds in all possible combinations. Again, I did not aim at creating any directional harmonic sense; therefore, I picked the individual chords by selecting randomly from the available repertory of intervallic permutations. Rather than harmonic progressions, the passage ought to be about variable chord *densities*. I was interested in how the listener's perception is affected as the vibraphone takes over more and more chord notes, which were originally played by the piano. This process comes to an end in bars 153 – 154, when the vibraphone plays 4-part harmonies leaving only two of the chord notes to the piano.

This process of handing over notes from the piano to the vibraphone is superimposed by a responsorial interplay of the two with the melodic instruments; these play very quiet events during the rests of the two short-note instruments. This is a similar situation to the acoustic illusions from masking effects at the very beginning of the piece that were discussed earlier. The following part until the slow central section beginning with [K] plays with different instrumental combinations of the six instruments.

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230. E.g. in the solo piano part at the beginning of his *Piano Concerto in G*: G major versus F#<sup>6/5</sup> major chords.

Bars 188 – 193 musically prepare the calm central section (bars 202 – 273), which contains sustained tonalising events recalling the earlier overtone field in bars 111 – 115. Whereas the first part of *dietro V avanti* (the A section of the ABA') was based on rather full 6-part harmonies, the quiet middle section is conceived as a radical contrast: technically, it focuses on just a few prolonged central sustained tones plus their 'false octaves'. The first fundamental at the beginning of the section is a D found in the clarinet (bars 202 – 212); it is taken over by the violin (bars 213 – 219); at bar 220 it returns to the clarinet again; it goes to the flute (bars 221 – 228); to the vibraphone (bars 229 – 231); to the piano (bars 232 – 236); the journey through all instruments is concluded at bar 237 in the cello. Ambiguity is introduced when their chromatic neighbours are added to the D-s and E $\flat$ -s: E and F in violin and cello in bars 229 and 232, and in the vibraphone at bar 237. As a conclusion in bar 238, the D is interpreted as a leading note towards the newly established fundamental E $\flat$ . One could say a 'modulation' is happening here. In line with my concept of 'false octaves', the neighbouring note E in the piano (bar 240) accompanies the new central tone E $\flat$  immediately.

Technically speaking, this is a long passage where the instruments present different types and speeds of vibrato: in bars 202—213, the clarinetist is expected to regulate their vibrato speed as if controlled by a fader on an electronic effect device. There is still more 'electronic music without electronics' going on. This is partly made possible by the use of electricity in the form of the vibraphone's electric motor when, in bars 247 – 255, the vibraphone regulates its 'vibrato' speed<sup>231</sup> from an initial medium fast rate down to a very slow one and up to as fast as possible again. This way of interfering with the vibraphone's tremolo speed was already prepared when the player was required to switch on the motor abruptly in bar 58 in the middle of a sustained chord.

Compared to its surrounding sections, the central part of *dietro V avanti* employs very reduced material. In bar 201, the motoric run comes to an abrupt standstill. Movement is taken up again in a similar abrupt fashion in bar 274. In the meantime, the listener is presented with extremely few notes and intervals compared to the sections before and after. Single held notes stand in the room as if they were individual sculptural objects. After the

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231. Needless to say that the vibraphone obviously does not produce a vibrato but a sort of tremolo, since pitches are not affected by the opening and closing of its resonator tubes.

hectic first part of the piece, listeners now need to shift their attention to different perceptual registers from those in the preceding section of the piece. Not just timbre as an abstract parameter but the tone quality of the individual instrumentalists themselves are brought into focus. This hints very directly at the performers' skills of presenting their instruments 'beautifully'.<sup>232</sup> It was absolutely intentional that the musicians would have to make up for the inherent structural simplicity of this section by playing with impeccable tone quality and creating a strong feeling for musical suspense. The section does allow and encourage the musicians to 'show off' instrumental virtuosity in an inverted sense compared to the usual understanding of the term. By exhibiting only well-known standard timbres of its six components, the section demands for an *inward* mastery of cultivated sound as well as a deeply felt musicality. In my experience, specialised new music ensembles have often neglected both features in favour of a concept of 'just' correctly executing pitches, durations and dynamics.

Personally, I have always dreamt of hearing contemporary music played by musicians I would also like to listen to when they perform a traditional repertoire piece — the musicians of *ensemble mosaik* are among these. This has unfortunately not always been the case in the performance history of new music when scratchy string sounds, breathy, thin woodwind timbres and brutal piano attacks have been the sad reality for a long time. So for me, this part of the piece also constitutes an inherent audible criticism of the treadmill of routine musical performance practice that results from a permanent sequence of quickly mounted premieres. Although the middle section of *dietro V avanti* apparently does not need a lot of manual practicing, it needs to be played with great intensity, which can only be acquired by understanding the deeper sense of the passage in the context of the piece. In particular, I regard playing chamber music as a form of social interaction that unfolds mainly in rehearsals. Ultimately a concert performance makes clearly audible everything that has or has not been musically 'argued', 'discussed' and 'agreed' in rehearsals. This highly piece-specific team interaction rightly takes its time and fortunately cannot be seriously replaced by any business-like routine.

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232. Cf. the availability of 'beauty' in the sense of being easily available as a commodity from the earlier discussion of >> *schönes klavierstück* <<.

The quick notes in the virtuosic outer sections of *dietro V avanti* are mostly short and devoid of resonance; the middle section beginning at rehearsal mark [K] confronts this with an epic celebration of sustained sounds. This section has no dramatic implications at all. The listeners just need to pay attention to the sonic events unfolding before their ears. Borrowing from the visual world, we could call this activity ‘aural observation’ since there is no generally accepted term in the acoustic domain. This happens after the long, quick and motoric first main section; here processual and observational ways of perception, linked to ‘music’ and ‘sound art’ respectively, follow each other directly. The standstill created here can also be related to the concept of music being ‘sounds in time’ illustrated in the earlier >>*schönes klavierstück*<< chapter.

*dietro V avanti* is an example of my limited belief in the traditional concept of music as a sonic discourse or as a means of expressing myself; the piece is rather about the materiality of sonic events and how these unfold over time. Especially with the contrasting middle part, I hope that the piece turns into an experience of perception itself, where listeners may actively observe how they perceive in that very moment, as opposed to just re-enacting a processual development stipulated by the composer, which is the case in the rhythm-centred A and A' sections. During this quasi-contemplative state of mind, time should be perceived as passing in a different way for the listener: it is very much them, and the players, making their own pieces, and not so much the composer who has mainly just provided the materials.

My rehearsal experience with different groups shows that the same mental process must also happen among the players themselves in order to be perceived by the audience: normally, it does not come automatically to an ensemble to immediately switch focus from the *mentally* very demanding earlier passage, which involves meticulous counting of beats and playing many short events accurately, to the sudden more context-related attitude which asks for maximum awareness and focus on the sound quality produced.

### **Aesthetic background**

Early after having pre-defined the inner-musical and psychoacoustic agendas, questions emerged about the means employed when I started composing the music. How can an ensemble piece be experimental if, on the face of it, traditional modernist attributes such as extended playing techniques are completely avoided? Or aren't these just superficial gadgets? Should I be bothered at all by these questions? Back then I still liked to see myself as a

committed avant-gardist, uncompromising as much as possible, and striving for extremes at the edges of what is still barely even accepted as music. As a shining and alarming example, I recalled that some in the new music ‘scene’ already expressed a certain disappointment when, ‘the new Lachenmann’<sup>233</sup> largely started to refrain from using noise techniques on traditional instruments especially in more recent works such as the *Serynade*, the 3<sup>rd</sup> String Quartet *Grido*, or *Concertini*. He himself delighted in calling this ‘going into the lion’s den of philharmonic sound production’.<sup>234</sup> Considering his vast catalogue excelling in orchestral music, one could certainly say Lachenmann has always been going there. It became clear over the years, that the listening expectations in new music circles had now become ready to willingly digest most materials and compositional techniques that were once considered as ‘odd’ and ‘unconventional’. In a conversation with Yuval Shaked at the 2014 Darmstadt Summer courses, Lachenmann compared this new situation with the one in the early years of his career as a composer:

Back then I said — because I was still very moralistic — ‘Art does not have to do anything but to provoke.’ I cannot say that any more. Provocation has become part of the business, of entertainment ... In practice this means that one assumes people have some sort of taboos and ... the people there who know full well that you have to be chic and modern are all laughing.<sup>235</sup>

Lachenmann rightly suggests here that keen new music audiences have not just come to terms with ‘strange’ sounds, but they now downright demand and anticipate them like a kind of quality seal for a music’s contemporariness. Consequently, some listeners may feel deeply disappointed or disturbed in their expectations if the surface impact of a recent composition does not deliver any ‘strange noises’ or ‘squeaks’ (but focuses e.g. more on an inner-musical game). It seems paradoxical only on the surface that people who do not like contemporary

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233. Lachenmann’s more conciliating music starts approximately with the trio ‘Allegro sostenuto’ originally written in 1986 – 88 but revised many times since then.

234. ‘Es galt nicht, in irgendwelche Labors oder exotische Spielwiesen auszuweichen, sondern sich in den philharmonisch vorgeprägten Raum, gewissermaßen in die Höhle des Löwen zu begeben, und dort galt es, nicht Spaß, sondern Ernst zu machen’, cite by Frank Hilberg, ‘Die Einheit von Denken, Fühlen und Handeln. Kommentar zu einigen Begriffen der Ästhetik Helmut Lachenmanns’, in Berno Odo Polzer and Thomas Schäfer (eds.), *Katalog Wien Modern 2005*, Saarbrücken: Pfau, 2005, p. 35. Cf. also e.g. Helmut Lachenmann, ‘Musik als Geräusch. Christoph Metzger und Roland Pfrengle im Gespräch mit Friedrich Goldmann, Helmut Lachenmann und Gottfried Michael Koenig’, in ‘Musik im Dialog II, hrsg. Christoph Metzger und Ralf Hoyer (eds.), Saarbrücken/Berlin, Berliner Gesellschaft für Neue Musik/Pfau-Verlag, 1999, p. 62.

235. ‘Damals habe ich gesagt — da war ich aber noch sehr moralisch — : “Kunst muß nichts, außer einen Provozieren.” Das kann ich nicht mehr sagen. Provozieren gehört zum Geschäft, zur Unterhaltung. ... Das heißt, man unterstellt den Leuten irgendwelche Tabus, und ... die Leute da, die das genau wissen, daß man schick sein muß und modern, die lachen dann alle.’ Helmut Lachenmann, in Conversation [in German] with Yuval Shaked, 07/08/2014 in Darmstadt, <https://voicerepublic.com/talks/1270>, (accessed 03/07/2015).

pieces often enough explain their aversions on the grounds of an (at least presumed) outward appearance of that music: it is ‘weird’ or ‘sounds wrong’. This is quite similar to the situation of conservative viewers of contemporary Visual Artworks: often viewers drop statements like they ‘do not understand’ a given avant-garde work adding with a shrug, ‘Well, it’s Modern Art after all!’ There sometimes seems to be the tacit implication that what comes under the contemporary label needs to be accepted to avoid being called old-fashioned. Even if you may find it all ugly anyway, it would be embarrassing for a refined person to say this so frankly. ‘Connoisseur’ listeners often explicitly embrace and glorify provocative art, the wilder the better. By rashly assigning such events and their authors the label of the ‘adventurous’, more moderate works are often dismissed as appeasing and therefore thought to be made for either traditionalists or the faint-hearted. Such a vantage point ignores Lachenmann’s argument cited above that in the meantime ‘[p]rovocation has become part of the business’.<sup>236</sup> For many composers this has now become a promotional label and marketing strategy.

From an artistic point of view, the question about whether a work of art is provocative or not seems now to have become a rather irrelevant question.<sup>237</sup> It would probably be like trying to square the circle for composers to thwart not only the expectations of traditionalist classical concertgoers but also those of new music ‘connoisseurs’ within the same piece. Here, I personally have rather decided to further challenge an audience that already comes with certain prejudices about what new music is and is not.

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<sup>236</sup> Lachenmann, Conversation with Yuval Shaked.

<sup>237</sup> Furthermore, I cannot see how an artist can reconcile such business thinking with being politically progressive.



## Das Zungenbuch (2007-)

*Das Zungenbuch*<sup>238</sup> appears in this portfolio for the purpose of demonstrating my approach towards speech and voice, which has always accompanied and influenced my compositional thinking even when I have been writing purely instrumental music. This commentary also refers every now and then to my roots in phonetics, and therefore it is not just one arbitrary subset of my oeuvre but one of my primary concerns.

*Aesthetic Phonetics* is the name of this sub-discipline of traditional phonetics, which has been particularly cultivated in the former *Phonetical Institute* at the University of Cologne<sup>239</sup> under the direction of Professor Georg Heike, who was a pioneer in the field in Germany.<sup>240</sup> From 2001 – 2005, I was fortunate to be appointed Heike's successor as module leader and tutor for his 'Aesthetic Phonetics' module at University of Cologne. The discipline can be defined as the artistic handling of human speech sounds beyond linguistic every day use in practice and theory. Composers referring to *Aesthetic Phonetics* transfer artistic methods onto phonetic materials considering analogies between musical parameters and those from speech articulation.

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238. 'The Tongue Book'

239. Now part of the *Institut für Linguistik* at the University of Cologne.

240. It is not widely known that Georg Heike was also the author of the explanatory footnotes for Stockhausen's then groundbreaking article '... how time passes ...', which Stockhausen decided to include in the first volume of texts on his work. Cf. Karlheinz Stockhausen, '...wie die Zeit vergeht...', 1956, in Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Texte zur elektronischen und instrumentalen Musik*, vol. 1., Cologne, DuMont, 1963, pp. 99 – 139.

The title *Das Zungenbuch* for this series of pieces for three phonetic voices puts phonetic articulation in the focus — represented in the title by its foremost human tool of production, the tongue. 'Zunge', in elevated German (similarly to the English 'tongue'), may also stand for 'language' itself<sup>241</sup>. *Das Zungenbuch* is conceived as a work in progress, in which I am testing different approaches towards phonetic composition. They are loosely connected by the fact that most of them are written for my ensemble *sprechbohrer*<sup>242</sup> fittingly consisting of three phonetic speaking voices in alto, tenor and bass register. The individual movements are otherwise not related to each other; each of them may be performed as a self-contained piece. They have the character of studies each of which experiments with a different facet of language and speech independently. My hope is that as more movements are composed in the future, one might get an overall panorama of speech by listening to the entire set. The concept might be compared to sporadic but extensive diary entries. So far, four movements of *Das Zungenbuch* have been completed; more are already in the pipeline and will follow at irregular intervals.

1) *...und dann ist mir donaueschingen dazwischengekommen...* (2007)

2) *tsvi:-Satz* (2008)

3) *VAGES unter LAS die/der VEGAS decke* (2010)

4) *Heisze Fusion* (2013)

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241. This comes pretty close to the concept found in Romance languages which use the same expression for both 'tongue' and 'language' (e.g. French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian): one could still speak of 'ein Dichter russischer Zunge' ('a poet of Russian tongue').

242. The 'SpeechArtTrio' *sprechbohrer* ('speech drillers') was founded in 2004. Since its three members (Sigrid Sachse, Harald Muenz, and Georg Sachse) are all three professional musicians, they perform 'spoken art' from the border area between music, phonetics and literature from a musical perspective. The *sprechbohrer* repertoire includes, in addition to their own compositions, e.g. works by Gerhard Rühm, Oskar Pastior, Tom Johnson, Dieter Schnebel and John Cage. In 2010, *sprechbohrer* realised the 90-minute first integral performance of Hans G Helms's *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* for Wergo; in autumn 2014 the same label released their recording of Kurt Schwitters's entire 'Konsequente Dichtung'.

1<sup>st</sup> Movement: **...und dann ist mir donaeschingen dazwischengekommen...** (2007; text: Harald Muenz, after an utterance by Heinrich Strobel)

Duration: ca. 7'30"

Premiere: 06/08/2007, Cologne, Kunst-Station Sankt Peter; sprechbohrer: Sigrid Sachse, Harald Muenz and Georg Sachse — phonetic voices.

Already in 2000 the name of the small town of Donaueschingen in South Baden had been part of the title of my instrumental quartet *...und weil die da in donaeschingen immer noch töne brauchen, hab' ich sie ihnen halt hingeschrieben....*<sup>243</sup> Seven years later I had planned to contribute a new piece for an upcoming concert of our ensemble sprechbohrer but saw the need of warning my fellow ensemble members that its completion could be slowed down by an unforeseen commission I had received for the famous new music festival. The title for this piece of speech-music, which itself is rather unlikely to be performed in Donaueschingen, was born when my sprechbohrer colleague Georg Sachse pointed out this irony of fate to me.

The text at its base is an utterance harking back to a 1959 remark by Heinrich Strobel,<sup>244</sup> who imagined the festival city in a new and different way: 'Donaueschingen wäre auch ohne Musik zu denken, jedenfalls ohne neue, aber die Neue Musik wäre undenkbar ohne Donaueschingen.'<sup>245</sup> In *...und dann ist mir donaeschingen dazwischengekommen...*,<sup>246</sup> Strobel's sentence is mainly represented by its intonation curve, a phenomenon that is commonly explained as the 'melody of a sentence'. The piece attempts to question this purported close relationship between language and music by submitting the prosody of the Strobel quote to extreme variations; therefore, it is indeed an etude without 'music,' especially without the typical 'new' music.

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243. Literally: *...and since those [people] there in Donaueschingen still need sounds, I have just written them down for them...*

244. The German musicologist Heinrich Strobel (1898 – 1970) was especially devoted to new music. After the Second World War, he became head of the music department of the newly established *Südwestfunk* (SWF) based in Baden-Baden, which has in the meantime been merged into the bigger public broadcaster *Südwestrundfunk* (SWR). The revival of the Donaueschingen Music Festival (which is geographically located in the broadcasting area covered by the SWF) in the early 1950s is mostly due to his initiative. The 'Heinrich Strobel Foundation' and the 'Experimental Studio of the Heinrich Strobel Foundation of SWR' are named after him. Cf. 'Heinrich Strobel', German Wikipedia entry, [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich\\_Strobel](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heinrich_Strobel) (accessed 22/07/2014).

245. 'It would also be possible to imagine Donaueschingen without music, in any case without the new music, but new music would be unimaginable without Donaueschingen.'

246. *...and then donaeschingen cropped up...*

Compositionally speaking, the piece plays a game of step-by-step shifting the word accent within Strobel's sentence. In each of its reoccurrences, the emphasis is put on a different word. Since in German (like English) speech accents are not mainly marked by dynamics but by pitch features (essentially the tone going up), the intonation curve heard will change with each instance. The performance of this is heavily obscured by the fact that the individual words are shared among the three speakers; nevertheless, they should keep the overarching intonation contour as natural as possible (i.e. as if the process was articulated by just one person alone).

Furthermore, to allow for the listeners to be able to focus on the intonation curve, the ensemble must articulate most of the text with closed mouth (*a bocca chiusa*). In the score this is notated with a strikethrough font. Chunks of letters between square brackets follow the conventions of pronunciation set out by the phonetic notation system *German SAMPA*.<sup>247</sup> All other text is in customary orthographic notation and its pronunciation that of standard German. Text that is vertically aligned between the three lines forming one system in the score should be coordinated in time. Underlined and shaded chunks of letters or syllables are to be accentuated (Typically for German, as mentioned, these 'accents' are not dynamic ones in the first place but are realised by pitch maxima within the intonational curve.) It is desirable that the performers, in each line, attempt to stick to 'natural' intonation as much as possible and focus on placing the main accent on the highlighted syllable. It must be carefully observed how the position within the phrase of this maximum changes from one line to the next. All speakers need to fit their pitch curves reasonably in the overall course in such a way that they lead towards these maxima and move away back towards the phrase end. Unless explicitly specified otherwise, the dynamics should also be those of a normal everyday speech. Further hints for interpretation and technical specifications are provided in italics and parentheses.<sup>248</sup>

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247. *SAMPA* is a simplified, computer-readable and more phonological than phonetic system for notating the sounds of speech, which was developed in the late 1980s. Compared to the traditional *IPA*, it focuses on the sound inventory of only *one* individual language, in this case that of German. Its main advantage in a computational environment is that it uses exclusively standard ASCII symbols for transcription. Cf. <http://coral.lili.uni-bielefeld.de/Documents/sampa.html>

248. These explanations correspond to those in the score, cf. Harald Muenz, *Das Zungenbuch für drei phonetische Stimmen, Nr. 1) ...und dann ist mir donaueschingen dazwischengekommen...* [preface to the score], Cologne, 2007, [unpublished manuscript].

2<sup>nd</sup> Movement: **tsvi:-Satz** (2008; text: tongue twisters)

Duration: ca. 6'00"

Premiere: 19/04/2008, Cologne, Domforum; sprechbohrer: Sigrid Sachse, Harald Muenz, and Georg Sachse — phonetic voices. Westdeutscher Rundfunk made an ad-hoc-recording after a sprechbohrer concert in their Kleiner Sendesaal.

*tsvi:-Satz* scans the full phonetic range between a single sound (a phone<sup>249</sup>), recombined syllables, words and extracts from the original, composing them back and forth again in reverse order and combining them with isolated intonational curves. The movement is predominantly based on the phonetic material drawn from the infamous German tongue twister ‘Zwischen zwei Zwetschgenzweigen zwitschern zwei Schwalben.’<sup>250</sup> The difficulty of this tongue twister is due to the articulatory issue of switching between the unvoiced alveolar and post-alveolar affricates [tʃ] and [tʃ̠], and their homonymous fricative [ʃ]. This may be more easily seen from its phonetic transcription:

[ʃ̠ʃvɪʃən ʃsvaɪ ʃsvetʃgən ʃsvaɪgən ʃsvɪʃən ʃsvaɪ ʃʃvalbən]<sup>251</sup>

The piece uses a phonological progression from simple towards more complex building blocks. It starts with isolated unvoiced stops and fricatives (bars 1 – 10), and then affricates are progressively introduced (bars 11 – 16 first half). From the second half of bar 16 – 23,

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249. My teacher Georg Heike always argued to avoid the term ‘phonemes’ (which is so widely used) if one wishes to address individual sound segments of speech. In the case of real world manifestations of speech sounds, it is linguistically incorrect to talk about ‘phonemes’: the concrete realisations of a ‘phoneme’ — an abstract phonological construct that can neither be heard nor pronounced — should be correctly called a ‘phone’. In many musicological texts about speech sounds, ‘phone’ is intended where the term ‘phoneme’ is being used.

‘Mit “Phon” bezeichnet man zunächst einmal den materiellen Laut, wie er in einem konkreten Äußerungsakt produziert wird. (...) Im Gegensatz zum Phon als einer Größe, die stets an die lautliche Substanz gebunden ist, ist das Phonem eine Abstraktion, die all das umfaßt, was eine Klasse von Phonen, die bedeutungsunterscheidend (distinktiv) wirken, gemeinsam haben.’ Urs Willi, 1996. ‘Phonetik und Phonologie’, in Angelika Linke, Markus Nussbaumer and Paul R. Portmann, *Studienbuch Linguistik*, Tübingen, Niemeyer, 1996, p. 425.) Also in Bregman’s definition ‘phonemes’ are not determinate fixed sounds but categories ‘because there are a number of possible ways of saying each of them’ A.S. Bregman, *Auditory Scene Analysis. The Perceptual Organization of Sound*, London UK / Cambridge (MA), The MIT Press, 1990, p. 598.

250. Although this does not make much sense, a possible word-for-word translation would be ‘Between two plum-twigs are twittering two swallows.’

251. This narrow phonetic transcription is based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in its 1996 version. Cf. The International Phonetic Association (ed.), *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999.

the new category of ‘voiced sounds’ is added as different types of nasals appear. Isolated syllables are the next phonetic unit to emerge at bar 24. Voiced stops and fricatives are featured for the first time here as well. In an attempt to still obscure semantics the syllables are built from reversed monosyllables of the original tongue twister in which, at the same time, unvoiced stops are substituted for their voiced counterparts. In bar 27, vowels that inevitably came in earlier together with the category of ‘syllables’ are withheld again. The focus is now put on the opposition of voiced versus unvoiced within otherwise constant phones. In bar 32 beat 3, original words from the text appear for the first time, but they are still obscured by the other voices simultaneously producing reversed versions of text.

The linguistic context of this process (phones → syllables → words → sentences) will normally not be perceived as a continuous one by an audience, since it ranges across different categories encompassing mere phones and syllables as well as semantic units. In my experience, the attention of audiences which are not used to listening to articulatory speech production purely as sounds is easily drawn away from observing sonic processes towards the ‘foreground’ linguistic-semantic ones. In vocal utterances, we are always prone to look for meaning, even if there is so little of it as in this tongue twister. In fact from m. 49, I add in words (apparently) just for the sake of their phonetic proximity to the dominant text ‘Zwischen zwei Zwetschgenzweigen...’: ‘sieben’ (seven) und ‘Schwaben’ (Swabians) in bar 49, ‘faseln’ (to babble) in bars 50 – 51, ‘Fabeln’ (fables) in bar 51. However, through the context they create in the piece, they can certainly be identified and interpreted in one way or another by a German-speaking listener.<sup>252</sup> In bar 52, the phonetic space is further extended, away from the German when the middle voice quotes the two initial words from the English tongue twister ‘She sells seashells on the seashore’. Again, the prevalent fricatives [ʃ] and [s] appear phonetically quite close to those in the German tongue twister.

*tspi*:-*Satz* relies on a much more conventional type of notation compared to my earlier works with phonetic voices. Stave notation appears again, although its usage does not suggest any specific pitches or intervals. The central one of the five lines indicates a medium, unforced speaking register for each voice, whereas the higher and lower ones signify individual higher

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252. It should be added that the composer of the piece is, in fact, a Swabian. There is also, in German, the fable of the ‘Seven Swabians’ in which they are depicted as slightly dull.

or lower registers respectively. The score may be realised with any combination of vocal registers as long as they can be identified as ‘high’, ‘medium’ and ‘low’ ones.

My consistent use of narrow phonetic transcription throughout the score is not just a whimsical quirk. On the one hand, *IPA* notation permits the piece to be realised unequivocally by any vocalist no matter what their native tongue is; on the other, and more importantly, when splitting a meaningful text into fragments, as is the case in *tsvi:-Satz*, standard orthography cannot indicate precisely enough, which actual variant of a given phoneme (i.e. which phone) is intended. For example, the isolated <e>-sounds in bars 42 – 46 could stand for three different pronunciations in standard German: [e], [ɛ], or [ə], and, in fact, all three possibilities do occur in *tsvi:-Satz*.<sup>253</sup> Just reversing the orthography and otherwise relying on the standard pronunciation rules of German would produce different phones from those intended, which are meant to be a *phonetic*, not a phonemic reversion, one that sounds as if a tape recording was played back from behind.

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253. E.g. when reversed versions of the main tongue twister are used in bars 34 – 40 in the first voice.

3<sup>rd</sup> Movement: **VAGES unter LAS die/der VEGAS decke** (2010; texts: Florian Neuner, Christian Filips, Monika Rinck)

Duration: ca. 7'30"

Premiere: 09/03/2010, Berlin, Villa Elisabeth; Florian Neuner, Christian Filips, Monika Rinck.

*VAGES unter LAS die/der VEGAS decke* bears the dedication ‘Whilst thinking of Heinz-Klaus’.<sup>254</sup> It was part of a larger collaboration that included 12 writers and 12 composers and was created for the ‘Liedertafel’ project organised by the Berlin-based ‘Sing-Akademie’. Afterwards print publication of all the contributions with an accompanying CD containing their recordings was also released.<sup>255</sup> My piece deals with the intertextuality gained from three interwoven poems by three different writers. The authors of the original texts were the three Berlin-based experimental poets Florian Neuner, Christian Filips, and Monika Rinck.

Again, the score may be performed with any combination of voices constituting a trio of high, medium, and low registers. With the three authors of the poetic texts in mind as performers — they indeed managed to do the premiere and the later CD recording — *VAGES*

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254. Much of my knowledge about Adorno has been mediated through the German music theorist and critic Heinz-Klaus Metzger (1932 – 2009) who had become famous in the first place for successfully replying critically to Adorno in 1957 (Heinz-Klaus Metzger, ‘Das Altern der Philosophie der Neuen Musik’, in *Die Reihe. Heft 4*, Vienna, 1958, pp. 64 – 80. Reprinted in Heinz-Klaus Metzger, 1980. *Musik wozu? Literatur zu Noten*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980, pp. 61 – 89). In the chapter of his book on Cage’s legendary 1958 appearance at the Darmstadt summer courses (fittingly entitled ‘The Cage shock’), Martin Iddon illustrates how ‘it was the translation of Cage into German’, mainly conducted by Heinz-Klaus Metzger, ‘that moved his [Cage’s] third lecture from playfulness and gentle irony into full-frontal assault’ — a fact that, as Iddon demonstrates, has had massive and long-lasting consequences for the public reception of Cage in German-speaking countries. (Martin Iddon, *New Music at Darmstadt*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 216 – 228.) Together with his partner Rainer Riehn, Metzger founded and edited the influential German musicological series *Musik-Konzepte* (until 2003). At the 1991 Cologne festival called ‘Prämoderne’, Metzger made quite a splash with his thesis, directed against post-modernism, that we are not living ‘after’ the modern age, let alone *post histoire*, but that the modern revolution has not yet taken place at all, and we are all still living *before* it. Metzger counted music among those products of the human mind that should not be left to the prolific movers and shakers. The fact that he always stood up to defend the ‘art character’ of music, often citing the famous Hegel utterance, also quoted by Adorno in the introduction of his *Philosophy of new music* (‘For in art we are not merely dealing with playthings, however pleasant or useful they may be, but [...] with a revelation of truth’, in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 573), has deeply influenced my own perspective on music. Consequently, I am arguing that with Metzger’s death, one of the last influential thinkers and Survivors from Darmstadt’s heydays of the 1950s has gone (Cf. Harald Muenz, ‘Fortschritt des kritischen Bewußtseins. Heinz-Klaus Metzger nachgerufen’, in *MusikTexte 123*, Cologne, 2009 December, pp. 41 – 43).

255. Christian Filips (ed.), ‘Variations sérieuses — Neue Musik trifft neue Poesie’, 2011, [including a Compact Disc], in Urs Engeler (ed.), *Zwischen den Zeilen. Eine Zeitschrift für Gedichte und ihre Poetik*, no. 32, January 2011, Holderbank (CH), Urs Engeler Verlag, pp. 89 – 90 and track 18 on the enclosed CD.



*unter LAS die/der VEGAS decke* was conceived in such a way that it can also be performed by speakers who have not had professional musical training. The score is to be read in the usual way from left to right. Every line represents a unit of meaning and is prefixed by an italic numeral. Large empty spaces stand for rests. Dynamics are reduced to and marked up in three levels: *m* equals ‘medium,’ i.e. ‘normal’ speaking volume, *p* means quieter than normal volume, and *f* stands for louder than average speaking level. Underlined syllables stand for the main ‘accent’ within a unit of meaning; apart from these, the indicated overall dynamics should be kept. (This is not a contradiction, since, as explained earlier, speech ‘accents’ in German are mainly produced by speakers significantly raising their pitch contour but not their intensity.)

Dynamic information, including crescendos and decrescendos, only applies to the particular voice in which it is shown and until it is being replaced by a new indication. Texts in italics above the line are indications for the interpretation and *not* to be spoken. The tone and manner of speaking should be kept within the natural range; speech rate and intonation must be chosen accordingly. The tempo should only deviate from the natural speech rate, where this is explicitly requested.

Grey-shaded letters should be synchronised and rhythmically aligned with other grey-shaded elements in another voice at the same vertical position. This should however not prevent a natural tone of speaking; it is therefore recommended that the voice which presents a continuous chunk of text speak the text without introducing artificial hesitations, whereas the interjections by the other parts should be ‘hooked into’ the voice with the longer block of text at the respective points. Semantic units are sometimes linked by short dashes, which serve mainly as a graphical aid for co-ordination. *Within the same voice*, priority should be given to maintaining fluency and coherence of meaning of a sentence, even where the resulting intonation curve goes against any possible overarching semantics arising from the *combination of parts*.

Punctuation marks should make a clear difference to the vocal intonation: a full stop means the vocal pitch is going down at the end of a phrase (*final* intonation); a question mark calls for the vocal frequency to go up in the end before it, as in waiting for a response (*interrogative* intonation); a colon means keeping the pitch of the voice in suspense, without

raising or lowering it, as in waiting for the continuation of what has just been said (*proredient* intonation).

Standard German serves as the basis for pronunciation and is also applied to the name ‘Vegas’ [ˈve:gas]. The only exceptions from this are a few French words, which should be pronounced as in French. The spelling of the original poetic texts was retained; therefore slight orthographic inconsistencies (e.g. different capitalisation, or ‘läßt’ versus ‘lässt’) do not imply any differences in pronunciation.

4<sup>th</sup> Movement: **Heisze Fusion** (2013; text: Christian Filips)

Duration: ca. 7'30"

Premiere: 14/09/2013, Cologne, Institut Français; sprechbohrer: Sigrid Sachse, Harald Muenz, and Georg Sachse — phonetic voices.

The piece is dedicated to the aforementioned phonetician Georg Heike with whom I was still lucky enough to be able to study Aesthetic Phonetics in Cologne. The score was a tribute for a festschrift on Heike's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>256</sup> *Heisze Fusion* brings differing intonational curves within a bilingual (German-English) self-similar text face to face. The text on which it is based is a commentary on the so-called 'global crisis' by the experimental writer Christian Filips:<sup>257</sup>

Heiße Fusion mit Menetekel

Zur Strafe: jetzt ein paar Stunden irrwitzige Übernahmen an die Wand malen.\*

\*As punishment now a few hours crazy paint-overs to the wall.

Zur Strafe jetzt mehrere Stunden crazy malen - Übernahmen an die Wand.

As punishment now several hours painting - crazy takeovers on the wall.

Zur Strafe jetzt ein paar Stunden Malerei - irre Übernahmen an der Wand.

As punishment now several hours painting - misleading acquisitions on the wall.

Zur Strafe jetzt mehrere Stunden Malerei - irreführend: Akquisitionen an der Wand.

As punishment now several hours painting - misunderstanding: acquisition of wall.

Zur Strafe jetzt ein paar der Stunden malen. Missverständnis: Kauf der Wand.<sup>258</sup>

From a structural point of view, Filips's poem could be called a gradual permutation by mutual back and forth translation between the German and the English. In my piece, I use each line of the original twice in a row.<sup>259</sup> Often, the same text is spoken in different rhythms simultaneously. The score may be performed with any combination of high, medium, and low voices. Similarly to *tsvi:-Satz*, the vertical positions of 'itches' in the score try to emulate differences in prosody, which would naturally arise if one were to pronounce the

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256. Harald Muenz, 'Das Zungenbuch für drei phonetische Stimmen — Nr. 4: Heisze Fusionen [sic] (2013) — Georg Heike, dem vielfältigen Ermöglicher, zum 80. Geburtstag' [contribution to the publication in honor of Prof. Georg Heike], in Ulrike Groß und Michael Thiergart (eds.), *Sprache und Musik. Hommage an Georg Heike*, [= *Hallesche Schriften zur Sprechwissenschaft und Phonetik Band 45*], Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 69 – 81.

257. Christian was also one of the three text authors for the preceding movement *VAGES unter LAS die/der VEGAS decke*.

258. Christian Filips, 'Heiße Fusion mit Menetekel', in Christian Filips, 2010, *Heiße Fusionen. Gesänge von der κρίσις*, Urs Engeler (ed.), *roughbook 005*, Berlin and Holderbank, <http://roughbooks.ch>, p. 5.

259. This becomes more obvious from looking at the text distribution table annexed to the score.

same sentence several times. The stave notation does not indicate any precise intervals or pitches but vocal registers with the middle line standing for normal, unforced speaking. Square note heads denote completely unvoiced segments. The text notation is based on the *IPA*. Arrows between two phones denote continuous sound transitions in which common phonetic features between the initial and final sound should be maintained where possible, e.g. the lip rounding in an  $\text{v} \rightarrow \text{ɔ}$  transition.

The composition was realised in a similar way to the one I used later, on a much larger scale, in my 50 minutes vocal-instrumental cycle *¡A la calle! ¡Fuera! Raus auf die Straße! Luft!* (composed 2012 – 2013). As opposed to the fashion of mechanically transcribing the entire frequency spectrum of vocal utterances that has become pervasive nowadays<sup>260</sup>, I am transcribing speech sounds exclusively according to what is otherwise called ‘speech melody’, i.e. the fundamental frequency curves (so-called F0 curves) of utterances which include pitches, rhythms and dynamics. These mapping procedures create ‘odd’ musical progressions one would not achieve otherwise, especially since the utterances were artificially prolonged<sup>261</sup> before transcription. Therefore we actually hear intonation curves in slow motion throughout the entire piece.<sup>262</sup>

Phonetic notation does not normally deal with word boundaries; groups of phones are only separated at veritable rests. *Heisze Fusion* makes audible that all the talk about ‘Satzmelodie’ is about an imprecise analogy: putting linguistic and musical ‘melodies’ on the same level and imposing the same musical concepts on them leads to a creative misunderstanding. With regard to the fundamental pitch, speech consists of one ongoing ‘legato’ stream moving up and down in continuous glissandos. This is a behaviour which cannot be found in traditional musical melodies; therefore, strictly speaking, it would be more accurate to not call speech intonation curves ‘sentence melodies’. The term was once assigned as a misleading analogy with music. (However, whether you want to call it music or not, the outcome is still a genuine vocal piece.)

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260. Among the most original and interesting of these is certainly Peter Ablinger's cycle *Voices and Piano*, which he started in 1998.

261. These are indeed ‘augmentations’ in the strict traditional musical sense of the word.

262. In *Heisze Fusion*, pitch contours are only transcribed approximately; in *¡A la calle! ¡Fuera! Raus auf die Straße! Luft!*, I provided detailed scores in standard stave notation for the instrumentalists of a chamber ensemble.

## **nearly — fast (2008)**

For clarinet, marimba and piano

Dedication: *In memoriam Karlheinz Stockhausen*

Duration: ca. 7—8 min.

Commissioned by *KGNM* (Kölner Gesellschaft für Neue Musik)<sup>263</sup>

Premiere: 23/08/2008, Cologne, Kunstverein; *musikFabrik*: Carl Rosman — clarinet, Thomas Meixner — marimba, Ulrich Löffler — piano

### Programme note

Here, as in many of my pieces, I constructed at an early compositional stage a sort of scaffolding of numbers, which I then responded to compositionally to varying degrees. It is no coincidence that this strict principle in *nearly — fast* is particularly evident even on a surface level: the piece was a commission for a Stockhausen Memorial Concert in 2008, thus taking its inspiration from his *Kreuzspiel*; even the instrumental line-up is partly similar. The piece is a kind of utopia, three individuals doing something similar in parallel at different speeds. These speed rates often change between the instruments, and the way these three are overlaid suggests they are

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263. *Cologne Society for New Music* e.V., which is the *International Society for Contemporary Music's* Cologne chapter.

sometimes bringing common objects into focus. A grid of pulses is laid down that subdivides the quavers of a continuous 3/4 in 4, 5 or 6 equal parts resulting in up to three different pulsations (that is 12, 15 or 18 beats per bar). Until the middle of the piece, one after the other of the attacks is omitted; after this the bars are gradually replenished with pulses, so that the overall form results in a thinning and subsequent re-densification process. In the spirit of Stockhausen, pitches and intervals are developed from permuted arrangements of 4:5:6. However, permutations of numbers are substituted for the principle of a rhythmic row, and my harmonic base in *nearly — fast* is never a 12-tone series, but bizarre chords built from 4, 5 or 6 semitone-steps, which produce deliberate doubled notes and octaves from the outset. In strict serialism, these intervals would have been frowned upon as ‘wrong’, whereas I welcome them as ‘bright spots’ that I allow subsequently to grow rampant into fields of resonances and overtones.<sup>264</sup>

## Genesis

In February 2008, briefly after the new music magazine *MusikTexte* had published my Stockhausen obituary,<sup>265</sup> Egbert Hiller of the commissioning body *KGNM* asked me to write a short piece to be premiered during their Stockhausen memorial concert; he also wanted the music to contain a link to the recently deceased composer. The original request was for a solo piece, but I convinced Hiller that for realising my idea I needed slightly more instruments. Although the music was originally conceived to be played by an uncondacted ensemble, the premiere without a conductor proved tricky, also because the musicians of *musikFabrik* had very little rehearsal time due to my relatively late completion of the score. Later, in 2011, the trio from *ensemble mosaik* indeed used a click track for our portrait concerts and CD production. Again, as already explained for *dietro V avanti*, the three instruments are not treated like soloists, but as the complementary components of one single musical organism.

## Title

Again, the title bears witness to my predilection for polysemous titles that are linked to multilingual Aesthetic Phonetics. *nearly — fast* is a play on the ambiguity of the word ‘fast’

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264. The translation of the original German programme note for the CD booklet was completed with the aid of Bob Gilmore to whom I am indebted.

265. Harald Muenz, ‘Vertreter einer aussterbenden Gattung. Karlheinz Stockhausen †’, in *MusikTexte. Zeitschrift für Neue Musik. Heft 116*, Cologne, February 2008, pp. 66 – 68.

which exists in both English and German. At the same time the German '*fast*' has the meaning of the English 'nearly'. The three musicians play the same music in three layers simultaneously and in three different rhythmic ratios, which, however, do not match each other. This means that the musicians are only 'nearly' (or in German '*fast*') together. What is more, I perceive the tempos in the piece as being only 'nearly' on the fast side: they show *some* movement but not a real forward drive *towards* something.

## Objectives

By relating *nearly — fast* to *Kreuzspiel*, I was intentionally referencing Stockhausen's *early* music. His piece was written in 1951 and dates from his period of 'strict serialism'. Although this is often not too popular with audiences nowadays, for me Stockhausen's music from his early years counts among his purest and therefore most convincing output. He knew very well how to musically combine compositional rigour with spontaneous outbursts by drawing surprising creative consequences from the immanent contradictions arising between his materials and a set of rules. (Wondrously enough, Alex Ross of all critics describes *Kreuzspiel* as 'notable for its quasi-jazzy insouciance and quasi-sensuous appeal, beginning as it does with the sound of conga drums and tom-toms pattering quietly beneath three-note piano chords splayed across various registers.'<sup>266</sup>)

For *nearly — fast*, I envisioned a pointillistic and pulverised sound, which should also be airy and sensuous at the same time, so *Kreuzspiel* seemed particularly apt because of its relatively transparent and fragmented sonorities. Stockhausen's music is written for oboe, bass clarinet, piano and three percussionists; *nearly — fast*'s line-up (clarinet, marimba and piano) could be called a reduced set of the original instruments and thus a further reduction of the *Kreuzspiel* sound. Nevertheless, *nearly — fast* has presumably less to do with the venerated *maestro* Stockhausen than with my personal compositional preoccupations. Here, like in most of the pieces from my enrolment period, composing for me has not meant 'creating from scratch' but making decisions among a range of choices. I saw my role as a composer as that of an instigator and subsequent subjective editor of the outcomes of blind and partly 'automated' processes. In later works, from *SCHLÖSCH* onwards, these pre-compositional processes were not generated manually but with the help of the computer.

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266. Ross, Alex, *The Rest Is Noise: Listening to the Twentieth Century*, New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, p. 429.

## Analysis

To technically realise the desired light sound quality, I superimposed the same musical staccato note pattern at three different speeds. I was hoping that, in this manner, the listener could immediately feel the rationale behind the title *nearly — fast*: the same is only ‘nearly’ the same.

With respect to the rhythmic organisation one could say that, in *nearly — fast*, Stockhausen’s use of a row is represented by strict permutations of numbers, using patterns of 4:5:6 pulses per crotchet, which are superimposed at the same time. The crotchet beats of a constant  $3/4$  were divided in up to three different parallel pulsations with 12, 15 or 18 pulses per bar which are notated as 3 times 4 (normal semiquavers), 3 times 5 (semiquaver quintuplets), and 3 times 6 (semiquaver sextuplets) respectively. Until the centre of the piece the initial maximum occurrences of 12, 15 and 18 pulses per measure are removed one by one. After 12, 15 or 18 bars respectively the process produces an empty bar (a full rest bar) within each layer individually, after which, until the end of the piece, the measures are filled with pulses one by one again. Running in parallel, the process remains incongruous between the three layers, not only because the same pitch material distributed on semiquavers, quintuplets and sextuplets does not exactly align vertically any longer (this is the main link to the title *nearly — fast*), but also since, on the macro level, the procedures of removing and replacing the measures’ 12, 15, or 18 pulses one per bar yield three different lengths corresponding to 12, 15 or 18 bar pattern lengths respectively. In order to obtain an equal number of bars in all three instruments, and thus a piece that ends together as a trio, the pulse layers are exchanged several times between the three instruments, i.e. at certain points (many of which designated as rehearsal marks in the final score) clarinet, marimba and piano are reassigned a different one of the three pulse layers. As a result, the three instruments are often playing similar pitch contours at different speeds, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes further apart in time, sometimes coming relatively close together and thus creating virtually self-similar musical shapes. Towards the end of the piece the focus is increasingly shifted onto repeated notes, as the pitch process makes sure that gradually fewer and fewer different pitches are available. The excess rests are filled with repetitions of the last note continued in the same pulse. In the final bar, all musicians join in these repetitions.



During the pre-compositional stage, the complete rhythmic grid was first established. In a next step, the three pulse layers were distributed among the three instruments to achieve equal overall length, after which a manual sifting process took place: I looked for any outstanding and musically interesting patterns in the blindly generated grid. Due to the fact that this procedure was carried out ‘blindly’, the musical layers in *nearly — fast* are not actively focusing on anything. From a technical point of view, the generative process may be compared to the compositional procedures described for the development in section [C] in the earlier piece *dietro V avanti*. After the three overlapping strata of different pulses in the 4:5:6 ratio running in parallel had been written out, I searched for accumulation areas within the texture, i.e. points, at which more concrete overarching musical ‘objects’ emerged from between the layers. In a subsequent step, I further emphasised and elaborated them manually. However, the materials in *nearly — fast* were generated in a different way from the earlier piece. Whereas in *dietro V avanti* I constructed the entire permutational grid from scratch, all three layers of the trio were generated *independently*. Still all three strata relate back to the same pitch material, an identical 12-tone set, which is rhythmically articulated in three different ways by projecting it on either a 4, 5, or 6-tuplet pulse grid. The outcome is different in that we now get a game of proximity and distance between relatively similar musical configurations superimposed in parallel.

The originally strictly organised process of numeric thinning and subsequent re-agglomeration was further obscured by exchanges of pulse groups between instruments. Finally, each section of the composition was assigned a different, possibly characteristic combination of the different registers of the three instruments, with an attempt to have all registers of an individual instrument covered over the course of the piece.

The following table gives an overview of the nine sections in *nearly — fast*:

<u>Section</u>	<u>Bars</u>	<u>Rehearsal mark</u>	<u>Tempo (quaver)</u>	<u>Clarinet</u>	<u>Marimba</u>	<u>Piano</u>
1	1 – 11	-	50	6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium (bass clarinet)	4-tuplets [A]: 6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium	Beginning: 4-tuplets b.7: mixed <b>R:</b> medium
2	12 – 27	[B]	50	[B]: 5-tuplets [C]: 4-tuplets <b>R:</b> high	6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium-high	[B]: mixed [C]: 5-tuplets <b>R:</b> medium-low
3	28 – 44	[D]	72	[D]: 5-tuplets  [E]: 6-, 5-tuplets <b>R:</b> low-high	Alternating 6-/5-tuplets [E]: mixed <b>R:</b> medium	4- against 6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium→low
4	45 – 57	[F]	50	6(12)-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium-low	4(8)-tuplets b.51: 5-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium-high	5(10)-tuplets b.51: 4-against 5-tuplets <b>R:</b> r.h. high l.h. low
5	58 – 79	[H]	60	[H]: 5-tuplets [J]: mixed <b>R:</b> lowest-high	6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> lowest-high	5-/6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> r.h. medium→high→highest l.h. low-very low
6	80 – 95	[K]	88	[K]: mixed [L]: 6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium-low, end: very high	6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> lowest-high	[K]: 5-/6-tuplets b.90: 4-tuplets <b>R:</b> r.h. high, l.h. medium, b.90: low
7	96 – 106	[M]	72	5-/6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> low, end: high	mixed  <b>R:</b> low	5- against 6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium high/low
8	107 – 127	[N]	60	[N]: 5-tuplets b.110: 4-tuplets b.116: 5-tuplets  <b>R:</b> high→medium→low	[N]: 4- against 5-tuplets b.122: 5-against 6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium, end: highest	6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> medium-low

				(clarinet)		
9	128 – 140	[Q]	40	6-tuplets  <b>R:</b> low→lowest (bass clarinet)	[Q]: 4- against 6-tuplets [R]: 5- against 6-tuplets <b>R:</b> high→ highest	4- against 5- tuplets  <b>R:</b> r.h.: highest l.h.: lowest

Table 1: *nearly — fast*, overview of the piece's macro-form in nine sections. The three columns 'Clarinet', 'Marimba' and 'Piano' (r.h. = right hand, l.h. = left hand) contain information on the prevailing pulse layer (4 = semiquavers, 5 = quintuplets, 6 = sextuplets) used in the respective instrument, as well as on the prevailing register (**R**) used in the corresponding section.

Unlike Stockhausen's, my harmonic building principle in *nearly — fast* is not based on any 12-tone rows but using 'odd' chord formations built from superimpositions of 4, 5 or 6 semitones (major third, pure fourth, and triton). The permutations of these intervals generated deliberate unisons and octaves in the resulting harmonies (which would have been unacceptable in strict serialism, since using the same pitch class more than once within a chord would have been deemed to put the equality of the twelve individual notes at risk). I purposefully welcome them as resonance and overtone events, thus my musical thinking here is perhaps much closer to spectralism than to Stockhausen. It was also not by random when I chose the ratios of 4:5:6, since they represent the frequency ratios within a major triad in just intonation.

In his liner notes to *nearly — fast*'s CD recording, Bob Gilmore emphasised my blend of seemingly conflicting aesthetic worlds.<sup>267</sup> However, I am not consciously taking on any models and combining them. My interest was to reconcile possibly diverse sources within my music, which nevertheless are close to me personally. I particularly love exploring the consequences of clashes between different materials, which others might see as irreconcilable. In *nearly — fast*, this can be seen in the articulation and emphasis of tonal relics within an otherwise serial (as far as pitches and rhythms are concerned) context. For me, this is indeed part of my personal experimental approach, the outcomes of which I cannot foresee at the beginning of the compositional process.

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267. '... a diehard musical avant-gardist experiencing a crisis of belief, a highly intelligent man though rather nervous, shifting his attention rapidly and enthusiastically ...' Gilmore, Bob, 'Making a friend' 2011, [liner note], in *Harald Muenz. nearly — fast*, [CD], Darmstadt, Coviello Contemporary COV 61117, 2012.

There is at least one more link to earlier works of mine. In the meantime, after having worked with speech materials quite a bit, my musical imagination is thinking in phonetic phenomena (even without using actual speech sounds) and transfers them to instrumental music. For example parallel movement like organ mixtures over a bass line, I perceive the musical equivalent to vowels in phonetics which essentially are harmonics ('formants') moving over a fundamental line ('F0 curve'). I also perceive a speech-like 'babbling' effect in 'prose passages' with quick, frayed rhythms, such as those found in *nearly — fast*.

## SCHLÖSCH (2008—11)

For large orchestra

Duration: ca. 18 min.

### Instrumentation

3 Flutes (2<sup>nd</sup> / 3<sup>rd</sup> doubling piccolo, 3<sup>rd</sup> doubling alto flute in G)

3 Oboes (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> also soprano recorder, 3<sup>rd</sup> also cor anglais and alto recorder)

3 Clarinets in B $\flat$  (2<sup>nd</sup> also E $\flat$  clarinet, 3<sup>rd</sup> also bass clarinet in B $\flat$ )

3 Bassoons (3<sup>rd</sup> doubling double bassoon, or preferably kontraforte)

4 French horns in F (3<sup>rd</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> doubling Wagner tubas in F)

4 Trumpets (1<sup>st</sup> / 2<sup>nd</sup> in D, 3<sup>rd</sup> / 4<sup>th</sup> in C)

3 Trombones (tenor-bass)

2 Contrabass tubas

Timpani

4—5 Percussionists

xyloimba, glockenspiel, antique cymbals, vibraphone, snare drum, 4 congas, bass drum, tambourine, triangle, metal castanets, 3 metal clickers (low, medium, high), pair of cymbals, crash cymbal, metal chain, large tam-tam, whip, wood block, 4 temple blocks, claves, castanets, bak, hyoshigi, vibraslap, ratchet, sistrum, bamboo

chimes, maracas, guiro, metal chimes, bin-sasara, cabaza, friction stick, arenaiuolo (sand-filled tin), sandpaper blocks, rainstick

1 Piano

1 Celeste

1 Harp

Strings: 14/12/10/8/6 (double-basses with low C)

### Programme note

Sounds, tones and chords are for me like individuals with a characteristic physiognomy. Initially, I chose a range of different characteristic chord patterns from the past, such as overtone-based, whole tone, quartal-tritone, dominant seventh, major-minor, Tristan, pentatonic chords, clusters, but also single notes as their most extreme reduction. These were then projected, over the course of the piece, in multiple sequences and configurations in diverse registers. The chords are treated like sculptural objects with each one type going through its own individual development and superimposed on top of most other chord types during the entire length of *SCHLÖSCH*. These encounters produce different musical consequences. Rhythm is derived from either Morse code or pulse material. At certain points *déjà-vus* of tonal elements appear in the form of hunting signals, which have a rather neutral, universal character and should emerge like hallucinogenic ‘traumatic’ archetypes. They also undergo their own continuous transformational processes which are superimposed on top of the unfolding chord sequence.

Formally speaking, *SCHLÖSCH* has two parts: the first half of the piece establishes a relatively coherent musical structure whereas in the second half the piece begins to increasingly fall apart until the end due to abrupt cuts, extreme registers, and the sped up hunting signals.

Naturally, another focus beyond composed out pitches and rhythms is put on orchestral timbres. After so many experiences with electronic and spectral music,

orchestration today cannot simply mean distributing an existing musical texture to a selection of instruments. Since harmony and timbre are intimately interwoven on a spectral level, simply presenting the same chord structure in heterogeneous registers makes a fundamental difference for the sensation of timbre. In *SCHLÖSCH* this is explored quite extensively. Finally, the piece is evidence for my renewed and still ongoing fascination and interest in purely instrumental music with large orchestra. (HM 2012)

## General

For me, the colour palette of a large orchestra is still enormously rich, and *SCHLÖSCH* in particular bears witness to this. The orchestra here is often split into several groups of different chamber ensembles. The piece requires traditional musical instruments, which play simple notes and chords in 12-tone equal tuning system over the entire course of the piece and therefore is not about expanding the musical material. Extended playing techniques, noise effects and electronics were entirely dispensed with. In search of these, new music has often, in my view, insensitively debased the ‘beautiful’ qualities of individual notes, timbres and harmonies. *SCHLÖSCH*’s harmonic concept attempts to revalue the vertical domain and avoiding the undifferentiated ‘grey’-coloured effect of a *Zeitgeräusch*.

*SCHLÖSCH* can be divided in two large parts: After the first half (rehearsal marks [A]-[Z]) has finished with a short appearance of the Tristan chord (bars 343 – 344), the piece falls more and more apart during the second one (starting at bar 347, [AA] – [ZZ]). The second part contains more quotes of highly significant and famous chord passages from the late romantic symphonic repertoire and also features with more abrupt cuts, as well as more extreme register spreads.

## Title

A letter sequence ‘schlösz’ appears in the 1<sup>st</sup> structure (6<sup>th</sup> column, line 10) of Hans G Helms's *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow*.<sup>268</sup> This experimental novel mixes phonetic material from more than 30 languages making it difficult to guess the meaning of many expressions. Even

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268. With my ensemble *sprechbohrer*, we realised the first complete performance of this legendary piece of experimental prose from 2004 – 2009. The result was released in 2011 on 2 CDs on Wergo, Mainz, Schott.

though, phonologically speaking, ‘Schlösch’ could be a German word<sup>269</sup> it does actually not exist.<sup>270</sup> The ultimate reason why I chose the title was the beautiful sound of its (imagined) pronunciation [ʃlœʃ], but also since I see the multilingual side of Helms’s polysemous work musically reflected in the heterogeneous chords in *SCHLÖSCH*, which start to communicate with each other.

## Harmony

In fact, my personal view of chords in *SCHLÖSCH* is they become established as individuals with a typical physiognomy. This is why I wanted to use a relatively broad choice of easily recognisable harmonies from the past. Originally, I chose the following thirteen diverse chord archetypes:

- 1 Wide Octaves (later developed into Overtone chords);
- 2 Whole tone chord
- 3 Quartal-tritone harmony
- 4 Pentatonic chord (later developed into agglomerates of superimposed thirds)
- 5 Mini-cluster
- 6 Single tone
- 7 D<sup>7</sup> with 7 in the bass (4-2-chord)
- 8 Two major seconds, a minor ninth plus one or more octaves apart (‘Feldman harmony’; later developed into my generalising concept of ‘False Octaves’)
- 9 Quartal Harmony
- 10 Major-minor Chord
- 11 Tristan Chord
- 12 Interval
- 13 Mirroring Chord: intervals grouped symmetrically around a centre

This list shows an extensive use of traditional chord models in *SCHLÖSCH*, which, however, occur outside traditional contexts. Generally they do not flip over into conventional harmonic

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269. Cf. ‘Die Strukturformel des Einsilblers’, in Klaus J. Kohler, *Einführung in die Phonetik des Deutschen*. (*Grundlagen der Germanistik 20*), Berlin, Schmidt, 1977, pp. 175 – 176.

270. In a personal email communication from January 2010, however, the Flemish guitarist Tom Pauwels drew my attention to the expression ‘Schloesch!’ in colloquial Dutch, which he tracked back to ‘a Dutch/Flemish onomatopoetic version of our vague remembering of the German original “Und jetzt Schluß damit!”’ (‘That’s enough!’ in English, comparable to the Italian exclamation ‘Basta!’)



progressions since the individual events are handled like isolated *objets trouvés*. Category no. 1 ('octave') is the simplest case of a chord in which different components perfectly blend into each other constituting a timbral spectrum instead of a harmony with individually discernible notes. This is the reason why I later decided to open up this category for all sorts of 'Overtone chords' (I could have also called it 'Spectral chords'). The 'Single Tone' and 'Interval' categories are liminal cases, representing only 'one note' (unison) or 'two notes' (dyad) respectively.

Considering that some of the chord categories did not seem to be dissimilar enough, I got a feeling thirteen different chord types would also not be easily discerned easily by any of listeners. For the sake of musical clarity, I therefore reduced the thirteen-element structure to ten, whereby the chords number 3, 9, and 11 were merged into the same category, as they can ultimately all be interpreted as different manifestations of quartal harmonies. The functional-harmonically ambiguous Tristan chord joins them as a borderline case just before the beginning of *SCHLÖSCH*'s second part (bars 343 – 344; see fig. 3); its two upper notes expose a pure fourth, the two lower notes an augmented fourth. Type no. 13 was entirely dropped, since axial symmetry is very hard to hear and the harmony in its original form was also rather similar to no. 8. Following this simplifying process, the chords stood out more individually.

The image shows a musical score for bars 343 and 344 of the piece *SCHLÖSCH*. The score is arranged in a system with eight staves. The top four staves are for woodwinds: oboe (ob.), cor Anglais (c.i.), clarinet (cl.), and bassoon (va.). The bottom four staves are for strings: violin I (va.), violin II (va.), viola (vc.), and cello (cb.). The woodwinds play the Tristan chord in its original instrumentation. The oboe and cor Anglais play a whole note chord (F#4, C#5). The clarinet and bassoon play a whole note chord (G4, D5). The strings play the same chord in a more complex texture. The violin I and II play a whole note chord (F#4, C#5). The viola plays a whole note chord (G4, D5). The cello and bassoon play a whole note chord (F#4, C#5). The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mp*, *pp*, and *ppp*, and articulation markings like *tutti div.*. There are also some numerical annotations like '1-5 unis.', '6-10 unis.', '1-4 unis.', and '5-8 unis.'.

Fig.3 *SCHLÖSCH*, bars 343 – 344:

The woodwinds play the Tristan chord in its original instrumentation; the harmony is immediately taken over by the violas.

# SCHLÖSCH

für großes Orchester

Harald Muenz

**A**  $\text{♩} = 72$

The score is divided into two systems. The first system includes:

- 3 flauti (3<sup>zo</sup> = fl. contralto in sol) with dynamics *f* and *mf*.
- 2 oboi with dynamic *mf*.
- corno inglese in fa with dynamic *mf*.
- 3 clarinetti in sib with dynamics *f* and *mf*.
- 3 fagotti with dynamic *mf*.
- corni in fa 1 e 2 with dynamic *mp*.
- corni in fa 3 e 4 with dynamic *mp*.
- trombe 1 e 2 (piccole in re) with dynamic *sfp* and marking "con sord."
- trombe 3 e 4 (in do) with dynamic *sfp* and marking "con sord."
- 3 tromboni with dynamic *mf* and marking "a 3 (senza sord.)".
- 2 tube contrabbasse with dynamic *mp*.

The second system includes:

- cassa chiara with dynamics *ff*, *f*, *mf*, *mp*, *f*, *mf* and marking "con bordoniera inserita".
- grancassa with dynamic *ff*.
- guiro with dynamic *f*.
- raganella with dynamic *mf*.
- vibraslap with dynamic *mf*.
- mazza da frizione with dynamic *mp*.
- bin-sasara with dynamic *mf*.
- vibrafono with dynamic *f* and marking "senza motore".

The third system includes:

- 14 primi violini with dynamics *f* and *ff*, and marking "1-8 div. in 8".
- 12 secondi violini with dynamics *f* and *ff*, and marking "1-6 div. in 6".
- 10 viole with dynamics *f* and *ff*, and marking "1-6 div. in 6".
- 8 violoncelli with dynamics *f* and *ff*, and marking "1-5 div. in 5".
- 6 contrabbassi with dynamics *f* and *ff*, and marking "1-3 div. in 3".

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Fig.4 SCHLÖSCH, bars 1—6, presentation of the chord material. The process reaches until bar 9 and comprises ten different harmonies.

The first nine bars of *SCHLÖSCH* serve as a kind of exposition for these ten harmonic prototypes (see figure 4). Later in the piece, the order of the chord series becomes blurred. The succession is altered in all future instances to get rid of a Passacaglia-like feeling. My aim behind avoiding as much as possible a sense of overarching harmonic progressions between adjacent chords was to put the focus on their inward characteristics and the individual beauty of the single harmonic events. They are treated like sculptural objects and arranged in the way a painter would do with patches of colour on a canvas. (After the composition of the piece was long finished, I even entertained the idea that the orchestra should possibly play all the dyads and triad-based chords in just intonation.)

Another reason why *SCHLÖSCH* is based upon a sequence of unadorned chords is that this helped me to get rid of the traditional ‘magic’ element of melody. Although composing with concrete pitches and rhythms is of fundamental importance in *SCHLÖSCH*, I wanted the main focus to be put on timbre. One could therefore call this music one continuous *Klangfarbenmelodie*.<sup>271</sup> In my experience the overriding quality of melodic arches often acquires such a powerful gestalt effect that it can easily side-track the listener’s attention from what is happening in other layers of the music, the harmonic one in particular.<sup>272</sup>

As a next step during the pre-compositional phase, the original harmonies were spread out in different orders and registers to build a harmonic grid. The initial sequence of chords was strictly permuted 52 times. Subsequently, each individual chord underwent an independent, ‘personal’ series of modifications over all 52 sections of the piece. The resulting harmonic clashes lead to a wide range of musical consequences. At certain points they create temporary tonal centres, e.g. in bars 121– 122 there is a clear V – I cadence ( $A\flat^7$  in flutes and trombones is ‘resolved’ onto a delayed  $D\flat$  tonic from bar 123 second semibreve onwards). However, in an overall non-tonal or at least tonally neutral context these glimpses of progressions lose their functional meaning and turn into alien islands.

### **Timbre**

The orchestration of the first instance of the ten chords is structured in terms of contrasting timbres:

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271. This was also my motivation for quoting the beginning from Schoenberg’s orchestral piece *Farben* op.16/3 in bars 430 – 432. Cf. Schoenberg’s definition of *Klangfarbenmelodie* in Arnold Schönberg, *Harmonielehre* [reprint 2001], Vienna, Universal Edition, 1911, pp. 504.

272. Also the classic objection against new music — ‘one cannot sing it, because it has “no melody”’ — stopped me for a long time from considering what I would have regarded as a step backwards to melismas.

bar 1	Spectral chord	strings
bar 2	Whole tone chord	‘French colour’ (mostly low flutes/clarinets, vibraphone, harp)
bar 3	Quartal-tritone harmony	double reeds
bar 4	Complex of thirds	low brass
bar 5	Mini-cluster	muted high trumpets
bar 6	Single tone (‘one-note chord’)	instrumental unison
bars 7	D <sup>7</sup> with 7 in the bass (4-2 chord)	piano + ‘reverberation’ <sup>273</sup>
bar 7,	‘false octaves’	xylorimba
last note		
bar 8	Major-minor chord	instrumentation varies but tonality always remains a D <sup>b</sup> major/minor mix
bar 9	Interval (‘two-note chord’)	exposed high woodwind pair

Timbre in *SCHLÖSCH* is treated as a complex, multidimensional parameter. I explore the observation that, on a spectral level, harmony and timbre are intimately interwoven. There is however no simple 1:1 correspondence between aural perception and measurable data in the frequency spectrum. The general experience that the same major third which sounds like a beautiful consonance in a medium register can be perceived as dissonant and rough in the low range is widely known and also taught in harmony courses. Already Rimsky-Korsakov, in his treatise on orchestration, pointed out that it is not only important which instruments play a given chord but that voice leading and chord spacing also play a crucial role for the perceived colour.<sup>274</sup> Another remarkable and even earlier example from the past are the isolated high

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273. The reverberation can be a natural one (basically just the acoustic decay of the chord) or an artificial one as in this case: the piano attacks, the following sustain is provided by another instrument, here by string harmonics.

274. In fact, I have always been wondering whether some passages of ‘standstill’ in Rimsky-Korsakov’s music aren’t just intended as timbral variations, e.g. passages in *Sheherazade* where there is only very little or no harmonic and melodic variation. What to critics of his music who were mainly judging from a perspective of

triads of three flutes (which yield difference tones) across a distance of 3 – 4 octaves over low trombone pedal notes in the *Hostias* movement of Berlioz's *Requiem* from 1837.<sup>275</sup> In *SCHLÖSCH* I experiment with how putting the very same interval structures in heterogeneous registers, also spreading them out or contracting them by octaves, can make a fundamental difference for the sensation of timbre.

A further hint at the interdependence of timbre with harmony are the outstanding D $\flat$  major/minor chord (model no. 8) — which is constantly re-orchestrated not only over the course of the piece but also within each of its manifestations — as well as the exposed high dyads played by pairs of woodwinds (model no. 9) — which should desirably lead to beatings or combination tones.

### **Rhythm**

Two simple processes in the temporal and rhythmic organisation support the anti-dramatic conception in the pitch domain. The percussion parts form separate time and rhythm layers from the rest of the orchestra and are also sonically quite distinct. The first few bars of *SCHLÖSCH* consist of a rhythmically rather regular and square chord machine, which then progressively loses its rigidity and unfolds in different directions: on the one hand it leads to trains of single pulses, and generates a layer of clockwork-like rattling noises on the other. Essentially both of these characteristics are already present in the first six bars. The strikes of the percussion at the beginning of *SCHLÖSCH* are introduced in parallel phase with the 4/4-bar chord sequence played by the other orchestral groups. Its sharp attacks seem to switch the sounds of the orchestra quite mechanically on and off. Opposed to the harmonic layer, the pulse stratum maintains a constant entry delay of four crotchets. It takes on the role of a triggering layer by cutting sharply into the sustained harmonies and abruptly switching around their orchestration within the same harmony.<sup>276</sup>

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traditionally preferred Western compositional parameters (i.e. pitches and durations) might often have seemed dull could perhaps be more experienced in terms of the extraordinary luminous timbres and intensities achieved. Cf. Chapter III, 'Harmony', in Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, *Principles of Orchestration* [reprint], New York, Dover, 1964 pp. 63 – 96.

275. *Grande messe des morts* op. 5

276. E.g. in bar 18 upon the hard attack in the snare drum, the whole-tone chord in cor anglais, bassoons and three trombones is suddenly taken over by flutes, clarinets and vibraphone; in bar 19 the flute and clarinet continue the oboe and cor anglais's sixth G5-E6 when the drum stroke cuts off the latter two. In both cases, overarching dynamics create a musical context: initial *piano* followed by crescendo-decrescendo in bar 18; *forte* followed by decrescendo-crescendo in bar 19.

Over the course of *SCHLÖSCH*, the two sound layers are gradually assimilated. The ‘bar pulses’ get out of phase with respect to the chord layer to which they initially belonged. Already at the first re-occurrence of the chord pattern, after the nine-bar exposition, the duration of the rhythmic layer is initially shortened by 1/16 (15/16 in bar 11, rehearsal mark [B]) before it takes up its original 4/4 length again. The next rhythmic anticipation by one semiquaver happens in bar 18. On top of this, more and more attacks are left out, however without disturbing the adjacent occurrences rhythmically (the same already happened in bars 14 and 16). The temporal discontinuities introduced by the almost physical accents in metal, wood, and skin percussion may be perceived like audible cuts from splicing a magnetic tape.

Many of the percussion instruments in the score come from ethnic backgrounds, whereas others are pedestrian objects, e.g. the arenaiuolo which is just a sand-filled tin can. Although there is no direct link between the idea behind the piece and the ethnic backgrounds of some of the percussion, this link fitted my overall idea nicely. The percussion instruments have been chosen by entirely musical criteria, e.g. the bin-sasara because it is a rattling instrument with a ‘perforated’ sound that links to the phenomenologically similar sounds of other instruments such as the ratchet or the guiro. Expanding on this concept, these sounds relate to drum or timpani rolls as well as to string tremolos or flutter tongue in the winds or brass.

Again, the thinking behind such sound categories goes back to my phonetical studies: rattling sounds are similar to the phonetic manner of articulation called ‘trill’ which indicates phones like the Spanish [r:] found in the word *perro* (dog). In articulatory phonetics, trills can be interpreted as a very dense accumulation of single stops, thus I conceive of musical trills as a borderline case of a series of rapid pulses. Suspended objects like bamboo or metal chimes, or the vibraslap are variants of a quick sequence of regular clicks producing an irregular pulse train in deceleration. They are also a form of *lasciar vibrare*, if one considers them as attacks with a subsequent decay. Short and sharp accents, e.g. from drum beats, hyoshigi, or claves, can be heard as being similar to unvoiced stops articulated at different points in the mouth cavity. (The recurring pulses of the percussion sometimes also resemble sober loud metronome clicks; but there might also be an aural influence of the sound world of the Korean story telling tradition P’ansori, which I watched in Seoul’s National Theatre during a stay in autumn 2002, with its solo singer who is just accompanied and seconded by a drum player.) Not only do these attacks happen more often, the more we go into the piece, they also always stand out more audibly against the background: first they start in the snare drum;

at section [N] they move on to a clicker; in bar 160, at [O], they go to the castanets; in bar 222 to a pair of claves; from bar 276 onwards they are shared between wood block and temple blocks; at bar 307 they continue in the whip; and from bar 347 we find them in the heavy Japanese counter-strike blocks (hyoshigi).

Similarly, in the beginning of *SCHLÖSCH*, only isolated rattling and clacking appears which will later become more and more prominent. The rattling rate gets denser and the sound qualities more intense: at section [I] the rattling is in the guiro; from [O] onwards in the vibraslap; after [S] in the friction stick; at [W] in the ratchet; and from bar 320 in the bin-sasara (which produces a massive noise similar to a collapsing pile of wood).

Approximately half way through the piece, at bar 376, a complementary semiquaver pulse pattern between several instruments has been reached. The orchestra now starts reversing the process by once more simply adding in semiquavers (1, 2, 3 ...), but this time it happens in the rest of the orchestra, leaving the percussion section out. The initial uniformity of this new pulse train becomes increasingly irregular and starts to include conflicting rhythms which could be seen as a form of 'rhythmic beatings' similar to those created by the pairs of high woodwind in the spectral domain.

Initially the rattle, click and clacking instruments also affect the compact harmonies by steadily fanning them out rhythmically. When these two meet, the chords lose their block-like character and are turned into little motivic objects. This can be seen by the fact that increasingly more arpeggios and tremolos occur: in bars 71 – 73 a dyad, the low fifth D-A, is dissipated in restless movements in the cellos and basses; six bars before [K] the high strings, for the first time, send rhythmic Morse code; at [M] we find a sparking field of flutter tongue notes; in bars 349 – 369 clacking instruments and rattles are combined into a climactic stretto culminating in outbursts of the snare drum after bar 370. Here, for the first time, a continuous semiquaver pattern is established, which is then being filled up until bars 376 – 377, where they already form an uninterrupted semiquaver chain over a length of five crotchets, after which the process temporarily disappears. It is taken up again, first fragmentarily, over several waypoints: bar 382 in the xylorimba, then this is continued in bars 386 – 387, 397, 406 – 407, 422/424, 434, 446, 456, 465 – 467, 479, 504, 515, 528, 540 – 541, 550 – 551, 561 – 563, 573, augmented to quavers in 596 – 598. The arpeggios from combined crotales,

glockenspiel, celeste and high violins in bars 613 – 615, taking on the form of a ‘super-chime’, are the final apotheosis and endpoint of this sequence of events.

Main accents mark the beginning of each complete chord cycle in the first half of the piece; they are always made clearly perceptible through *ff* attacks in the bass drum. These are complemented by secondary pulses that, initially, coincide with the beginning of each individual chord at the bar line,<sup>277</sup> but become increasingly less explicit later in the piece through the stepwise omission of more and more of these percussive attacks.<sup>278</sup> They however still exert a certain force as a hidden switching layer which triggers other events. Also their rate is increasingly shortened, in semiquaver steps, from 4/4-bar length until a continuous pulse chain in semiquavers is reached.

*SCHLÖSCH* does not show any development: no direction is implied, many things could also happen at other points in time from when they occur. In fact, the formal procedure, which was originally very neatly constructed, became more and more obscured during the compositional process by deliberate permutations of sections. This way of dealing with form shares common features with what Stockhausen once called ‘Momentform.’<sup>279</sup> Although, in theory, portions of the music from the first half of the piece could be exchanged with one another, the form was finally fixed by ear following subjective musical criteria. Moreover, the appearances of the D $\flat$ /C $\sharp$  major-minor chorale (developed from chord no. 10, which is then heard for the next time in bars 73 – 76, and reappears in several variations, e.g. bars 123 – 128, 181 – 187, 197 – 203) form a series of *déjà entendus* which ultimately lead to a further impression of formal coherence.

### **Hunting signals**

Apart from the few repertoire quotes, which will be discussed later, as traces of melisma, hunting signals were introduced into the otherwise athematic structure of *SCHLÖSCH*. I

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277. They are assigned to one characteristic percussion instrument per section, e.g. in section [A] to the snare drum.

278. The process is always suspended during hunting signals and ornamental cuts.

279. In Stockhausen’s own definition: ‘When certain characteristics remain constant for a while — in musical terms, when sounds occupy a particular region, a certain register, or stay within a particular dynamic, or maintain a certain average speed — then a moment is going on: these constant characteristics determine the moment. [...] And when these characteristics all of a sudden change, a new moment begins. If they change very slowly, the new moment comes into existence while the present moment is still continuing.’ Robin J. Maconie (ed.), *Stockhausen on Music*, London, Marion Boyars, 1989, pp. 63 – 64.



found the originals in a booklet I had bought at an antiquarian bookshop.<sup>280</sup> The signals I was particularly interested in were so-called Guiding Signals by which a group of hunters once co-ordinated themselves acoustically when they could not see each other.<sup>281</sup>

As can be seen in the figure 5 below, these motifs are based on simple broken triads (cf. the mentioned arpeggios introduced by the pulse train process). In my belief, such *Jagdleitsignale* also work as guidance for the listener in *SCHLÖSCH* as well. Each entry of a new hunting signal is always coupled with an instance of chord no. 10 (D $\flat$  major/minor, which later becomes the ‘chorale’) in such a way that the rhythm of the former breaks the chord notes of the latter into an arpeggio. Every following appearance of the same signal is then coupled with a different one from the remaining chords out of the pool of ten (arpeggiating it accordingly). Also each time the same chord model re-occurs the rhythm of a hunting signal is gradually further diminished until the end of *SCHLÖSCH*. (Technically, in the beginning they were augmented quite drastically, and then progressively sped up, diminished, over the duration of the piece until they reach their fastest final versions.) Their orchestration changes depending on the initial orchestration of the relevant chord used.

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280. Reinhold Stief (ed.), *Die deutschen Jagdsignale in der offiziellen Fassung des DJV*. (= vol. 1 of *Handbuch der Jagdmusik*), Munich, F. C. Mayer, 1969 [no pagination].

281. Cf. ‘B. Jagdleitsignale’, in: *ibid.*, [nos. 13 and 14].

**B. Jagdleitensignale**

7. Hegeruf  8. Antwort 

9. Notruf  10. Das Ganze 

11. Aufbruch zur Jagd 

12. Anblasen des Treibens („Das Ganze“ wird vorausgeblasen) 

13. Laut treiben  14. Stumm treiben 

15. Aufmunterung zum Treiben 

16. Halt  17. Treiber in den Kessel 

18. Treiben zurück 

19. Aufhören zu schießen 

20. Sammeln der Jäger 

21. Hunderuf 

22. Wagenruf 

Fig. 5 ‘Jagdleitensignale’, in Stief, *Die deutschen Jagdsignale in der offiziellen Fassung des DJV*. I used ten of them in order of their first appearance in *SCHLÖSCH* (at the given bar numbers; the numbers immediately preceding the titles are those in Stief’s list): 1) ‘14. Stumm treiben’ (strings in bars 34 – 39); 2) ‘19. Aufhören zu schießen’ (winds bars 73 – 76); 3) ‘13. Laut treiben’ (flutes and clarinets, + oboes in conclusion, bars 123 – 128); 4) ‘10. Das Ganze’ (clarinets, bass clarinet, bassoons, contrabassoon, bars 181 – 187); 5) ‘8. Antwort’ (strings, bars 234 – 236); 6) ‘7. Hegeruf’ (oboes and trumpets, bars 296 – 300); 7) ‘17. Treiber in den Kessel’ (interlocking trumpets ↔ oboes/cor anglais, bars 363 – 371); 8) ‘16. Halt’ (fragment in horns and trumpets, bars 401– 404); 9) ‘9. Notruf’ (cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet, horn, bars 461 – 465); 10) ‘18. Treiben zurück’ (Tutti, bars 507 – 510).

The hunting signals in *SCHLÖSCH* do not acquire any extra-musical meaning like e.g. in Mahler’s 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> symphonies where brass signals stand for the violent and traumatic military sphere. For me they are timeless archetypes for ‘brass music’ in general, but also for different forms of arpeggios. In diametrical opposition to Mahler, they introduce a feel of nature — indeed, as mentioned, it would be good to hear them played in just intonation. The hunting signals are also not just pasted into the piece in their original forms like alien quotes, but are used as a kind of transformative matrix, which is applied to all chords from the 9-bar pattern. The ‘root’, ‘third’ and ‘fifth’ notes from a hunting signal are mapped respectively onto the other chords arpeggiating them as one would a traditional triad. Within limits, the listener can still perceive the contours of the moving parts and their rhythms.

An extended arpeggio-section using different forms of broken harmonies links between the initial situation of isolated block chords and the hunting signals. In this manner, the signals introduce rhythmic variations into *SCHLÖSCH*'s initial block chord structure and, at the same time, represent articulated broken chords. This culminates in a giant arpeggio spanning six octaves in bars 246 – 247. Here, for example, we can observe the ‘false octaves’ again, which were discussed earlier in the analysis of *dietro V avanti*: the G1-A1 in the left hand of the piano followed by (F3-)G3-A♭3 two octaves higher and, again two octaves above this, F#5-G5 (bar 246). This climax is immediately preceded by what I perceive as ‘composed beatings’ (high flutes and string harmonics in bar 245).

### Repertoire quotes

If the hunting signals are impersonal, quasi ‘natural’ quotes, some characteristic chords from music history are cited as a contrast. The ones I have chosen mainly originate from late 19<sup>th</sup> century symphonic repertoire and have acquired a certain celebrity status in music theory (e.g. the ‘Tristan chord’), thus I consider them like intrusions from musical history into the otherwise relatively abstract sonic world of *SCHLÖSCH*. The selection of quotations is entirely subjective and closely linked to my personal associations at given points in the second part of the piece. At the same time most of these harmonic citations can also be matched with the general prototypes of the initial chord categories A – J. The following is a list of these quotes:

[N], bars 143 – 152, strings: The first chord from Alexander Scriabin’s symphonic poem *Prometeo*.

Bar 181: The ingeniously stretched out piano chord in just pure D♭ major from Chopin's Piano Scherzo op. 31 which opens up a hallucinatory reverberant space.

Bars 343 – 344: The beginning of Wagner’s *Tristan*. I hear this ambiguous and much-discussed chord as a B<sup>7</sup> with a diminished fifth in the bass and a passing note in the soprano going from a major sixth to a seventh. The lowered fifth links the chord to the altered chord from Strauss’s *Till Eulenspiegel* that occurs later. It is presented in the original instrumentation in the woodwinds, but in arpeggiated form. The celli precede this with the opening minor sixth of Wagner’s opera.

Bars 430 – 432: As mentioned earlier, the initial chord from Schoenberg's *Farben* op. 16/3 appears, in its original orchestration.

Bars 442 – 445: The spectacular ascending quartal chord in the horn, from the beginning of Schoenberg's 1<sup>st</sup> *Chamber Symphony*, is re-orchestrated here (omitting the horn) and superimposed on top of an A $\flat$  harmony, which has already been prepared several bars earlier.

Bars 467 – 469 contain the famous F $\flat$  major + E $\flat$ <sup>7</sup> mixture harmony in the strings from *Les Augures Printaniers* of Stravinsky's *Sacre*. The original accents in eight horns are mimicked here by all low brass, but the timing of the pulses is different from that in *The Rite of Spring*, since they were determined by my own pulse train pattern.

Bars 541 – 542: Richard Strauss's *Till Eulenspiegel*-chord in four horns, then taken over by the original instruments (oboes, cor anglais, bassoons), which fade away quickly, also hinting briefly to its kinship with the *Tristan*-chord (on the fourth quaver in bar 542). The *Till Eulenspiegel*-chord is another famous harmony that had a strong impact on me in my youth. I interpret it as a diminished dominant seventh chord without fundamental within F major (which is in fact the tonic onto which it is being resolved in Strauss's piece) with the seventh in the bass and an augmented leading 5<sup>th</sup>. The original solo of the high D-clarinet leading into the chord is put on top of it in bar 541 and re-orchestrated by sharing it between low piccolo and E $\flat$ -clarinet.

Bars 589—592: Like *Tristan*, Tchaikovsky's *Romeo and Juliet* is about a dramatic *Liebestod*. One of Tchaikovsky's most used chord progressions leads here to a modulation from D major to D $\flat$  major: the notated dominant seventh chord A<sup>7</sup> is being enharmonically respelled as an augmented 6-5 double dominant chord.

### **The critical role of computers**

One implicit consequence of the use of notational software is that a certain resistance has to be overcome before using any non-standard notation that is not easily at your fingertips in the software interface. Not only do we all have a limited amount of lifetime and, as human beings, we also come with a certain natural inertia. This implies notational software does not only lead to a uniform score layout, but — within limits — also the musical contents will be

affected. It was only a question of time before I decided to make this a subject in my compositions.

It may seem ironic that, instead of using computers as tools to gain more control, for me they became a means to *loosen* the grip on many musical aspects. This is certainly both typical and programmatic, e.g. in *dissieme* (2004) for flute, clarinet, violin, violoncello and live electronics the musicians depend on the electronics for their coordination in time, since they must play their parts from four distant points in the performance space not facing each other and wearing closed headphones. All time-critical information is generated live and transmitted to them via these devices. Paradoxically, despite the fact that the electronics play a crucial role throughout the piece, they hold completely back in terms of audibility as a sound generator.

Rather than just making use of my direct musical imagination, like so many other composers working with computers, I prefer to question what I feel has become an increasing digital hegemony.<sup>282</sup> Although I already owned a computer in the early 1990s and used e-mail and the Internet since 1995, I did not stop writing my scores by hand until I began working in London in 2005. I started using the Sibelius software and suddenly became aware of how much it had already established itself as the only acceptable quasi-standard. For any composer of my generation or younger, it has indeed become practically impossible to get around this; I cannot think of any publisher who would still be ready to accept handwritten scores for publication.

My critical stance with regard to the digital hype around the magic machine goes at least back to 1996,<sup>283</sup> at a time when people started to rely on computers since they ‘do not make any mistakes’ and ‘have everything under control’. To oppose this, in some of my earlier pieces such as *deChiffraGE* (1993), *standArts* (1996), *The SelfComposer* (1999 – 2002) and others, I employed computers in the role of machines producing chance events and not as the

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282. ‘Along with the hegemony of computers comes a certain logic, and therefore a certain set of prescriptions determining which statements are accepted as “knowledge” statements.’ Jean-François Lyotard, ‘Answering the Question: What is post-modernism?’, 1982, in Charles Jencks, *The Post-Modern Reader*, London, Academy Editions, 1992, p. 140.

283. Cf. Harald Muenz, ‘Reagieren in Echtzeit. Der Computer als Klangerzeuger’, 1996, in *MusikTexte. Zeitschrift für Neue Musik. Heft 103*, Cologne, November 2004, pp. 46 – 50; and Harald Muenz, ‘Live random concepts and sight-reading players - the role of the computer in the era of digested digitalism’, in *Contemporary Music Review*, vol. 29, no. 1, February 2010, p. 81 – 87.

infallible calculator that may easily reproduce everything it generates again and again just as you wish.

Consequently, also in some of my recent instrumental music, beginning with *SCHLÖSCH*, the computer is used as a black box tool for pre-compositional transformations. It is fed pre-existing musical contents, which were sometimes explicitly conceived by myself for the purpose, sometimes taken from other sources.

When I was working on the orchestral piece, I found at a certain point that all my constructive preparations — including chord permutations, rhythmic compression and stretching, transformations through the hunting signals, etc. — should be counterbalanced by something quite unpredictable. Therefore, after having cast all that coherent pre-compositional net over the entire piece and having completed the composition of the first half of *SCHLÖSCH*, I took this entire 346-bars passage (comprising study letters [A]-[Z]) and superimposed it onto the sketched grid of the second half (study letters [AA]-[ZZ]) using the on-board arrangement algorithm of the Sibelius software. As the plug-ins of this notational programme are intended for dealing with relatively simple tonal music, it was impossible to predict what precisely the computer would output when the input is of a rather complex and non-traditional nature.

Initially I did this for the sake of curiosity, to see what the outcome would sound like, but then I found that, by changing my music quite a lot, the notation software had indeed made some fascinating musical decisions. It partly eliminated elements it deemed unplayable in superimposition, and presumably the algorithm was often overwhelmed by the sheer number of notes. In this way, the computer acted as a kind of random filter on my music, pushing my imagination forward towards constellations I would otherwise not have imagined. I decided to accept the outcomes as a kind of variation of the first part and started to edit them into a reasonable score. This blend of intention and spontaneous gestures felt somehow like Rauschenberg who, in his pictures, combined rational planning and chance operations allowing for random brushstrokes and the paint to drip.

It must be underlined that the entire transformational process is not as straightforward and automatic as the description might suggest; it is definitely not accomplished ‘by just a few mouse clicks’ and needs many intermediate auxiliary steps I am omitting here for the sake of

not becoming too technical.<sup>284</sup> My human-composerly interventions consisted in interpreting the computer-generated results and editing them manually.

In other words, from halfway into *SCHLÖSCH*, beginning at rehearsal mark [AA], composing for me turned into a giant editing process of a computer transformed ‘score’. Clearly, commercial computer plug-ins are in no way able to produce a polished final score; this would also have been totally unsatisfying artistically. The main point of interest for me was, how I would react, as a musician, with my own mind-set and associations to any ‘weird’ output by the machine. In my later pieces *data compression* and *unashamed piano playing*, I have used similar strategies to an even greater extent.

### Conclusions

The different compositional procedures in *SCHLÖSCH* were very typical for my musical thinking at the time of writing. They reach back to my earlier preoccupations with Cage’s thoughts and were on the lines of whatever you present to the listener, they will ultimately accept it as one piece, as long as it has a fixed setting of instruments and happens within a reasonable range of time. Especially in the case of a traditional orchestra sitting there and playing — no matter what is happening, the listener’s perception integrates everything into a whole.<sup>285</sup>

I had long since turned away from the idea of consciously expressing my subjectivity, as well as from the concept of music being a ‘language’. Through my randomised distribution of chords in *SCHLÖSCH*, the thinking of the New York School enters the stage: ‘Where people had felt the necessity to stick sounds together to make a continuity, we four<sup>286</sup> felt the

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284. Namely the chunk size for the programme to process at any one time must be chosen quite carefully, since, on the one hand, the software cannot handle passages which exceed certain limits, on the other hand, the desired artefacts only start kicking in from a certain score length onwards.

285. Exploring precisely this borderline has actually been part of earlier research of mine, when I was looking for how far one can go in creating ‘non-pieces’ by purposefully doing what the audience would probably neither expect nor accept as one coherent piece any more. For example in *ariche* for bass flute and random playback from 2001, the entire musical structure changes radically with every page of the score. Each section lasts for ca. 30 seconds, and rather long and unforeseeable pauses further cut the music apart. The playback is presenting both player and audience with 22 short surprising vocal interventions, the temporal entries of which are subject to random control.

286. Cage refers here to Christian Wolff, Earle Brown, Morton Feldman, and himself.

necessity to get rid of the glue so that sounds would be themselves.<sup>287</sup> My use of a ‘Feldman harmony’ (chord no. 8) is a little tongue-in-cheek homage to this composer.

Generally, I often approach music in the sense of an Acoustic Situation, which means listeners should aurally observe sounds over time. I hear the basic chords, whether tonal or not, as nearly tactile sonic steles which are placed in an acoustic space. Time for the listener passes predominantly in a non-dramatic way. The listener’s mind inevitably creates a coherent musical image. Some of the ways of composing for traditional instruments in *SCHLÖSCH* have their origins in the sphere of the electronic studio, in acoustics and recording: the composed beatings in bar 244 – 245 have been mentioned earlier, the abrupt leaps and accents reminding of tape cuts are another example for this. The idea of controlling sound from behind a mixing console can be seen, when, at times, apparently contradictory dynamics are used in order to get a split, non-homogenous sound.<sup>288</sup> Crescendos or diminuendos should rather be executed as linear fade-ins or fade-outs than as their more exponential ‘musical’ counterparts.

The rigid structural net was modified many times over the duration of the composition process. One could say I set out an objective grid of relationships first, which was then, secondly, contaminated by my subjectivity over the course of a long and multi-layered appropriation process. I was musically, acoustically, phonetically, phenomenologically or historically commenting and associating, although not everything pre-stabilised could be simply overthrown *a mon goût*. All this normally happens as the results of a long sedimentation process from different strata and in several revision steps.

I see this as a reconciliatory act between the intuitive part of my mind and the more constructive one, which previously produced the abstract grid-object; however, this object is not an *objet trouvé* but still an offspring of myself, which means it contains other aspects of my personality. These two sides of the same person are not separate but work hand in hand: conceiving the ‘object’ requires many subjective choices to be made (e.g. how this should sound, which chords to choose, etc.) On the other hand, associations I have are often objectivised: using strict permutation procedures; new rhythms are often obtained by

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287. John Cage, ‘History of experimental music in the United States’, in *Silence*, Hanover, NJ, Wesleyan University Press, 1961, p. 71.

288. E.g. bars 53 – 56, or 138 – 140 in the strings.



subdividing given durations by integers; quotes are backed by researching the respective scores, etc.

## **data compression (2009)**

For violin and accordion

*Dedicated to Pi-Chao Chen and Primož Parovel*

Duration: ca. 13 min.

Commissioned by Pi-Chao Chen.

Premiere: 26/09/2009, Cologne, Belgisches Haus, Pi-Chao Chen — violin, Primož Parovel — accordion

Programme note

The experimental idea behind *data compression* was to create unpredictable passages during the composing process by means of black-box processes whose inner workings I am unaware of. I tried to respond, as a composer, to a musical ‘flooding process’: a myriad of sounds I had previously structured coherently for my orchestral piece *SCHLÖSCH* should pass through the eye of a needle. I was assisted by a computer algorithm that attempted to reduce the data automatically — a process that practically guaranteed the compression would be done ‘badly’ and that very few, and not always the most important things, would remain. Therefore, this intermediate step turned out to be a random filter. The attraction for me was to respond again to the resulting ‘blemishes’ compositionally, and — lo and behold! — my musical focus jumped to

events I had not paid much attention to before. The outcome was a completely different piece from the orchestral one; it is basically the result of a ‘Chinese Whispers’ game with myself. And isn’t this actually the genuine ‘computer music’?<sup>289</sup>

## Genesis

In *data compression*, my work with computer plug-ins is driven further than in the predecessor piece *SCHLÖSCH* for large orchestra. Now I applied an automated process onto a pre-existing composition of mine to create an entire new piece. The source material for *data compression* was approximately the first half (bars 1 – 346) of the completed score of *SCHLÖSCH*, which was fed through the on-board ‘arrangement’ algorithms of the notational software Sibelius. These plug-ins were used as a bottleneck for reducing the data of the orchestral piece and squeezing it into just three staves of a violin plus an accordion.

Sibelius’s plug-ins were originally designed to be used with much simpler, entirely tonal music. They are optimised to execute simple editorial tasks such as removing unisons, parallel octaves and fifths, or redoubled chord notes. Since my orchestral piece contains ca. 30 score systems, with hardly any parts doubling each other, the program needed to get rid of a considerable amount of non-redundant information in order to make the initial material fit a duo line-up.

From my former experience with *SCHLÖSCH*, I expected the algorithm would be overwhelmed and produce artefacts because of the sheer amount of input being fed into it. The arrangement algorithm normally tries to retain as many lines of the original as possible but, at the same time, has to make assumptions about the limitations of a violin and an accordion. Therefore I was particularly tempted by the disclaimer in the Sibelius reference manual saying the function was ‘not intended to produce a complete result without any user intervention at all’,<sup>290</sup> since this nurtured my hope for unpredictable outcomes from the process.

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289. The translation of my originally German programme note for the CD booklet was completed with the aid of Bob Gilmore to whom I am indebted.

290. ‘Die Arrangier-Funktion ist daher nicht dazu gedacht, ein vollständig ausgeführtes Ergebnis ganz allein ohne weitere Eingriffe zu erzeugen.’ German Sibelius Reference to Sibelius version 7.1.3, p. 456.

Whereas the Sibelius reference manual explains rather in detail what the programme does when arranging small instrumental line-ups for bigger groups,<sup>291</sup> it provides only rudimentary information about how it works the other way round, when it needs to abridge any score contents. So the interesting question was how the software would resolve any conflicts may arise, which were clearly to be expected in this case. Since it was precisely this black box effect I was interested in, I experimented with tweaking the parameters of the plug-ins but did not want to investigate them in any systematic manner. After I had found a satisfying combination of settings I decided to keep them fixed and to accept its decisions, using it as a kind of random transformation process.

The results of the black-box computer process never produce a serious score and could rather be called a very provisional collection of musical material. The unfiltered outcomes contain wholly unsuitable musical notation and would never be playable as they are. Consequently, the next step was to manually process the computer-transformed score step by step, in an old-fashioned composerly manner, into the final piece for accordion and violin (in a quite similar way to how I had worked on the permutational grid I had laid out myself at the pre-compositional stage of *dietro V avanti*). Reconsidering my *own* orchestral piece *SCHLÖSCH* under such a radically different, quasi-estranged perspective, like an innocent editor, was a personal artistic and aesthetic challenge for me. How should I react to outcomes where the algorithm had not even kept what I considered to be the most beautiful or important elements from my music? To my surprise, over the course of the ‘editing’ work, my musical focus shifted to latent aspects which had not been fully explored in the former orchestral score, a fact that inspired and intrigued me to new and mesmerising passages on the basis of what Sibelius had come up with: new ideas grew out of and were expanding the older ones.

As an example, the harmonic sequence from the beginning of *SCHLÖSCH*, consisting of 10 different chord types (quartal harmony, whole tone, dominant seventh, diminished seventh, Tristan, etc.) is still clearly audible, and even some of the Acoustic Situations from the original could be retained (e.g. the beatings at bar 266 in *SCHLÖSCH*, now in bar 264 in *data compression*). In some passages, similarly to *SCHLÖSCH*, I added contradictory dynamic marks between the two instruments, however, in *data compression* (as opposed to the orchestral piece where I often deliberately went for split timbres which do *not* blend), I made

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291. German Sibelius Reference, 5.6 Bearbeiten von Arrangier-Stilen → Funktionsweise, pp. 465 – 466

an attempt to combine both instruments into one single new hyperinstrument. Thus, both performers must be able to produce a broad range of different tone colours.

Writing once more for the bellow-instrument was a challenge again.<sup>292</sup> Only partly conscious of all conventions of the instrument, I tried to avoid thinking within traditional harmony rules for voice leading and spacing. As a starting point, I rather preferred to take a more visual and gestural approach: perhaps with Feldman's idea of working on a musical canvas in mind (or thinking, again, of Robert Rauschenberg), I distributed 'patches of colour' within the time-space of the score. As a consequence, the accordion *écriture* is unorthodox, since it would be common practice to give the left hand just one or two single notes at the same time but normally, unless absolutely necessary, no chords and if so, only in a slow tempo. All other parts, technically difficult passages and leaps would be given to the right hand. Although I tried to eschew unnecessary technical difficulties, I would often neither avoid big leaps nor share them between both hands. Despite the compositional framework being that of distilling a piece with the aid of an undocumented computer algorithm this enhanced the desired strong gestural side of my music.

### **Title**

A massive information flood assaults us on a daily basis in our digital age. We humans need systems in place for selecting from the plethora of data, which surround us, to make sure not only electronic brains but also our human ones can ever even remotely process and understand them. This results in two important questions: Do responsible expert decisions stand behind the data selection or just a mechanistic selection scheme? Are the characteristic features of the original retained or is an independent, completely different outcome being created?

Similar problems arise in translations from one language into another. Especially when it comes to keeping not only the obvious literal sense but also the tone and spirit of the original, automated processes have not yet been able to resolve this in any satisfying way. Good translations of poetry should produce a version, which does conceal the fact that it is a

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292. In 1999 – 2000, I was commissioned a piece for accordion, organ and two cellos (*BACH-machine*) for the *EXPO 2000* world exhibition in Hanover, Germany, which was my first experience in writing for the bellow instrument, however following a completely different compositional concept.

translation and not an original. In the sense of making a fluent version within a different idiom, *data compression* is the product of a musical translation process.

Another musical example from the acoustic world which directly concerns me are data-reduced audio formats such as *mp3* which claim to remove only data deemed ‘unimportant’ or ‘inaudible’ from the original by applying calculations based on psychoacoustic models. Their loss of differentiation for me can be compared to the role the harp often has in an orchestra: even if the instrument does not stand out from the rest of the orchestra, and therefore is not being heard *directly*, something essential would be missing from the sound if the harp was not playing.

### **Analysis?**

The random nature of the compositional black box process to generate *data compression* makes an analysis impossible and essentially pointless. Any leftover structural relics derive from the original piece *SCHLÖSCH*. My responses to the computer transformations are spontaneous local score interventions that could be called improvisations on the outputs of the algorithm.

### **Aesthetic background**

*data compression* grew out into a completely different piece from *SCHLÖSCH*. One could call it the outcome of playing Chinese Whispers with myself. It may be slightly misleading that the score is notated in a conventional manner. In spite of the fact that the music has not been created in a traditional way, this might make it look like a quite traditional piece. Apart from being a particularly tactile piece of music, the information density in *data compression* is, indeed as the title suggests, rather high. It is perhaps this aspect of the composition Bob Gilmore is hinting at in the English liner notes to my portrait CD, where he states ‘a sensuous hedonist’ could have written the piece.<sup>293</sup> Due to its genesis, *data compression* features a sequence of permanently changing colours and the music is largely unpredictable. The acoustic scenarios change almost constantly embracing sudden leaps of mood like flipping a switch, or jump cuts in a film. These discontinuities are magnified relics

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293. Gilmore, Bob, ‘Making a friend’, 2011 [liner note], in *Harald Muenz. nearly — fast*, [CD], Darmstadt, Coviello Contemporary COV 61117, 2012.

of the percussive attacks from the underlying orchestral piece. To keep the mood of the duo more tempered on the long run, I tried to balance passages full of sudden outbursts with some slower and more lyrical fragments, also bringing the tempo of the music from *SCHLÖSCH*'s ♩ = 144 (minim 72) down to ♩ = 120.

It may be argued that 'serious' composers, at least those coming from the tradition of modernism, would normally not allow an unmodified, cheap pre-set automatism from a commercial piece of software to interfere with their music. I suspect behind this still lurks a very traditionalist picture of the composer as the all-inventive genius who creates everything from scratch at his [!] desk, without any presuppositions. I am trying to take the idea of experimentalism seriously and avoid relying on divine or poetic inspiration or spontaneous suggestions. At least, I tend to utilise techniques that exclude or reduce the influences of the latter.

## **unashamed piano playing (2010)**

For two pianists without electronics

*Dedicated to the Piano duo Jennifer Hymer & Bernd Fograsher*

Duration: ca. 12 min.

Commissioned by the Piano duo Jennifer Hymer & Bernd Fograsher

Premiere: 21/01/2011, Hamburg, Festival klub katarakt, Kampnagel, Piano duo Jennifer Hymer & Bernd Fograsher.

### Programme note

Despite the prevailing digital hype most people would probably deem it absurd to claim that now there is the *iPad* we can safely forget about printed books. In contrast, mere composing on music paper is nowadays often dismissed as old-fashioned on the outset: sponsors, festivals and radio stations are rather inclined to promote ‘multi-media productions’, preferably such including electronics and video. Simple external progress in the material is confounded with aesthetic gain here, often even by



referring to Adorno's concept of material in his 'Philosophy of Modern Music'<sup>294</sup> — which, however, already dates back a couple of years: the first edition of the book was published in 1949.

## Genesis

The commission for *unashamed piano playing* arrived from the Hamburg based pianist Jennifer Hymer who forms a piano duo together with Bernhard Fograsher. They were looking for new pieces for their project called *Mantra Aftermaths*, the context of which was obviously Stockhausen's legendary eponymous piece.<sup>295</sup> This situation challenged me to respond counter-cyclically by composing just pure score music, for two pianos without any technical means, which however, within its structure, should again be deeply imbued with the use of computers. I wanted the subtitle to say 'For two pianists without electronics' to make a difference to the other pieces on the programme<sup>296</sup> emphatically at the outset. Stockhausen himself claims *Mantra* is not a series of variations, since the mantra is neither altered nor ornamented: 'it always remains itself'.<sup>297</sup> *unashamed piano playing* could instead be classified as a sequence of non-directional variations, however there is no mantra in my piece.

## Title

Writing for the piano, an instrument with such a broad traditional musical repertoire has always been one of the biggest challenges for me. In >> *schönes klavierstück* <<, I resolved the issue by omitting sounds as much as possible, writing events which just mark the edges of the silences in between them. The commission for the piece for two pianos drove me into

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294. See terms such as 'tendency of the material', 'laws of motion of the material', 'historical tendency of musical means', 'the most advanced state of technological mode of procedure', 'claims directed to the subject by the material' or 'material as sedimented spirit'. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1976, pp. 38 – 42.

295. *Mantra* (1970) for two pianists (with wood blocks, cymbals antiques, sine wave generators and ring modulators) and sound director was Stockhausen's first fully conventionally notated composition again. After *Plus-Minus* from 1964, he had mainly presented what he called 'process compositions'. Those were verbal or graphic scores with no specified musicians that could be called more layouts or concepts for musicians to elaborate into scores than actual finite compositions. Also *Stimmung* (1968) can hardly be considered as 'conventionally notated'.

296. The other two pieces in the premiere concert in Hamburg were Sascha Lino Lemke's 'Sketches for a Postcard to Sirius' and Hans Tutschku's 'Irrgärten', both for piano and live electronics.

297. '... MANTRA ist also *keine* Variationsform. Das "Mantra" wird nicht variiert; es wird nicht ein einziger Ton hinzugefügt, es wird nichts 'begleitet', ausgeschmückt usw. Das "Mantra" bleibt immer es selbst und zeigt sich in seiner Zwölfältigkeit mit seinen 13 Charakteren.' Karlheinz Stockhausen, *Texte zur Musik 1970 – 1977*, vol. 4, Cologne, DuMont, 1978, p. 155.

quite the opposite corner: I envisioned the two pianists hammering away on keys of the keyboard over the full length of the piece but, at the same time, any resemblance to known piano music and conventional piano playing should be avoided as much as possible. The piece should sound filthy, muddy and rude, even inapproachable and autistic — Both from the players' perspective and the audience. However, as opposed to the impeccable high-gloss aesthetics that are so widespread these days, I do not view these uncouth qualities negatively at all. Thus, the idea of *unashamed piano playing* was born.

### **Harmony**

When discussing >> *schönes klavierstück* <<, I mentioned that music for me is also about the 'silent relics' *between* sounds. These silences may not necessarily be veritable rests but also their opposite: noise. If one avoids extended keyboard techniques (such as those explored by Crumb or Lachenmann) from the outset and just plays — unashamedly or not — on the keys, noise can still be represented by different manifestations of tone clusters. *unashamed piano playing* explores all kinds of clusters, from extremely broad to very small ones, from chromatic to diatonic, all sorts of arpeggios inside them, those created by pedalled glissandos, as well as combinations of these types.

In the preceding compositions discussed here, I largely avoided the noise spectrum; I had explored this to a larger extent in my pre-2005 music. This is why generally, in most pieces of this portfolio, extended playing techniques were not used and also why clusters were avoided. *unashamed piano playing* is an exception to this. The entire piece is centred on the musical idea of moving clusters, which are internally articulated, built up or destroyed in manifold ways. I imagined the paradoxical situation in which an ensemble, which is more suitable to play harmonies than anything else, is precisely *not* doing this for most of the time the piece lasts.

In *unashamed piano playing*, the notational application Sibelius's arrangement algorithms were used again, but this time for rearranging massive cluster fields, out of which the computer carved harmonic and melodic relics randomly. After having already experimented with the software's built-in algorithms in *SCHLÖSCH* and *data compression*, I was aware that beyond a certain degree of musical complexity, Sibelius is unable to deal with the

amount of data fed in to the programme and the algorithm will start reducing the input data in an unforeseeable manner. Normally a composer would avoid such a programme ‘feature’, but I decided to creatively interact with this one more time. Together with the initial twelve-tone structure I entered chains of clusters of different widths and inner constellations into the Sibelius plug-ins. The computer-filtered results were edited compositionally afterwards to yield a playable score. Up to this point, the procedure resembled what I did in the earlier pieces. This time however, the result itself was fed back through the algorithm *again*, and this iterative process was repeated several times in a row. The outcomes could be called a sequence of Sibelius-filtered ‘variations’ with each new generation being a variation of its predecessor (and not of the original gestalt).

During the subsequent manual editing process I applied fixed combinations of piano registers, which change in every new section, similar to the register combinations I described for *nearly — fast*. Also I prefixed a melodic 12-tone section to the beginning, which returns in its retrograded version at the end of *unashamed piano playing*. This formal idea of putting a musical frame (or bracket) around a piece will be seen again in *fein...auflösend*, discussed in the next section. In the piano duo, this should give the impression that the initial melodic lines gradually sink into the clusters, or respectively grow back out of them again in the end.

## **Form**

The following scheme illustrates the different sections of the piece:

- 1) Bars 1 – 42: Two interwoven 12-tone melodic lines. This frame is increasingly filled up harmonically until clusters are reached.
- 2) [B] Bars 43 – 54: Focus on melodic relics that appear between clusters.
- 3) [C] Bars 55 – 71: Cluster in arpeggios: downward; upward; in contrary motion; all these divided between the four hands of the two pianists; giant arpeggio over both pianos (bars 59 – 60); ‘white’ and ‘black’ keys glissando (bar 70).
- 4) [D] Bars 72 – 97: Clusters on black versus white keys, which are often set against each other in complementary harmonic movements: the superimposition of F# pentatonic plus C major results in 12-tone-fields again.
- 5) Bars 99 – 128: Fading clusters in and out by pressing or releasing keys respectively.

- 6) Bars 129 – 152: Start of *recitante* interjections (piano 1, bars 129, 140 – 142; piano 2, bars 129, 132, 141 – 142, 145 – 146)
- 7) Bars 153 – 188: There is increasingly fast movement until the rhythmic climax before [H]. On top of this, there are further *recitante* gestures, first exposing a whole tone + semitone motif (piano 1, bar 153; piano 2, bar 154 – 155; piano 1: bars 159, 162, 165 – 166, etc.), later including repetitions or staccato notes (piano 1, bars 161, 165, 168, 178, 180 – 181, 182 – 183, etc.)
- 8) [H] Bars 189 – 246: Complementary rhythmic movements between the two pianos until climactic chromatic ‘super-cluster’ played with both arms by both pianists in bar 199. First melodic motifs come back (piano 2, bar 210 – 215; piano 1, bars 214 – 215, 217 – 219)
- 9) [J] Bars 247 – 257: In addition to being perforated by rests, the clusters become narrower and shorter. Short accents in piano 1 are set against a legato structure in piano 2.
- 10) [K] Bars 258 – 302: Narrow extension within the narrow range of just approximately one octave, complementary rhythms between the two pianos. Bars 258 – 298 are the retrograde of the first 40 bars. As a consequence, the clusters are gradually thinned out until the music is once more reduced to just two interwoven lines (as in the beginning of the piece).

### **Aesthetic background**

In *unashamed piano playing* I had to deal with my general reservations about composing for piano, as could be seen in the discussion above about how I tried to get to grips with these misgivings about the instrument and its place in the classical canon. In this specific work, these difficulties were multiplied by the fact that there are *two* pianists and *two* pianos involved. All this makes it clear that the piece is not just about the notes on the page but the entire situation of ‘playing piano on a stage’. It must be noted that the duo is extremely difficult to perform for at least two reasons: firstly, playing so many different clusters in quick succession over nearly a quarter of an hour is a tiring physical challenge for any pianist, and the dense harmonies are not easy for the players memorise or for the listener to recognise<sup>298</sup>; secondly, rhythmic coordination between the players is particularly hard since there neither is a true pulse nor any catchy motivic material.

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298. Having said that, I could imagine a more accurate performance than the two that have taken place so far.

## **fein ... auflösend (2010—11)**

For flute, clarinet, violoncello and piano

Dedication: *For my friends in ensemble mosaik: Bettina, Christian, Mathis und Ernst*

Duration: ca. 9 min.

Commissioned by Kunststiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen for funded portrait concerts / portrait CD production in May 2011.

Premiere: 25/05/2011, Cologne, Alte Feuerwache, Ensemble Mosaik (Berlin): Bettina Junge — flute, Christian Vogel — clarinet, Mathis Mayr — violoncello, Ernst Surberg — piano

### Programme note

The quartet *fein...auflösend* (*finely ... dissolving or resolving*) is probably the most light-hearted of my pieces from the last few years. It has a lot to do with musical childhood memories of Christmas carols, which have always had a strong fascination as social topoi for me. Here they serve as a (largely hidden) compositional background for all sorts of rhythmic and harmonic proliferations as well as dissolution and expansion processes around the originals. The many tonal — or at times perhaps spectral — sound complexes are directly derived from the source material. And the course of the piece is — in the tradition of Christmas medleys — slightly pastiche-like, a fact that seemed very fitting to me in this context. Very often

melodic lines are entrusted in rapid succession to different instruments, in order to blur them. To me, the piece contains very elementary traits of music making, with the block-like stasis of the music at the same time eating up the underlying traditional songs like an amoeba, in order to then build entirely different shapes from them.<sup>299</sup>

## Title

The main material for this music is other music, namely a selection of Christmas Carols from the international repertoire.<sup>300</sup> The work title translates into English as either *finely ... dissolving* or *finely ... resolving*. These attributes hint at both the acoustical background and the analytical aspect for my compositional decisions in this piece. Sometimes I look at the originals as if through several aural magnifying glasses with different resolutions at the same time with some elements being screened more coarsely, others more finely. Occasionally, these images are also superimposed on top of each other.

## Analysis

The following table provides an overview of the macro-form of the piece:

No.	bar	Section title	Tempo	Christmas Carol used
(1)	bar 1	<i>Coming out: venite!</i>	(♩ = 84)	‘Ihr Kinderlein kommet’
(2)	bar 22	<i>Susani’s Serial</i>	(♩ . = 56)	‘Vom Himmel hoch, oh Englein kommt’ (‘Susani’)
(3)	bar 36	<i>Pastoralissimo</i>	(♩ . = 56)	Potpourri from 6/8 carols
(4)	bar 47	<i>Gioioso</i>	(♩ = 100)	‘The Twelve Days of Christmas’
(5)	bar 129	<i>Adagio elettrico</i>	(♩ = 66)	‘Go, Tell it on the Mountain’
(6)	bar 152	<i>Free shipping</i>	(♩ = 150)	‘Es kommt ein Schiff geladen’
(7)	bar 194	<i>Vivo</i>	(♩ = 200)	‘Il est né, le divin enfant’
(8)	bar 227	<i>Tintinnabuli</i>	(♩ . = 56)	‘Süßer die Glocken nie klingen’

299. The translation of the original German programme note for the CD booklet was completed with the aid of Bob Gilmore to whom I am indebted.

300. Already in 2003, I made a piece from superimposed Christmas carols, the 13-minute long 8-channel tape piece *rieselt stille froh entsprungen*, which I composed for a ‘Raummusik’ project held on the 31.10.2003 in Cologne’s *Kunstwerk* with 8 loudspeakers arranged centrally in the middle of the audience in a double line of 2x4 speakers back to back.

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|------|---------|--------------------|-----------|---|
| (9)  | bar 249 | <i>Vivo</i>        | (♩ = 200) | ‘Il est né, le divin enfant’ / ‘Süßer die<br>Glocken nie klingen’ |
| (10) | bar 300 | <i>Tempo primo</i> | (♩ = 84)  | ‘Ihr Kinderlein kommet’   |

On the surface, this looks indeed like a simple medley of Christmas carols. Medleys, or potpourris, for me rather aim at an *absence* of form, or actually at ‘non-form’, since they represent simple concatenations of isolated musical numbers closed within themselves. This idea of anti-form thwarts a sense of continuity and thus fits the aspect of dissolution, which is already present in the title *fein...auflösend*. The simple sequence of events in a potpourri permits for a piece that does not go anywhere. Such a non-developmental format leads to an overarching, large-scale formal standstill, which widely excludes narrativity.

The slightly provocative component of artlessness that the potpourri idea brings to the piece is again typical for my musical worldview. In art music, formal *pastiche* is normally regarded as a compositional weakness; within the coherence- and logic-seeking tradition of modernism, it has been virtually taboo. I try to challenge this notion with even more ostentatious absences of musical craftsmanship, e.g. by composing ‘cheap,’ ‘bad’ or even no transitions at all. In fact, they are often completely replaced by jump cuts, like in a movie (see e.g. the non-transitions at bars 46 – 47 or 128 – 129). In contrast, transitions between songs sometimes proliferate and push unashamedly to the foreground. By suddenly taking on an unduly dominant role they override musical hierarchy between important and unimportant elements, e.g. in bars 191 – 193.<sup>301</sup>

Apart from the pastiche conception apart, there are in reality many internal formal links within the piece, even if they do not become immediately evident for the listener. Despite the fact that the piece has ten number-like sections, there are only six different musical tempi, since the initial song ‘Ihr Kinderlein kommet’ and the French carol ‘Il est né le divin enfant’ (*Vivo*, bar 194) are both recapitulated at later points in the piece (in the Coda at bar 300, and the *Vivo* at bar 249 respectively).

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301. Cf. the opposition of ‘avanti’/foreground and ‘dietro’/background in *dietro V avanti*.

## Section 1

There are interrelations between the sections, which do not come to the surface. *fein ... auflösend* begins with ‘Ihr Kinderlein kommet’ (‘Come Little Children’), a song which I have always regarded as the most ‘classic’ among German Christmas carols. It is used like a curtain for the piece, and it also has the final word in the concluding ‘coda’ thus serving as a formal bracket:<sup>302</sup> from bar 300 through the end it is continued exactly where it broke off after the opening measures of the piece in bar 21. This compositionally slightly artless link between the opening and the end of the piece acquires a somehow forced character, like an unfitting frame imposed on a painting.

In the opening section of the piece, several voices run slightly displaced in different tempi; e.g. the ornamental figure, which the flute plays in semiquavers (bar 13), returns one bar later and diminished to semiquaver triplets in the left hand of the piano; it appears again augmented to quaver triplets in the following bar in the cello. Each instance varies the combination of semitone versus whole-tone steps of the sequence over the range of either a minor or major third. Later the piano, followed by cello, clarinet and piccolo take up the same triplet motif in accelerating rhythms when ‘Ihr Kinderlein kommet’ comes back in the final stretto (bar 300).

## Sections 2 and 3

In spite of the otherwise melodic and harmonic dissolution of the songs taking place in *fein...auflösend* for the listener, the clear-cut rhythms probably create the most identifiable aural reference back to the originals. Tonal rhythms (i.e. rhythms characteristic of tonal music) reveal themselves rather quickly. Therefore, in my earlier music, I normally tried to work around them in such a way as to remove their ‘square’ feeling. The musicologist Rainer Nonnenmann commented after the premiere he had never heard any piece of mine with such a ‘rhythmic insistence, one with such continuous movement’.<sup>303</sup>

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302. Maybe in this, even a similarity to the typical bracketing elements, introduction and stretto, of a waltz sequence by Johann Strauss.

303. H.M. in Concert talk with Rainer Nonnenmann.



In *fein...auflösend*, tonal rhythms are deliberately employed as stereotyped materials.<sup>304</sup> For me Christmas carols have an aura that is less linked to any sacral or spiritual experiences but rather connected with family experiences and childhood memories.<sup>305</sup> The initial and final 4/4 derived from ‘Ihr Kinderlein kommet’ forms a rhythmic contrast to the adjacent sections in 6/8. The rhythmic cliché of the Siciliano meter is used abundantly in the piece for its archetypal pastorale character; it will appear in sections (2), (3), (8), and (9) again.

Immediately after the introduction, the straightforward 6/8 of ‘Susani’ (bar 22) become entangled. Snippets of the carol are transposed individually in the four instruments resulting thus in an overall indecipherable polytonality for the listener. The unifying element of the passage remains, indeed, the 6/8 pulse. In the following section (‘Pastoralissimo’, bar 36) the pastoral mood is condensed into a climactic culmination with about 20 different 6/8-carols in G major combined together.<sup>306</sup>

#### Section 4

Probably the most evident artifice applied consists of assigning one and the same voice to different instruments in rapid alternation. This becomes very clear in the top voice of the passage from ‘The Twelve Days of Christmas’ (bars 47 – 64), but similar procedures, resulting in nested *Klangfarbenmelodie* are used in many places throughout the piece. Similar manners of orchestrating have been already identified in *dietro V avanti* and *SCHLÖSCH*; however, these earlier pieces are widely athenatic. In *fein...auflösend* the re-orchestration techniques are applied to *melodies*, which are thus blurred in this way. Despite the fact we

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304. ‘Christmas carols have always been mainly social topoi for me.’ H.M. in Concert talk with Rainer Nonnenmann.

305. ‘Well, of course it is also something I had to get over. For me that always used to be a bad season, I must say, and, in a Protestant household in Württemberg, the carols were an integral part of it and had to be sung. Maybe not the international ones, which I’ve added now, obviously those were not known, but there was a fixed canon of Christmas songs, which are mostly in 6/8-time. [...] That’s why I feel this is, rather than being a homage, a dissociation. It haunted me and I thought, now I must realise this piece once for all.’ Concert talk with Rainer Nonnenmann.

306. This collage from 6/8 carols in bars 36 – 46 includes, among others, the following songs: Flute: ‘Heiligste Nacht’ (bar 36 with upbeat), ‘Süßer die Glocken nie klingen’ (bar 38), ‘Der Heiland ist geboren’ (bar 40 with upbeat), ‘Stille Nacht’ (bar 42), ‘Vom Himmel hoch, oh Englein kommt’ (bar 44 with upbeat), ‘Stille Nacht’ (bar 46). Clarinet: ‘Auf dem Berge, da wehet der Wind’ (bar 36 with upbeat), ‘Schlaf wohl, Du Himmelsknabe, Du’ (bar 37), ‘In dulci júbilo’ (bar 39), ‘Vom Himmel hoch, oh Englein kommt’ (bar 44 with upbeat). Piano: ‘Schlaf wohl, Du Himmelsknabe, Du’ (bar 36 with upbeat), ‘Süßer die Glocken nie klingen’ (bar 37), ‘In dulci júbilo’ (bar 38), ‘Der Heiland ist geboren’ (bar 39), ‘Stille Nacht’ (bar 41).

still perceive the melodic lines as continuous ones,<sup>307</sup> we are irritated by them being continually recast in different colours.

In the following example from bars 62 – 72 (fig. 6), traditional tonal chords are to be played preferably in just intonation:

Fig. 6: *fein...auflösend*, bars 62 – 72, enharmonically respelled short score.

This sequence of three-part chords contains the following tonal progressions (V→I progressions are marked by arrows, other traditional progressions by dashes):

1<sup>st</sup> line: Gmaj — D<sup>aug</sup> → Gmaj, G<sup>aug</sup>, Gmaj<sub>3</sub>—Gmaj, F<sup>#aug</sup> → Bmin,  
 2<sup>nd</sup> line: Gmin → B<sup>b, aug</sup> → E<sup>b</sup>maj, B<sup>aug</sup> → Emin — Gmaj<sub>3</sub> — Emaj → A<sup>7</sup>,  
 Gmaj<sub>3</sub>

The tonal ambiguities behind this chain of chords work on a backdrop of internalised functional relationships, which are combined with false relations. In an otherwise simple diatonic context, such false relations may have traditionally appeared in folkloristic contexts (cf. Brahms's *Hungarian Dances*); in stricter forms of art music, they have rather been conceived as artless, wrong and to be avoided.<sup>308</sup> The three parts do not respect the harmony

307. The Gestalt principle of Grouping behind this is called 'Good Continuation'. Cf. Roger Shepard, 'Cognitive Psychology and Music', in Perry R. Cook, *Music, cognition, and computerized sound: an introduction to psychoacoustics*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1999, p. 32.

308. An explicit exception for this has always been made when the Neapolitan chord was followed by the chord of the dominant; in this case the false relation should not be avoided as it indeed constitutes a main characteristic of the cadence.

‘law of the shortest way’<sup>309</sup> (and other conventions, see figure above) to wilfully enhance this. They move in leaps, which is reinforced by continuously shifting the instrumentation of the three chord notes between the different players.

From bar 66 onwards, the tone D is always heard in different tonal roles in a row: first as the root of an augmented chord after a preceding G major; then as the third of B minor; as the fifth in G minor; as the root of an augmented chord on D, which is then immediately interpreted as a leading note to E $\flat$ , which is suddenly respelled as the leading note D $\sharp$  in an augmented chord over B respectively; and so forth. It would be ideal if in a performance the flute, clarinet, and violoncello players continuously adjusted their intonations depending on the role of the chord note they play. These tonal possibilities were further explored in the context of intonation and tuning systems in my later pieces *stein-sum* (2011 – 12) and *aldiladellaldiqua* (2014), which are not part of this portfolio.

In the tonality domain, the mentioned screening effect happens through the use of concatenated abrupt modulations. An example for this can be seen before the section ‘... and a partridge in a pair tree...’ (from ‘The Twelve Days of Christmas’) is processed (see score extract, bars 106 – 109): after a short period of tonal stability has been reached with the winds playing horn fifths on the dominant over a fundamental bourdon fifth on the root G in bars 108 – 113, more and more thirds appear hinting at the chromatic neighbouring tonality A $\flat$  major (D $\flat$ /B $\flat$  in bars 108 – 109, a first clear A $\flat$  major triad in bar 110). Once A $\flat$  major is finally reconfirmed in bars 112 – 113 (clear IV – V – I cadence D $\flat$ , E $\flat$ , A $\flat$ ), the tonic is violently transposed down phrase-wise by semitones beginning from bar 113, 2<sup>nd</sup> beat: G(for 4 ♪)-G $\flat$ (4 ♪)-F(5 ♪)-E(5 ♪)-E $\flat$ (5 ♪)-D(4 ♪)-D $\flat$ (4 ♪)-C(4 ♪)B(4 ♪)-B $\flat$ (4 ♪)-A(4 ♪).<sup>310</sup> The cello’s final downward semitone glissando of 2<sup>nd</sup> inversion chords in parallel motion (B $\flat$ maj - Amaj) reveals the building principle as the passage concludes (see figure 7 below).

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309. Schoenberg citing Bruckner in the chapter ‘Connection of the Diatonic Primary and Secondary Triads’ in Arnold Schoenberg, *Theory of Harmony*, trans. Roy E. Carter, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1983, p. 39.

310. Always ending on the dominant of the respective tonality, lengths of phrases are indicated here as numbers of quavers.

106 fl+cl, exchanging voices 1/2  
 (pp sempre) *f* *mf* *p* *mf*  
*f* sempre

116 *mp* *mp* *p* *pp* *pp* *mp* *pp*  
*f* *p* *gliss.*

Fig. 7: *fein...auflösend*, bars 106 – 124, enharmonically respelled short score.

Another typical gag from commodified popular music that I introduced are abrupt modulations:<sup>311</sup> to increase tension, the same music is brusquely presented a tone or a semitone higher in the last verse of a song. They seemed a fitting idea within the ‘artless’ *pastiche* concept, as they oppose the more sophisticated modes of modulating gradually in classical music. Thus in *fein...auflösend*, chromatic transpositions were imposed on the music, like a violent external agency, *after* the entire section had already otherwise been coherently composed. In the end of the passage, this rather mechanic artifice is radically employed as a strict transformational rule to achieve a consistent *downwards* movement (bars 118 – 123). This time the imaginary sound engineer behind the mixing console is playing around with his ‘transposition wheel’; the result yields an exaggerated, inflationary and ultimately ironic sequence.

By introducing such abrupt chromatic shifts traditional harmonic progressions are obliterated and transformed into a mere colouring effect. Since the sequence of chords *has* a clear tonal context which at the same time is highly ambiguous, the three non-keyboard instruments in the ensemble must permanently and intuitively adjust their intonations thus revealing the difficulties an equidistant tempered scale presents in such a context. Ultimately this procedure emphasises the fact that such radically chromatic relationships entirely depend on equal-tempered tuning.

311. The German term ‘Rückung’ (‘shifting’, ‘moving out of place’) implies that this is, in fact, not a ‘modulation’ at all.

## Section 5

With the spiritual ‘Go, tell it on the mountain’ we arrive at another 4/4 (bar 129). I am tried to make the original and its harmonisation hard to recognise by distributing the four voices of the underlying four-part setting individually over four, five, six and seven irregular subdivisions of the bar. The parts of the underlying arrangement happen simultaneously in four different pulses, similar to the overlaid 4:5:6-structures in *nearly* — *fast*. On the lines of the term *auflösend* in the title, this leads to a ‘camera shake’ effect, which results in a sense of dissolution. Former tonal rhythms and harmonies are thus stretched in different directions. The result is a frayed version of what was originally a relatively square choral-like piece. It is as if we were looking at differently pixelated images of the carol at the same time that are superimposed on top of each other. (A real world reference here would be in church the singing of a congregation trailing behind the echoing sounds of the accompanying organ.)

The entire *Adagio elettrico* section is characterised by unmotivated and even ‘unmusical’ sudden crescendo/decrescendo outbursts. Their effect is similar to a technician in a mixdown session who is abruptly pushing the volume fader up and pulling it down for one particular instrument. The climax of these dynamic games happen in bar 140 in the cello, where the crescendo even ends with exaggerated bow pressure in *ff*, leading to a scratchy noise sound that remotely recalls a distorted sound recording. (A similar effect will come back in the last section of the piece.) One could imagine a sound engineer again who is trying to mix down a multi-track recording of the piece in an odd way. The overall solemn expression of the chorale is tempered by the harmony sliding out-of-phase and by the violent dynamics applied ‘from outside’.

## Section 6

The two carols ‘Es kommt ein Schiff geladen’ (bar 152) and later the French ‘Il est né le divin enfant’ are transformed in such a way that they never go anywhere. After moving *three* notes forward within the song (i.e. in its original direction), we jump *two* notes backwards and start over from there. After three notes forward we are leaping two steps back again. By trudging through the songs in this manner, the sense of the originals is heavily blurred though not completely annihilated.

The passage is centred around the medieval Advent song ‘Es kommt ein Schiff geladen’ (‘A ship arrives, loaded’), one of the oldest Marian hymns in German language,<sup>312</sup> is placed right at the centre of the entire piece. My ship, however, comes loaded with ‘false octaves’ in parallel motion. The original melody in E Dorian is projected onto a non-octavating scale, whose building principle is the concatenation of cells made from two whole-tones followed by one semitone. In this manner the pitches of the scale differ in each octave (figure 8):



within the phrases are left out. These holes lead to a feeling of rhythmic fragmentation (see score extract figure 9).

The image shows a musical score extract for bars 182 to 189. It consists of four staves: flute (fl), clarinet (cl), violin (vc), and piano (pi). The flute part is in the treble clef, while the other three are in the bass clef. The time signature changes from 7/8 to 5/4, then 7/8, and finally 9/8. The music features complex rhythmic patterns with many rests, creating a fragmented feel. The piano part has a dense, cluster-like texture in the lower register.

Fig. 9: *fein...auflösend*, bars 182 – 189, score (actual pitches): part leading in parallel in 'false octaves' with rhythmic 'excisions'.

### Sections 7 – 9

As mentioned earlier, the French carol ‘Il est né le divin enfant’ appears in the piece twice. After its harmonically relatively simple first presentation (*Vivo*, bar 194), it is reprised later, following a brusque interruption by ‘Süßer die Glocken nie klingen’ (*Tintinnabuli*, bars 227 – 248), in a much adorned but compact form (*Vivo*, bar 249). The first time it surfaces from a transitional ornament in the piano (bar 194) but is hardly recognisable because it is played in retrograde. The second time (bar 249) the tonality of the song, from simple diatonic, is increasingly filled up until it reaches the complete chromatic field through extreme polytonal superimpositions in different ones of the four instruments: starting from the common key G major in bar 249, individual bars of the song are transposed, each in a different interval, accumulating more and more remote tonalities in quick succession. In this manner, the strong melodic drive flips over into an almost cluster-like texture. (Compositionally, this can be seen as the reverse process to the subtractions of lines out of clusters described above in my earlier duo *unashamed piano playing*.)

Occasional sudden speed alterations occur, including slightly faster (piano bar 261 with 9:8 semiquavers; clarinet bar 265 with 4:3 quavers; piano bar 269 with 9:6 semiquavers), or slightly slower values (flute bar 263 with 5:6 semiquavers; flute bar 267 with 7:8 semiquavers; piano bar 268 with 5:6 quavers; cello bar 271 with 7:8 semiquavers). These disruptions cause the rigid semiquaver structure to sway since the variations stick out

dynamically through quick ‘fade-ins’ into forte followed by immediate ‘fade-outs’. If earlier in the piece the virtual technician behind the mixer was playing around with quick ad hoc transpositions, here it is as if someone is using an imaginary tempo joystick.

Through its ongoing harmonic shifts, the short episode based on ‘Süßer die Glocken nie klingen’ separating the two occurrences of ‘Il est né le divin enfant’ introduces a stark contrast to its harmonically rather static surroundings. Sections 7 – 9 are therefore a reminiscence of an ABA' form within the context of the piece.

### Section 10

Towards the end of the piece disturbingly high tinnitus-like sustained notes emerge in the most strident registers of clarinet (bar 295) and piccolo (bar 297). These recall remotely a sound engineer unable to avoid feedback during a recording session. The continuous 6/8 motion of the preceding section is simply cut short by the shrill acoustic event whereas a musical transition is substituted for a cross-fade at the beginning of the final stretto (Tempo primo, bar 300).

### **Aesthetic background**

The piece was a singular attempt to play an inner-musical game with found objects from the public domain. Although still using techniques that are strongly rooted in the tradition of modernism, *fein...auflösend* shows an overall post-modern approach, in which tonal materials are available without sticking to their traditional implications in the functional system. To me this felt like a new freedom, as if I was able to start composing afresh and to lend a formerly unknown serenity to my music.

In this apparently harmless medley, I attempt to deal with music rather like a sound engineer would with tracks in a sequencer programme than like a composer in the traditional sense. The music should be played mechanically, at times electrically (which does not only apply to the *Adagio elettrico* at bar 129). A listener could ask whether this piece is electronic music without using any electronic means, since a traditional way of composing pitches and rhythms is confronted with a more recent one directly working on sounds (which is borrowed conceptually from Sonic Arts).



It is probably needless to say I did not wish to write an ordinary ‘Christmas potpourri’ like those already heard and commercially available. Nevertheless, I like the paradoxical situation that *fein...auflösend* maybe still could *be* one — just in my very own way. Neither was it my aim to (re-)produce any Christmas atmosphere. I would rather wish to alienate the listener with the run-off-the-mill seasonal songs by creating something new and different with them. Although tonal harmonies, cadences, traditional rhythms and melodic fragments can be identified, it is in no way essential for the audience to recognise any of the Christmas carols. The listener quickly gets the feeling of something tonal, perhaps even that there are *objets trouvés* behind the music, but this is difficult to materialise in concrete terms.

Recognition of the original carols is impeded by the use of a range of international songs but mainly since the original materials are dealt with as if they were atonal ones: serial or permutational procedures are applied to tonal pitches and rhythms. However, the tonal character of the Christmas carols still remains quite strong, and the outcomes still show identifiable tonal features.<sup>314</sup> This is intentional, and I was hoping that, nevertheless, something new would come out of this process. I take the view that it is not only possible to compose coherent harmony within a tonal system (such as traditional functional harmony), but also the degree of how much tonally centred a certain passage is may itself be object of composing; this could happen between poles that can be roughly delineated by the buzz words tonal, polytonal, and atonal.<sup>315</sup>

The piece takes the idea of borrowing to an extreme, which I do not believe I could or would want to pursue any further. I would maintain that *fein...auflösend* is a one-off attempt at *pastiche* in the sense of the distinction Fredric Jameson has made between *parody* and *pastiche* as its historic successor. He argues that *pastiche* is ‘devoid of laughter’ whereas

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314. ‘One, of course, notes while listening, there is well-known material, there is a tonal rhythm, there are also tonal harmonies that arise, melodies, motoric movement, a rhythmic gesture, cadence formulas, and so on, but they hardly ever materialise.’ Musicologist Rainer Nonnenmann about *fein...auflösend* in a Concert talk with the author during the interval of my portrait concert at Cologne’s Alte Feuerwache, 25/05/2011, in which *fein...auflösend* had its premiere. Unpublished transcription of the recording.

315. In hindsight, this thought might have been inspired by Clarence Barlow’s theories, particularly those relating to his major piano work *çoğluotobüsişletmesi* (1975 – 79). Cf. C. Barlow, *Bus Journey to Parametron* (all about *çoğluotobüsişletmesi*). [= *Feedback Papers No. 21 – 23*], Cologne, Feedback Studio Verlag, 1980.

*parody* pretends its subject matter is still living in ‘some healthy linguistic normality’.<sup>316</sup> I would certainly not wish to defend the latter point of view.

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316. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1991, p. 17.

### **3. Stocktaking and perspectives**

## The situation: Composition in the era of digested modernism, experimentalism and post-modernism

What remains, cannot be predicted. But maybe later, in a different order of things, one could still hear to how beautifully one once composed five o'clock in the afternoon in the *Menuet* of the *Sonatine*. The table is set for tea, the children are being called to come to the table, the gong has already been struck, they hear it ringing and play one last round before joining the rest on the veranda. By the time they get away from the table, it has cooled down outside, and they must stay inside.<sup>317</sup>

‘Crisis’ is a term that is often used lightly, but over the last two decades, it can be argued that a crisis has arise not only for the Western model of a capitalist economy but also for the artists who are forced to work within it.<sup>318</sup> ‘Composition’ itself seems to have become an increasingly problematic term. Traditionally, notating music on paper for other people to play circumscribed a clearly defined and easily defensible position. The activity of a composer seems naturally analogous to that of a writer, although a similarly large audience for score reading (in the literal sense of the term) has hardly ever existed. This suggests that musical notation has always been something for specialists if not, put ideologically, for initiates. Today’s situation is markedly different. Never before in the history of Western art was creating and exploiting one’s own music (thus calling oneself a ‘composer’ without having undergone professional training) so readily accessible as a hobby.<sup>319</sup> At the same time it seems, even in spite of a global economic slowdown, as if the confusing plethora of festivals for all kinds of contemporary music we have these days is much more than we have ever seen in the past. If one considers music making through computer technology as an act of democratisation (on the surface, I’d say, as accessibility to sophisticated and expensive

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317. ‘Was davon bleibt, läßt sich nicht prophezeien. Aber vielleicht wird man später, in einer anderen Ordnung der Dinge, doch noch hören, wie schön man einmal, im Menuett der Sonatine, fünf Uhr des Nachmittags komponiert hat. Es ist zum Tee gedeckt, die Kinder werden hereingerufen, schon schallt der Gong, sie vernehmen ihn und spielen noch eine Runde, ehe sie sich mit dem Kreis auf der Veranda vereinen. Bis sie von dort loskommen, ist es draußen kühl geworden, sie müssen drinnen bleiben.’ Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Ravel’, 1930, in Theodor W. Adorno, *Moments musicaux*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1982, p. 65.

318. Analysing the links between late capitalism and new music production in depth would be a valuable task; however, it is far beyond scope of the present work.

319. Maybe this could even be considered a belated vengeance of the socially underprivileged who had been excluded from the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois practice of playing string quartets and piano arrangements *à quatre-mains* at their leisure in amateur circles.

technology comes into play), it may appear that the seemingly cumbersome and highbrow activity of notating music for others to play is increasingly being swept away as unnecessary across a broad front. Calling oneself a composer (in what is widely perceived an old-fashioned sense of the term) does not seem to be a position that can be defended easily any longer. This applies even more, if the ideas behind one's art suggest that some fundamental elements within the music scene itself should be essentially different from how they actually are.

Composing music is now one rare possibility to come near unfixable, ephemeral and actually unreachable wondrous objects — not only in the blunt sense that sounds cannot be touched. Ultimately, they remain permanently incomplete and in progress. Intangibility for me is music's lifeblood, hence my predilection for precarious textures that are rather difficult to perform and thus partly elude musicians and audiences (and at times even the composer himself). For me, musical composition should lead to possibly fragile, intangible, evanescent non-objects constituting a reality of their own.

## Acoustic Situations

In the light of these findings, it has become even more of a challenge for me to be *experimental*. Although most of the pieces in this portfolio are written for traditional instruments, they contain attempts to confront a conventional listening perspective. Within my music, purely sonic events appear simultaneously or in juxtaposition with historically charged materials. Alongside my own sounds — if these can really ever exist — I often use *objets trouvés* or pseudo-quotations (understood as stylistic allusions) in the same piece, which is the case e.g. in *SCHLÖSCH*, >>*schönes klavierstück*<<, or *fein...auflösend*. Another important category are passages that deal with physical characteristics of a sound (e.g. the oscillating vibrato speeds in the central section of *dietro V avanti*), and are covered by the term 'Acoustic Situations' already explained in Chapter 1. The way of listening to these is similar to the one encountered during the viewing of installative works of art<sup>320</sup> but (due to the differences between the visual and the acoustic domains) not identical.

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320. Peter Ablinger describes a very similar listening attitude: 'We could possibly move around *inside* a sound. This would be another open-genre aspect that has gained great importance in both idealistic (concert) and real (physical) form (installation).' Peter Ablinger, 'Sagen und Zeigen. Variationen einer Differenz', 2006, in *MusikTexte* 135, November 2012, p. 16.

Andy Hamilton's differentiation between soundart and music was briefly considered in Chapter 1. The present portfolio contains examples for these two modes of perception, in particular hybrid forms mingling the two genres. The processual passages e.g. in *dietro V avanti* could be seen as regressive elements borrowed from a Ligeti-esque aesthetic (although the developmental drive in the Hungarian composer's music does usually not come with any perceptual choices on the lines of Hamilton's distinctions), whereas its central section would probably fall into the category of 'non-documentary sonic composition'.<sup>321</sup> For the future, I am enticed by the perspective of making categorical shifts between different modes of perception that happen over the course of a single piece of music. Instead of keeping them separate by doing mutually exclusive installative and concert work, I am hoping to make these categories more 'composable'. For example, this would mean that cross-fades could happen between 'listening to music in the traditional sense' and 'listening to a sound as such'.

## **Sharpening human perception**

Attentive listening can certainly be demanding. For music that wants to be perceived as art and not just as mere entertainment, I believe it is necessary to abandon a consumerist sit-back-and-relax approach. In the long run, we can only hope that people's ears and minds will adapt and aural perception will become ever subtler. The utopia behind a generalised concept of sharpening human perception would be that the alert state of mind one has passed through during certain listening experiences, could also be recalled in everyday life, which could in turn lead to an improved ability to notice small differences. I am deeply convinced that the more intensity a composer invests in their artistic outcome, the more intensity will be perceived on the other end. Good performers will definitely further enhance intensity, but they cannot completely make up for it if it is already weak at the outset. An active and attentive listener might become an ever more differentiated person. As a consequence, living the critical potential of experimental art may mean, quite concretely, that things in life may be put to the test before just being silently accepted, digested or regurgitated. If adopted by many, this attitude could even result in politically critical situations for populist leaders.

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321. Hamilton, 'Music and the Aural Arts', p. 62.

As pointed out, it is my aim to provide a context to my sounds instead of sending the listener in an idyllic sphere that showcases supposedly ‘neutral’, a-historic materials remote from this world. John Croft gives a forceful account of the commitment of modernist art ‘after the post-modern’: it is still possible to raise objections against the cheap ideology of capitalism to subsume *all* art, including its non-pop currents, into the label of a giant ‘entertainment industry’, no matter whether the artists themselves wish to be part of it or not.<sup>322</sup> Croft suggests the ‘fields of rubble’ heaped up around the subject by both modernity *and* postmodernity could be overcome through a ‘new mimetic music’<sup>323</sup> which gives music back an individual and social relevance, ‘a notion of use-value for art’.<sup>324</sup> Whether this could be introduced and cultivated by new music of all things will come down to substantial support by society, both financially and ideologically. The musical experiences of contemporary composers, as well as those of the performers and audiences linked to them, are still far removed from the everyday experience of most people in other social strata. A large-scale re-rooting and de-alienation of people reaching beyond the bourgeois new music concertgoer will be certainly worth striving for.

## Differentiation

In the hope of giving my musical experiences depth, I do not believe in compositional day-by-day production at all. Just chasing after the next premiere does not work for me. As set forth earlier, I still believe that in the first place music is art not entertainment and therefore should have a lasting value.<sup>325</sup> This might sound old-fashioned for someone, and, at this point, it may come as no surprise that I am very suspicious of unfiltered inspiration and spontaneous outpourings in general. My compositional process goes through a long series of sedimentation and densification procedures, which make genesis of the work a usually slow and cumbersome process. It is a long journey from first ideas over their sensual and intellectual penetration until a piece reaches its final, differentiated musical elaboration. In an attempt to approach things from a principled point of view, I am hardly ever ready to easily take procedures for granted that have proven to work in earlier compositions of mine and

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322. John Croft, ‘Fields of rubble: on the poetics of music after the post-modern’, in Heile, Björn (ed.), *The Modernist Legacy*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, p. 25.

323. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

324. *Loc. cit.*

325. Cf. John Croft, ‘Fields of rubble: on the poetics of music after the post-modern’, in Heile, Björn (ed.), *The Modernist Legacy*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, p. 25 – 38.

therefore to use them again in a new piece. Finding it downright suspicious if something works too well, I like to introduce artificial obstacles and resistances of all sorts that stop me from reaching a musical outcome quickly and easily. Thus the final shape of my music has normally followed a long series of revisions.<sup>326</sup>

This goes hand in hand with my refusal to establish any general pre-compositional methods — e.g. for organising pitches and rhythms — which I could easily retrieve from my top drawer. My technical backdrops do often change significantly from piece to piece. My music manifests itself in extremely diverse manners, and I like to see each of my pieces as a unique specimen. There could even seem to be a different personality behind each individual piece.<sup>327</sup> I honestly like to be perceived in such a way, although I feel that in the background there *is* a unifying and unique ego at work. I regard the fact that a codified Muenz-style cannot be easily defined as a virtue and an act of resistance against the rampant view that making art could, even remotely, have to do with running a business. If a composer follows the commercial idea of establishing their own ‘brand’, they will be expected to come up with a clearly identifiable musical signature. I am ready to defend music as something ephemeral, fragile and intangible against the real-existing world by escaping as far as possible from any pressure by a market-based economy.

In recent times, particularly some German authors have linked themselves to a movement which they call ‘New Conceptualism’.<sup>328</sup> One of their advocates, the Frankfurt-based musicologist Michael Rebhahn, proposes the introduction of the term *Zeitgenössische Klassik* (*Contemporary Classical Music*) alongside that of *New Music*.<sup>329</sup> He claims that more and

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326. That is why working against [sic] deadlines is crucial to me for finishing a piece; otherwise, the extensive improvement process could probably go on forever.

327. ‘For some listeners [...] this first portrait CD of Harald Muenz [...] may provide a first encounter with his music. If so, it may initially seem like the work of a composer with a multiple personality disorder. [...] It may come as no surprise that Muenz the man does not resemble any of these multiple personalities particularly closely, and that these superficial descriptions of his pieces miss important layers of connection and linkage between them. As our initial encounters dissolve into true friendship, we begin to see the whole person more clearly (or convince ourselves that we do). Consistency of thought and behaviour becomes evident where formerly we could detect only whim and caprice; mere flesh and blood becomes a human being, and lines of history and heritage slowly appear. We become able to tell stories.’ Bob Gilmore, ‘Making a friend’, 2011, [liner note], in *Harald Muenz. nearly — fast*, [CD], Darmstadt, Coviello Contemporary, COV 61117, 2012.

<sup>328</sup>Cf e.g. Johannes Kreidler, ‘New Conceptualism’, video of a lecture given at the *Darmstädter Ferienkurse für Neue Musik* on 27.7.2012, <http://www.kreidler-net.de/theorie/conceptualism.htm>, (accessed 30/03/2015).

<sup>329</sup> Michael Rebhahn, ‘No problem! Approaches towards an artistic New Music’, transcript of a lecture given at the conference *New Perspectives for New Music*, Harvard University, Department of Music, 13/04/2013, pp. 13–14, <http://hgnm.org/other-events/hgnm-conference-new-perspectives-on-new-music>, (accessed 30/03/2015).



more musical premieres just present the customary under a slightly different guise, well-made but without any aesthetically critical potential. Assuming a growing dissatisfaction with the term *New Music* among some young composers, he summarises their perceived reservations on two fronts: one is about music coming with ‘an overly strong impression of arts and crafts’<sup>330</sup> at the outset, the other one about such seeking refuge in ‘self-referential sonic fetishism’.<sup>331</sup> My main question to this would be how you can be ‘totally interested in contributing to an aesthetic discourse’<sup>332</sup> and, at the same time, negate or neglect the sensual and craft aspects of your artistic genre.

The task of developing an ever more differentiated way of dealing with life requires time, effort, and concentration. Again, it can only be accomplished by looking at things with sufficient differentiation. After the total eclecticism advocated by Lyotard left us with the past being seen as accumulated piles of rubble,<sup>333</sup> we have long since arrived in an era of *après*-postmodernism. Today every 10-year-old seems to understand that someone equipped with a tablet computer can treat every type of music on the same level, no matter whether this is Bach or The Beatles, Lachenmann or Lady Gaga. Copying, cutting and pasting with the aid of a computer are indeed entirely contemporary techniques but by no means the most creative or intense ones imaginable. In particular, I strongly doubt that algorithms alone can bring forth musical intensity. This, again, seems to have become an old-fashioned value for some nowadays, perhaps also due to the fact that sufficiently explaining this verbally to someone who has never felt the inherent passion in music is next to impossible. The totally arbitrary way of handling anything and everything in an indiscriminate manner does maybe lead to pleasant or even useful playthings<sup>334</sup> — listeners recognise, of course, that it is everyday reality that is being dealt with — but in no way does this experience go beyond what is already happening around them anyway in their daily lives. How could an unaltered perpetuation of mere everyday experiences ever be challenging for perception in any way?

Everything ultimately boils down to a differentiated appreciation of musical composition where only personal artistic decisions do the job. This is why I choose to respond to

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>333</sup> Cf. Croft, *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>334</sup> ‘For in art we are not merely dealing with playthings, however pleasant or useful they may be, but [...] with a revelation of truth.’ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, Frankfurt, suhrkamp, 1970, p. 573.

computer-generated materials as a human being by weighing every detail of a composition individually. This also implies an essential aesthetic-political question: do we musicians wish to further promote massification and alienation processes, or can we prevail by confronting the ubiquitous mere eclecticism with our individuality and personality in a clearly audible way? From my own experience, I know how powerless an individual can feel in the face of such big issues, but perhaps we could at least try to not surrendering without a minimum of resistance.

## **Music and Society**

One important contribution — or challenge — Cage and his Experimental music brought to Western art was to fundamentally question seemingly eternal convictions about art. Even if it might be assumed that the influence of Western music (including the impact of a supposed ‘unbroken tradition’ running between Bach — Beethoven — Wagner — Brahms — Schoenberg — Nono — Lachenmann and on to the contemporary music world) is dwindling, in terms of institutions, publications and finances, it must still be considered as quite powerful. Assumptions about what music and musicality should be by its inner circle of advocates often make it difficult for those who think out of that box to push through with their own ideas.

Some of the tacit understandings about composers and composing from musical tradition have now been redressed by the power of the factual. The acceptance of computers and the Internet — together with their implicit development of new artistic genres, the easy availability of music from different cultural backgrounds, as well as a generational change — have done away with many of the old Western stereotypes. However, these innovations have also induced a radical shift in the value systems of our societies, which could yet have perilous consequences for concentrated, intense activities of any sort which is now widely perceived as tiring (concert music, art, reading etc.). Therefore, battles on two fronts need to be fought: one against inflexible conservatism and ineradicable prejudices about art, music, composition, society (which the musical world is part of), and another one against a naive *laissez-faire* positivism, which welcomes everything that is new and sexy as long as it fits the bill of mere entertainment.

Musical contents aside, it may be necessary for composers to reflect about new ways in which society thinks about the role music and musicians play in it. In our globalised world,

this could possibly gain momentum. Neither a single state nor even entire continents can any longer simply keep claiming moral superiority or hegemony in thought or economy over other extraordinary cultures, some of which, like India or China, can look back on traditions that are much older than ours. Musicians may also be able to demonstrate how well international co-operation on all levels can work across linguistic, religious, political or other barriers. In a nutshell, we may even be able to realise some more ambitious, seemingly utopian concepts. It is likely that in the future, we must learn how to deal peacefully with the co-existence on an equal footing of different concepts about life, culture and art. If one is firmly rooted in one's own traditions (without any moral or religious drive for imposing them on others) being curious about different worldviews can be more easily seen as an enrichment.

## Future directions

In my future work, I plan to extend my renewed interest in harmony towards microtonality that is not based on quartertones or similar subdivisions but on overtone spectra. I will certainly bring this together with the experimental and modernist experiences gained from my earlier music. Composing pitches by establishing relationships between them does not seem viable any more within the equally tempered tuning system without ultimately returning nostalgically to functional tonality. In this sense, taking undisguised tonal materials as the basis for a composition and dealing with harmonic progressions, as I did in *fein...auflösend*, was presumably a one-off experiment. (My acousmatic pieces *BeethovEnBloc*, *Orèlob 80* or *BrahmsBloc* do employ musical materials by authors from the past, too, but their main research focus was put on aspects other than harmony.)

A certain acoustic or even spectral behaviour, informed by psychoacoustic or cognitive phenomena, may be identified retrospectively in my music written during the enrolment period, namely in the slow central passage of *dietro V avanti*. Its coda could be another presentiment of what I might do in the future: in bar 391, the violoncello unexpectedly plays a natural harmonic B $\flat$ , which is the 31 cent flat (compared to equal temperament) 7<sup>th</sup> harmonic on a fundamental C; in bar 398, between the piano's E $\flat$  realised as a 7<sup>th</sup> partial on F and the cello's G $\sharp$  as the 13<sup>th</sup> partial on C<sup>335</sup> occurs an interval that is completely out of

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335. The notation suggests a wolf fourth (plus an octave) which is rather perceived as a 28ct flat minor sixth (plus an octave).

tune with respect to 12-tone equal temperament. In 2012, I finished a microtonal piece with the title *stein-sum* for mezzosoprano, viola d'amore and keyboard, which was premiered by the Amsterdam-based *Trio Scordatura* (Alfrun Schmid, Elisabeth Smalt, Bob Gilmore) specialising in music with microintervals — but now this would be the beginning of an entirely new chapter.

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## Musical Resources

Recordings of

>> *schönes klavierstück* << ,

*dietro V avanti* ,

*nearly — fast* ,

*data compression* , and

*fein ... auflösend* ,

played by *Ensemble Mosaik* (Berlin), can be found on the CD

*Harald Muenz, nearly - fast*. Darmstadt, Coviello Contemporary (COV 61117), 2012

which is enclosed with this submission.

Documentary recordings of

*unashamed piano playing* and

*Das Zungenbuch* (selected movements)

may be accessed online via SoundCloud on

<https://soundcloud.com/harald-muenz>

