

UNIVERSITÄT FÜR MUSIK UND DARSTELLEND KUNST GRAZ

## Music as Performance Situation

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## Abstract

Mit einem gewissen Abstand von unseren üblichen Definitionen der Musik können neue Methoden zum konzipieren, interpretieren, und komponieren gewonnen werden. Um eine Idee des „reinen“ Kunstwerks zu kritisieren, stelle ich, in einer Diskussion über *klangbezogene* Sichtweisen der Musik, nicht nur dar, dass die Musik nie außerhalb des menschlichen Körpers existieren kann, sondern auch, dass wenn man die verkörperte Position der Musik anerkennt, die Rolle des *situierten Hörers*, in dem die Tätigkeit der Erschaffung der musikalischen Erfahrung eigentlich verortet ist, hervorgehoben wird. Angesichts dieser Konzeption eines *situierten Hörers* öffnet sich ein total neuer Bereich der musikalischen Erfahrung, wobei die *Weltrelation* des Klangs selbst Teil des Materials, welches durch den Akt der Komposition zu untersuchen ist, wird. Als Folge werden alle Bestandteile einer musikalischen Performance auf radikaler Weise frei, für sich selbst zu bestimmen, was die Grenzen dieser Erfahrung seien. Ich zeige dann eine mögliche Umsetzung dieser Definitionen der Musik durch meine eigene kompositorische Arbeit, besonders in der narrativen Filmkomposition *Der Zwiebelkönig*.

By taking distance from how we usually view the phenomena and experience of music, new tools for conceiving, interpreting, and composing the musical situation can be won. Discussing views of music that center around *sound* and critiquing the idea of the “pure” artwork, I show that not only can music never exist outside of the human being, but also that acknowledging the bodily location of music emphasizes the role of the *situated listener*, in whom the agency for creation of a musical experience actually lies. With the *situated listener* in mind, a whole new realm of musical experience opens up, whereby the *world-relation* of sound becomes material itself to be explored through the act of composition. As a result, all constituents of a musical performance become radically free to determine for themselves what the boundaries of this experience can be. I then show the application of such a view of music through various works of my own, in particular the narrative film composition *Der Zwiebelkönig*.

## I. Introduction

Although music, in contrast to other temporal and performing arts, usually emphasizes its sonic aspects, this does not necessarily mean that sound is at the base of the musical experience. Although the presence of sound and its types and applications may be the strongest factor in judging an experience as musical as opposed to theatrical, visual, performative, literary etc., the sound is never acting alone. Any gesture to reduce music to an essential quality of sound is an act of exclusion on the part of the causal environment<sup>1</sup> and the bodies that inhabit it.

For example, in the sphere of popular music, sound is rarely the goal of the musical experience. Rather, it is the identity-constructing and communicative coming-together of artist and audience over cultural values and physical sensations that create the uniqueness of the experience. The sound is rather a vehicle to facilitate the social function of the music (dancing, singing along, text content, communicating emotions or common human experiences<sup>2</sup>).

In the European classical tradition, it is often assumed that a “pure listening” experience or “pure sound” is the goal – that the Beethoven sonata is mainly about sound and its applications in time, and should be listened to with all of the associated conditions. However, this view is alarmingly self-unaware: a performance of a piano work from early 19<sup>th</sup> century Vienna is also an identity-constructing and communicative coming-together situation over cultural values and physical sensations, just as it is in popular music. The difference is here the cultural values this “pure listening” experience hinges upon deliberately reject the outside world in favor of a vacuum of ideal forms. One should concentrate on piano tones and their cohesion in a pseudo-linguistic context (the tonal practices of the Viennese classic) and ignore the bodies producing these sounds and their relation to the space in which they are produced.

These bodies are not negligible. As humans, we possess material forms that unavoidably influence everything we see, feel, and do. These bodies are made up of the same material as the

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<sup>1</sup> Stan Godlovitch outlines a concept of causal environment, which accounts for the factors which go into producing the sound. Godlovitch, Stan. "The Integrity of Musical Performance." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51, no. 4 (September 1993): 573-87.

<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth analysis of the social aspects of popular music, see Frith, Simon. "Towards an aesthetic of popular music." In *Music and society: the politics of composition, performance, and reception*, edited by Richard Leppert and Susan McClary, 133-49. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 141. "We enjoy popular music...because of its use in answering questions of identity: we use pop songs to create for ourselves a particular sort of self-definition, a particular place in society."

world around us.<sup>3</sup> Although we possess some ability to extract and isolate forms from our continuously fluctuating surroundings, this does not itself constitute a separation from the world. Just as our minds are inextricably bound to our bodies, there is no absolute abstraction of the phenomenal world. What is commonly thought of as immaterial – feelings or thoughts, waves of light or sound – are in actuality themselves also physical substances. The only difference is that our perception is inadequate to sense them without the aid of certain tools. Consequently, it cannot be denied that although the piano is a mechanical instrument that isolates certain types of frequency relations which inform our perceptive practices, this isolation is always dependent on the instrument-body and human-body that enact it. A cat, jumping across a detuned piano, makes this body-material-phenomena contingency explicit.

Therefore, promoting a hierarchy of essences oriented toward a nonexistent absolute that closes off the causal chain from origin to reception in a musical experience necessarily closes off the relation of music to the world, thus dissolving reality, and with it the actual presence of the human beings involved. Insofar as it is desirable to acknowledge the real-world context in which events happen, I maintain it is irresponsible to insist on this act of exclusion, especially in an era where the context, or *situatedness* of information, of events, of narratives, and of human beings proves to be the decisive factor in building a bridge from past to future.

With this conviction, I hereby give an alternative view of the musical experience that seeks to account for the *situated spectator*, whereby the *world-relation* of the musical situation is reconsidered, mutually justifying wildly varying approaches to music, as well as foregrounding the most important factor in the art experience: the relation in and between the individual human beings and their environment.

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<sup>3</sup> See Erika Fischer-Lichte's discussion of "Verkörperung": „Es ist das ‚Fleisch‘, durch das der Körper immer schon mit der Welt verbunden ist.“ (Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 141.)

## II. The Situation

### IIa. Reevaluating Music

Everything must be questioned. Only through a process of reevaluation can we find anything of value. Thus, in order to understand music, we must first reevaluate our understanding of music. The philosopher Andrew Kania offers us the following definition:

“Music is (1) any event intentionally produced or organized (2) to be heard, and (3) either (a) to have some basic musical feature, such as pitch or rhythm, or (b) to be listened to for such features.”<sup>4</sup>

Kania, in his attempt to separate sound art from “music” proper, pinpoints the most familiar features of an average musical experience: pitch and rhythm, organization and intention, hearing and listening. This definition illustrates a typical view: music is sound organized under specific parameters, meant to be perceived as such. However, Kania’s approach does not address the underlying complexities and inconsistencies that appear when setting such boundaries, assuming a consensus on what these features are and relying on a *morphological*<sup>5</sup> definition of music.

From the outset, the approach is suspect. What constitutes intention and organization? What is hearing and what is listening? How can we understand the “musical features” of pitch and rhythm? I seek to complicate and confound Kania’s essentializing in order to demonstrate that we may never be certain what any particular thing “is,” and to set the stage for an alternative framework for a musical practice.

Let us begin with pitch and rhythm. We commonly attribute similar musical characteristics to the sounds made by animals, presumably because they, at times, seem to closely mirror the sounds and behaviors of typical human music. Bird-song is certainly produced explicitly to be heard, especially by other birds. Yet if bird-song, for birds, functions

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<sup>4</sup> Kania, “The Philosophy of Music.”

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Kosuth undertakes a criticism of defining art based on morphological grounds: “...morphological notions of art embody an implied *a priori* concept of art’s possibilities.” This makes it “...impossible to question the nature of art.” (Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After*, 18.) As it is here presented, a morphological understanding of art *assumes* a function or even essence to art based on a tradition of prior examples.

actually more like bird-speech (though not necessarily bird-language), does this eliminate its status as music? Clear tones are present which are iterated with an astounding temporal richness. But any sensible analysis would say bird-song belongs to a non-musical, yet *music-similar* group of activities. This is because, as far as we know, birds have no concept as we do for such an activity as music. Bird-song is produced by creatures who do not share our concept of music, thus is not produced to be music. For this reason, we also cannot say that it is produced to possess the parameters of pitch and rhythm. Just the same as the concept of music, these “musical features” are subjective qualities of our own design.

Pitch and rhythm are subjective because they occur through cognitive processes in the listener. It is frequency spectrum and duration that are the objective properties of sound from which pitch and rhythm are defined. Microtonal music makes this very clear: it can be quite a wide range of frequencies that, depending on context and practice, are understood as a particular pitch. Even in traditional music, small fluctuations on a given note are commonly understood as still belonging to the same pitch, i.e. the technique of vibrato. Similarly, clearly defined rhythmic proportions in a Bach violin sonata become malleable in the face of expression or interpretation. In this way, pitch and rhythm are never fixed properties. They are quantizations of frequency and duration that are *filtered by a particular culture’s musical practice, and are located in the particular listener’s brain.*

To limit music to sonic events which possess pitch and rhythm would also exclude established modes of music making that contain an excess of noise (noise music, musique concrete<sup>6</sup>) or an excess of duration (drone music). Would then an extremely long sample of white noise unable to ever be music, regardless of reception or intention? Perhaps one could research each parameter thoroughly and pinpoint exactly when noise possesses enough of a clear frequency band to facilitate the perception of pitch, like in percussion music, or the durational equivalent with rhythm, but the details of this are outside the scope of the discussion and contrary to my argument in general – policing boundaries is not my interest or goal.

The next point of investigation from Kania’s model is the phenomena of hearing and listening. He asserts that it is necessary for sounds to be intentionally organized to be heard, or

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<sup>6</sup> A good example that contradicts the precondition for pitch and rhythm in music would be Luc Ferrari’s *Presque Rien No.1* (1970), or any compositional practice that makes extensive use of field recordings.

be listened to for the aforementioned musical features. Yet listening itself is not an automatic process. Pauline Oliveros differentiates:

“To hear is the physical means that enables perception, to listen is to give attention to what is perceived both acoustically and psychologically.”<sup>7</sup>

In this model of listening, hearing is the passive process that is happening constantly, while listening is a focused moment that, like conscious thought, compiles and orders information. A similar divide between incoming signals to the body and their registering as perception in the brain has been documented by Brian Massumi in his work *The Autonomy of Affect*.<sup>8</sup>

Kania, too, does admit a disconnect between hearing and listening, but his definition prioritizes hearing with the intention and organization in its origin, and only conditionally requires listening. It is then conceivable that to Kania, music does not have to be paid attention to. Background music in a shopping mall is thus legitimized as music. But this also implies that all music must be produced with the goal of having perceivable acoustic information. Imagine a wood block piece played with such quiet dynamics that the neither the performer nor the audience can actually hear it. The rhythms will be seen in the motion of the player’s arms, and vibrations will occur, but no perception of the sound will take place. This of course fulfills the precondition for musical features, but since Kania’s definition hinges on the hearable, it could not be music.

One way of justifying such a piece as music is by arguing that (as I will discuss later with John Cage) the listener should understand the work as giving an organizational framework for listening to time – or, in other words, dividing up a particular listening experience without specifying any sound to fill the durations in question. This, however, bears the conclusion that *the listening experience alone can be sufficient conditions for a musical experience*. Given the fact that listening requires an active intention, the difference in whether something is truly listened to or not rests solely on the spectator. An experimental musician accustomed to noises who listens to a tree falling in a forest would then compile this sonic event into how they understand frequency and duration, fulfilling both the organizational requirement for music and the

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<sup>7</sup> Oliveros, *Deep Listening*, xxii.

<sup>8</sup> Massumi, “The Autonomy of Affect,” 89–91.



precondition of musical features. Pauline Oliveros's practice of deep listening functions exactly in this way, and proves that *the status of music does not belong to the sound itself, rather the contextually informed perception of the spectator.*

This is where the problem with Kania's approach lies. If one acknowledges the distinction between hearing and listening, thus accepting that the organizational requirement for music rests primarily in the act of listening with a particular intention and understanding of frequency and duration informed by culture and practice, one cannot ignore the fact that *no musical experience happens outside the body of a human being.* However, this is exactly what definitions of music like Kania's require us to do. In order to preserve an essence of music, Kania must locate the musical experience outside the body. Otherwise, any coherent and clear boundaries between what is music and what is not disappear. Apparently, this would be an undesirable outcome.

Take the following example: you are at the beach, and there is a steel-drum player on the sand, playing music. When you dive beneath the waves, you can still hear the instrument. Filtered through the resonating body of the ocean, the steel-drum playing sounds tinny and distant. When large swells of water come, it creates fluctuations and interferences in the mix between ocean-sound and steel-drum player, sometimes obliterating the steel-drum sound completely. Assuming the intention to listen while jumping into the water, your ability to perceive the sounds (the steel drum player) is confounded by the presence of an outside force (the ocean).

From the perspective of the listener, this implies that the perceptive status of a musical experience is unstable, depending on the focus of listening and the ability to hear pitch and rhythm under the waves. And since all sound is constantly inhibited by the physical world around it without discernible intention, using Kania's definition would then force one to either restrict the conditions for listening (by arguing that there is a "correct" way to listen to music, excluding listening from beneath the waves<sup>9</sup>) or admit that *it is possible for music to transform into non-music when it undergoes processes of non-intentional interference.*

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<sup>9</sup> This would be an incredibly problematic stance to take: if listening etiquette trumps intention (for example, if you *wanted* to listen from underwater), thereby eliminating the "incorrect" behavior from being counted as listening, then the experience of one's mind wandering towards the umpteenth variation in Brahms' *Paganini Variations* would be then equally unmusical. This would in turn force the conclusion that the experience of music is not at all stable and can very easily disappear.

The only route for the Kania model is then to propose that an event can be music even if it is not perceived as such, so that music can still exist even when it is not listened to. Stan Godlovitch, discussing the conventions of instrumental performance, gives us useful terms to understand this position, differentiating between the *agent performance*, or the experience of the player, and the *phenomenal performance*, or the experience of the listener.<sup>10</sup> Kania would then claim that, even when the phenomenal experience of music does not take place (ocean waves drowning out the steel-drum player), music can still exist from the perspective of an independent agent creating the sounds (the steel-drum player herself). The only way to avoid the conclusion that *it is possible for a particular event to be music and not-music at the same time*, which points directly towards a general instability and unclarity of music as an event (making it theoretically awkward for essentialists like Kania), would be to then claim that *the phenomenal experience of music does not affect whether an event is music or not*, thus that music is an event independent of its instantiation in the mind of the human being – spectator and performer alike.

This is not true. Following Pauline Oliveros' division of perception into a passive, information-based stage, and an active, compilation-based stage, there are, of course, physical events in the world that exist outside the body. Like my earlier analysis of musical features, these are frequencies and durations, produced by bodies and materials (the most common in the musical situation we know as "instruments," although these are more like media and not measuring tools). What we know as "music" is the combination of these extra-corporeal events that travel through our senses with our own, subjective, embodied interpretations of them. Sounds become musical when we ascribe certain culturally constructed characteristics to them (a dance rhythm, a musical scale). A sonic event becomes musical when we ascribe to it the pathos and affects of the human experience. Naturally these qualities exist on a spectrum; extreme cases of anti-pathic or nonaffective music, or non-cultured or non-characteristic music exist. But physical events without the passions, imagination, and understanding of the human being are merely that: at best incomprehensible, at worst, unknowable. As a human concept built out of human concepts that filter every bit of our perception, music cannot exist outside of ourselves. If this were not the case, if there were *a* music that was objectively situated outside the listener and performer, the concept of music would not be so malleable and subject to historical whims. For this, there are countless examples of a scandalized public reacting against

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<sup>10</sup> Godlovitch, *Musical Performance*, 585.

unfamiliar artworks by claiming it is not music, merely “noise” or sophistry, regardless of the serious intentions of the musicians or composer, or practices that were too crass to be considered “musical” in one historical moment that were assimilated in the next.

Two last examples to complicate Kania’s definition of music: church bells in the city, and an electric car with human-designed sounds. They are both produced particularly to be heard and listened to, and many times (or nearly always, in the case of the bells) possess recognizable qualities of pitch and rhythm. Yet they are not commonly understood as music. Church bells would never be confused with a classical symphony, and a tesla would never be mistaken with a piano concerto. These examples suggests that there are more criteria that an event must fulfill beyond pitch and rhythm in order to be properly and clearly seen as musical. Other parameters like timbre (belonging to the production method on a recognized or unrecognized instrument) or counterpoint and texture (belonging to a semantic structure) perhaps can aid this impression. The problem with traveling this path is one then is forced to exclude (typical!) musics that do not fulfill to a satisfactory degree these other parameters (for example, common arguments against rap and hip-hop in its early days). As I will discuss in the following section, I contest that, besides listening, the second most important constituent of the musical experience is the contextual situation of the listener (cars and bells happen outside, symphonies happen mostly indoors). This will lead to the conclusion that *it is the culturally constructed, semantic context of sound that actually defines what is understood as music and what is not*. If this is the case, we would be radically free as individuals and communities to define for ourselves what the limits of a musical experience can be.

This is not new: since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century similar positions have gained considerable traction in the visual arts. The sculptor Tony Smith had the following realization while driving on the New Jersey turnpike one night in the early 1950s:

“The road and much of the landscape was artificial, yet it couldn’t be called a work of art. On the other hand, it had done for me something that art had never done... liberate me from many of the views I had had about art. It seemed that there had been a reality there that had not had any expression in art.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, 131.

It was this aesthetic experience with an industrial section of a highway that led Smith to create one of his most famous works, *Die*, a large, black, metal cube that sits just above the height of an average person and is one of the first examples of minimalist sculpture. In his essay “Art and Objecthood” critic Michael Fried offers a provocative interpretation:

“But what *was* Smith’s experience on the turnpike? Or to put the same question another way, if the turnpike, airstrips, and drill ground are not works of art, what *are* they – What, indeed, if not empty, or ‘abandoned’, *situations*? And what was Smith’s experience if not the experience of what I have been calling *theatre*?”<sup>12</sup>

Both Smith and Fried struggle with the same issue. If a highway or an industrial site was not built by an artist to be viewed as art, how can it have triggered the aesthetic experience described in Smith’s anecdote? Smith gives his answer in *Die*; Fried suggests that the answer lies in perception itself. The windshield of the car through which Smith viewed the highway, and moreover his very own eyes are the canvas on which this work is drafted. It is an art existing solely within the interaction between spectator and the environment – a *situation*. For this very reason Fried calls it a type of theatre, highlighting the performative nature of these relationships in a place.<sup>13</sup>

This is precisely what my critique of Kania’s essentialist definition of music points toward, that when one views the musical situation as originating primarily in the interaction between subject, sound, and sensation, what is left is a *situation*, a term that highlights the interrelatedness of bodies, objects, and the means of perception. In order to serve this purpose, I will refer to the human beings involved in the process as the *situated spectators* (or listeners), to differentiate the conception of the audience in “pure” art with the position I am describing here.

In the visual arts, this sensibility was seen as negating the art-conditions of existing forms like sculpture or painting due to the fact that they existed, quite literally, outside the frame of traditional media. No longer was the artist dividing up historically formed material in a lineage of gestures that had specific meanings and associations. Instead, they would divide up

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>13</sup> The director and theorist Richard Schechner relates a definition of theater from John Cage that points to a similar aesthetic position: “I would simply say that theater is something which engages both the eye and the ear... one could view everyday life itself as theater.” (Schechner, *Environmental Theater*, xxii.)

the experience itself by providing a definition of perception<sup>14</sup> – a frame. Inside this frame would be an environment or object, sometimes even untouched by the hand of the artist, with which the spectator could have an encounter. In this way, artists began working *outside the traditional semantic contexts of painting and sculpture*, thus outside their morphological conditions. Rather than an interplay between imagined figures, spaces, narratives, and paint in a clearly delineated reception zone, these encounters spilled out into the physical world around the spectator, made possible by the understanding it is the *situated spectator* that is at the base of the art experience, not the object or phenomena.<sup>15</sup> This shift also necessitated a move outside the historically pre-given semantic context of a particular medium.

Naturally, all this had a great impact on the sphere of music. John Cage famously gave his own account of the situation between spectator and art object in his work *4'33"*. Commonly considered a piece about silence, this work rather uses “silence<sup>16</sup>” as a framing device to call attention to the sounds present in the environment which would have otherwise gone unnoticed. On the outside, the piece appears to be a typical instance of a concert: the audience sits down, facing the performer (in this case the pianist David Tudor, who gave the 1952 premiere in Woodstock, New York), and listens attentively. Yet the instrument never sounds: in the absence of resonating tones, instead what is foregrounded is the relationship between artist, artwork, and audience.

It has been argued, by Andrew Kania<sup>17</sup> and others<sup>18</sup>, that *4'33"* is not a piece of music because it does not fulfill the condition of intentional organization. By these accounts, the sounds that are heard are not placed there by the composer, thus this is an artwork, not a musical composition. However, as I have already demonstrated, the subjective experience is that which compiles sounds heard in an environment into something listened to, thus is self-organizing. By this logic, Cage, through giving a duration and situation in which to listen, is *organizing the organization of listening* into a musical experience, therefore fulfilling the condition of intention by which the work gains legitimacy as musical composition.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Or a proposition, according to Joseph Kosuth (Kosuth, *Art After Philosophy and After*, 19-20).

<sup>15</sup> As Rosalind Krause chronicles, this quickly escalated to artists presenting, or even *forming* landscapes, with or without objects, with or without public. See Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field.”

<sup>16</sup> Here understood as the absence of instrumental sound, or the absence of sound directly organized by the composer.

<sup>17</sup> He writes in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy that he categorizes *4'33"* as sound art and not as music.

<sup>18</sup> Julian Dodd, as he argues in his TEDx lecture “Is John Cage’s *4'33"* music?: Prof. Julian Dodd at TEDx University Of Manchester”, 15:01.

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps better way to frame the debate is the legitimacy of indirect vs. direct organization in a compositional context.

How exactly does Cage construct this listening experience? Most obviously, he gives a duration. Yet there are other aspects present that activate the contextual understandings that filter our perception. If these were not present, we could, for example, listen to Robert Rauschenberg's *White Painting* in the same way as we could Cage's *4'33"*. But *4'33"* (as it was first presented) took place in a concert hall, featured a piano, chairs, an audience, sheet music, a pianist, a stage – all of these things which form a network of relationships that constitute the musical experience. The undeniable conclusion that one draws from this is that *music is about much more than just sound*. Such an understanding renders Kania's definition obsolete.

Yet it is not only the sound of the instrument which Cage removes. He frequently refers to an idea of sound-in-itself, and denies the process of communication in the artwork with statements like "I have nothing to say and I am saying it..."<sup>20</sup>. As Noël Carroll points out in his article "Cage and Philosophy", what Cage actually means with such statements is that "the objects and events in question are semantically mute."<sup>21</sup> While investigating whether this is truly the case with Cage's music, Carroll makes a further distinction, arguing that despite this „muteness," one can actually differentiate between a sonic event in everyday life and sound in a work of John Cage. He writes: "Cage's noises are, in other words, illustrative. Thus, they have a semantic content that the ordinary noises to which they allude lack."<sup>22</sup> Carroll justifies this by pointing out the foreword of Cage's *Silence*, in which he states

"My intention has been often, to say what I had to say in a way that would exemplify it; that would, conceivably, permit the listener to experience what I had to say rather than just hear about it."<sup>23</sup>

Cage would thus, in *4'33"*, be giving the listener an example of silence, whatever that may contain. Carroll argues further that this exemplification inherently has meaning: it is a part of a symbolization process that serves the cognitive function of art. As such, exemplifying an experience has a semantic value for its position as a symbol in a historically structured context. The relationship of symbol to context allows the listener to thus differentiate a work of art from an everyday experience. So when Cage – instead of simply representing everyday

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<sup>20</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 182.

<sup>21</sup> Carroll, "Cage and Philosophy," 94.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>23</sup> Cage, *Silence*, ix.

noises on instruments, or presenting the audience with a selection of noises from everyday objects – opens a space for the listener to perceive what is actually happening in the sonic environment around them, he presents an *alternative mechanism of meaning-construction that does not utilize the usual semantics of music*. Just as Tony Smith and his contemporaries in the visual arts, Cage has found a new way to organize the world of sound; and with it a new way to compose.

As much as Kania would like to prove that this is not music, when one properly investigates the situation, one finds rather that there are many ways of constituting the musical experience that simply step outside the mechanics of the European classical tradition. This is because music, like art in general, due to its existence primarily in the situated spectator, is *contested*, and as such develops through disagreements in practice that contribute to a richer understanding of the activity as a whole.<sup>24</sup> It is only when we define an artwork by its morphology rather than its function, do we close out works that propose radically different forms and functions.<sup>25</sup> This process of exclusion ignores the situated spectator in favor of an absolute, “pure,” ideal of art that neither exists nor can be reached. The entire history of European art and music engages in this act of exclusion. Noise has been present on the violin since before the time of Bach; bodies have been present from the beginning of human history. It is only a question of where our attention lies.

## **IIb. Music and Performance**

How can we then construct an understanding that accounts for the contested nature of music and looks past the exclusionary act? Underneath the questions of the musical experience in the discussion about Cage and Smith is another phenomenon: the dissolution of the illusion of the art-object in favor of the reality of the situation. This is what Erika Fischer-Lichte describes in her book *Ästhetik des Performativen*: through instances that foreground the relation between artist, art-object, and audience, a new symbolic context is created that opens new channels of meaning, prioritizes corporeal affect, and unflinchingly turns the artistic gaze onto *reality-constituting* activities.<sup>26</sup> This is the aesthetic of performance to which Fischer-Lichte’s book

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<sup>24</sup> This term is adopted from Carlson, *Performance: a Critical Introduction*, 1

<sup>25</sup> See Kosuth’s *Art After Philosophy* for an in-depth discussion of morphology and art-as-proposition as a way to investigate the function of art.

<sup>26</sup> Fischer-Lichte, *Ästhetik des Performativen*, 19.

owes its title; I assert that by viewing music through this lens, a mutually inclusive understanding can be reached that allows not only for a justification of wildly different forms of music, but also a more direct relation to the world around us.

My impetus for this assertion is my own work as a composer, my own resistance to the exclusionary act, and an increasing interest in materials, media, and situations from outside the sphere of music (as it appears in the historical canon and is normally taught in the academy). I hope to justify my practices and prove their method and integrity *as part of composition itself* while accounting for their inhabiting an inherently hybrid space – the space of performance.

Specifically, I assert that by viewing music as a specialized subset of performance, one can travel in between the various levels of “semantic” music, “symbolic” music, and more generally performative actions (or even actions that take on semantics of other disciplines, such as theater or dance), winning new methods and materials for exploration. This flexibility allows not only a more inclusive musical practice, but also updates the radical counter-movements of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century: it is not a hardline stance I take that rejects the semantics of sound, as in Cage, but places this aesthetic treatment on a multidimensional axis in which many gradations and combinations are possible between the various semantic and symbolic, narrative and performative, musical and non-musical poles.

How can we then understand performance in this context? In his work *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Richard Schechner gives the following definition:

“Performances – of art, rituals, or ordinary life – are made of ‘twice-behaved behaviors,’ ‘restored behaviors,’ performed actions that people train to do, that they practice and rehearse.”<sup>27</sup>

Here performance is understood as something done with a conscious effort, is something that already exists or has already been prepared in some way (whether the performer is aware of it or not). This is what Schechner refers to as “twice-behaved,” or “restored.” The broadness of this definition means that performance can be anything from doing a hand-stand for friends in a backyard to a recital of Schumann’s *Dichterliebe* in the concert hall, thus making an understanding of music based in performance theory flexible enough to account for the multiplicity of artistic approaches in today’s field.

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<sup>27</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies: an Introduction*, 22.



Another implication of this definition of performance as a particular type of behavior is that everyday life, or reality external to the performance, becomes increasingly present in the work, necessarily gaining legitimacy as a material itself, since “the everydayness of everyday life is precisely its familiarity, its being built from known bits of behavior rearranged and shaped in order to suit specific circumstances...there is no such thing as ‘once-behaved behavior.’”<sup>28</sup> This echoes the sentiments already addressed of Tony Smith and John Cage, that, with the proper framing, a situation, experience, or action “in the world”<sup>29</sup> can take on aesthetic meaning and value.

Erving Goffman offers an even broader definition:

“A ‘performance’ may be defined as all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way [any] of the other participants. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic point of reference, we may refer to those who contribute to the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants.”<sup>30</sup>

With this definition, the relations between participants are highlighted, reframing a performance event as a network of influence. This is an alternative formulation to what I called the *organization of the organization of the listening experience* with John Cage. For example, during Allan Kaprow’s happening *Household* of 1964, the performance may be understood to consist of everything involving the participants and their actions regarding grape jelly, bread, and an automobile, but not any happenstance creature that might simultaneously be hanging around the floor of the surrounding forest. This is again a function of the situated perception of the art-experience. Perhaps a rabbit, frightened by noise, darts across the performance area and the participants react to it – this would be a case of the rabbit joining the performance. But before this interaction and thus influence takes place, the rabbit is not understood as part of the performance *because it has no effect on the situation*.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>29</sup> I mean this as a material, event, or phenomena existing outside of the representative illusion of the artwork or human being.

<sup>30</sup> Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 15.

In this way, performance exists primarily in the relation between actors<sup>31</sup>, participants, spectators, objects, and environments. As such, it is a process of relations, existing in the liminal space between things. Just like I outlined in my reevaluation of music, performance cannot take place without a situation; all situations have the potential to be taken as instances of performance. Richard Schechner further clarifies:

“to treat any object, work, or product ‘as’ performance – a painting, a novel, a show, or anything at all – means to investigate what the object does, how it interacts with other objects or beings, and how it relates to other objects or beings. Performances exist only as actions, interactions, and relationships.”<sup>32</sup>

To take music as a performance situation means to *situate oneself in relation to a context of musical behavior*. Traditionally this takes place solely as giving players instrumental instructions in the form of particular duration and frequency relations that have an audible result. To counteract this narrow focus on material, the performative view of music would be to investigate the entirety of the relationships involved, not just historical instruments and divided waveforms in time, rather the material of the instruments themselves, the actions required to perform on said instruments, the relation of audience to performer to composer, the typical behaviors of the concert setting, the economic, demographic, political relations among participants, *ad infinitum*. Taking such a view of music means to *build an aesthetics outside of absolute music*.

Music philosopher Harry Lehmann has already proposed a model for this. He proposes the term *relational aesthetic*, in which the *negative aesthetic* of absolute music in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that has dominated institutions is being replaced by a fundamentally different paradigm. In the older model, which has roots in the idealism of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, music was thought to reproduce the world in primarily abstract terms, as exemplified by philosopher and critic Eduard Hanslick’s assertion: “The essence of music is sound and motion.”<sup>33</sup> Lehmann’s relational aesthetic, which I maintain aligns with my own performative view of music, in contrast allows for more direct *world-relations*. Lehmann gives two examples from recent

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<sup>31</sup> This is to be taken in the very general sense of someone who carries out an action.

<sup>32</sup> Schechner, *Performance Studies*, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Hanslick, *The Beautiful in Music*, 67. This can be seen as the basis of an aesthetics that justifies the exclusionary act I described earlier.

instrumental music to illustrate this aesthetic divide:<sup>34</sup> in Lachenmann's *Zwei Gefühle*, extra-musical material in the form of language is presented. However, this language is deconstructed into syllables and phonemes, which are then swapped, omitted, etc., thereby neutralizing the communicative function of the language. This is a stark contrast to a work such as Carola Bauckholt's *Schraubdichtung*, where a nonsensical text consisting of names of tools and their associated actions serves as a model for the temporality and frequency characteristics of the sounds from the instruments. This imitation and translation highlights more than "sound and motion;" it rather points to the connection between language, action, and objects (instruments and everyday tools alike), thereby constituting itself as *relational*, or, in other terms, by foregrounding the relations between world, word, sound, and gesture, *Schraubdichtung* moves beyond absolute music into a performative space.

Again, what I assert here is not new. Both of these pieces I just mentioned were written thirty years ago.<sup>35</sup> This "performative turn" in music naturally has roots in the work of Cage and the fluxus artists, but has since gained renewed interest since the 2000s through works by composers such as Jennifer Walshe, Johannes Kreidler, Simon-Steen Andersen, Trond Reinholdsten, Martin Schüttler, George Nussbaumer, and Peter Ablinger, among others. What I rather seek to present is a theoretical framework for this turn and to illustrate its legitimacy and relevance in the face of absolute music and the exclusionary act of the European tradition; my hope is by doing so to win agency for musicians, composers and audiences against entrenched cultural axioms on music and art that would keep the door to the canonic halls closed, and by contingency shut down the way to new perceptions.

This is unavoidably a political question as well as an aesthetic one. When one stands outside a belief- or value-system, one is too often completely closed off institutional support. In art as in real life, this can be precarious, if not dangerous, for both the well-being of the individual and the health of the artistic community. Values always need to be thrown into question – this is the only way to reach any understanding of the world. It also echoes the way we treat other human beings in general: when we view people as "other," we invite the situation where we designate them as "enemies." Art is a laboratory for perception; thus through artistic investigations we can change the way we view the world and eventually affect the way we act in it. In the words of Mathias Spahlinger:

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<sup>34</sup> Lehmann, „Gehaltsästhetik – Relationale Musik – Konzeptmusik,“ 1:23:18.

<sup>35</sup> *Schraubdichtung* is from 1989/90 and *Zwei Gefühle* from 1991/92

“...radical self-questioning of one’s own cultural evolution must be included if one wants to...make strangers or enemies into friends.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Spahlinger, “political implications of the material of new music,” 166.

### III. My Work

#### IIIa. Foreign Objects and the World-Relation

Looking back over my compositional output in recent years, I can now clearly see that these views were influencing my aesthetic choices. If one takes a few metaphorical steps back from “music” and views it, quite neutrally, as a situation of instructions, performers, objects and sound, the way one composes naturally changes as well.

The first change to take place was the inclusion of foreign objects in my work. After working in electronic music and with field recordings, I became quite bored with instrumental sounds. I felt the need to address the rich spectrum of noise that surrounds us at every given moment, so I began adding sound-objects to my work.

This was inspired by a workshop with Jennifer Walshe that took place at the Kunstuniversität Graz in November 2017 and January 2018, in which Walshe led students through various exercises like making short films, improvisations, and body movements. We also performed pieces from the fluxus workbook; this format showed me not only that these ideas were legitimate as part of “serious” composition – I had already been deeply influenced by Cage and the New York milieu during my undergraduate studies but was not yet courageous enough to pursue this avenue – but inspired me to incorporate this attitude into my own work.

This culminated in a flurry of activity including a piece for performers and citrus, a restaurant installation, a lied for singer and broken table, and a percussion quintet for objects and food sculpture. I felt it necessary to work as quickly as I could to make up for that which I then knew to be missing from my previous artistic practice. In the winter of 2018, I received an opportunity to write a piece for large ensemble and singer in support of the course Projekt Neuer Musik at the Kunstuniversität Graz, under the direction of Edo Micic.

The resulting composition, *dicht*, was scored for mixed ensemble and a speaking vocalist who plays an amplified water bucket and other various objects. Although the commission was technically for vocal music, I felt bold enough to provide my own interpretation of what vocal music could be. If, as I argued earlier, any sound can be listened to for frequency content and thus for its pitch information, then speaking can also be regarded as a type of vocal music. The sound production mechanism is of course quite different than classical singing, but is

analogous to bowing on the body of the violin – which is now generally accepted as violin music.

The piece is my first investigation into comparison and opposition. The title *dicht* (dense, tight, thick, close, impervious, airtight, compact, impermeable, consolidated, waterproof), references a poetic attempt at coalescence, crystallization, and condensation, in bringing together not only fundamentally different materials, but also aspects of the self.

The performer plays sound actions (water bucket, glasses, a metal tray with coins, baking soda and vinegar) and speaks lines from a poem I wrote about the experience of pressing out the subjective self into a material: the processes of creative expression. This process was seen by me at the time as futile – that one may try but never achieve a total expression, that materials always *resist* their anthropomorphizing. Thus the oppositions between object and instrument (which is a highly anthropomorphic object), narrator and ensemble, text and sound, are never resolved, rather presented in a *dichtung*, literally a poem or composition, but also a condensed, amorphous mass of material.

This was also reflected in the treatment of sound: the foreign materials are also resistant to traditional tools of composition – a single bucket of water cannot alone play a scale. However, instead of trying to augment the water (one can imagine a piece with a “keyboard” of water buckets, or an electronic apparatus that filters and transforms one splash into polyphony), I let its limitations draw the composition away from highly developed systems of organization into a basic *soundmaking*. This seemed fitting for my feelings about the futility of self-expression, that underneath the poetic conceit was simply an imperfect mechanism of communication, to be cherished for its beautiful incompleteness.

Leaving the objecthood<sup>37</sup> of the water unaltered seems even more conspicuous against the instruments built for the highly developed tonal system. However, I chose not to accentuate this contrast. Instead, I also reduced the instruments to basic soundmaking actions: sustained tones, with great attention to the detail of how they are produced, using the architecture of the instruments (natural harmonics, multiphonics) to provide me with as many different microtonal variations of the same tone as possible<sup>38</sup>. In a way, I wanted to reveal the basic

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<sup>37</sup> The term objecthood also factors greatly into Michael Fried’s analysis of minimalist sculpture (*Art and Objecthood*, 120), whereby the “literal” treatment of objects *as* objects is a device to render them, in the words of Noël Carroll, “semantically mute,” (“Cage and Philosophy,” 94) and thus foreground the situated spectator.

<sup>38</sup> This reflects my concern with the subjectivity of the phenomenon of pitch, as mentioned in the first section.

imperfection and objecthood of the instruments as well, and set them on a level playing field with the water bucket – a comparison of sorts.

I was also tired of seeing instruments designed for music of past centuries treated as state-of-the-art technological objects, capable of dazzling feats of time and tone manipulation. To me, they are quite literally relics of the past that have certain capabilities. A computer is more precise – why compete? Thus the work unfolds delicately and slowly, using simple instructions that rely on phenomena already present in the instruments and objects to create a complex mass of sound that would not otherwise have been reproducible.

Although today I would call *dicht* a quite traditional work that focuses almost totally on sound, my concerns were already inhabiting a space of performance, of relationality. My priority was not to create the most interesting relations between sound and structure, but to create the most interesting world-relations between performer, instrument, sound, and situation.

My next significant step on the topic of foreign objects in music was the short work for solo performer *music for plastic bags and piano*. This piece originated in a conversation with my teacher Klaus Lang, whose own work has heavily contributed to my understanding of music as performative situation, where we came up with the juxtaposition of a piano and plastic bag as a provocative format to explore these themes.

This time, it was not enough for me to make only a comparison through sound. I also began to imagine the plastic bag *as something else*. This was indeed my first step into conceptualism, whereby the conception of an object determines its characteristics and not the other way around. Thus the piece became a lied, where the piano was a resonating noise object and the assortment of five plastic bags a voice.

Sonically, I advanced my approach from *dicht*: the piano became an instance of noise by using a long wooden plank to press as many keys as possible – noise is indeed a saturation in the frequency domain. The mechanical sound of the pedal pressing was also foregrounded as another instance of the piano producing a complex noise spectrum, thus also using the architecture of the instrument as source material. Against this, I imagined the alternating rhythmic durations of the five plastic bags to be melodic fragments, perceivable through the differences in noise spectrum inherent in the bags. Later in the piece, I searched for other conceptual contact points: I used the bags to whip the inside of the piano to produce a combination of string tone and plastic noise. I also filtered the piano keys to reveal middle C

and set that in contrast with one single bag, emphasizing the unbridgeable difference between the two materials.

Connecting the different ideas of noise, pitch, and instrument to each other revealed a richer possibility of composing in this idiom. The conception of the plastic bag as a voice gave a textural setting, and the conception of piano as noise object gave a harmonic setting (insofar as a harmony comprised of every tone you can reach is indeed still harmony). Furthermore, searching for contact points between these two conceptions suggested theatrical possibilities (whipping the piano strings with the plastic bag), which would lead me eventually to my work with the *Zwiebelkönig*.

However, while showing this piece in a seminar, I was confronted with a (rightfully so) critical question that I feel the need to address. In review, it was stated “we don’t want to regress.” By this I understand that due to the reduced rhythmic and harmonic elements of the work, it was perceived as returning to a “less developed” state of music. The question of course was well-intentioned and led me to useful conclusions. That being said, I think there is a much better question underneath: *what is the value of material progress and in relation to what?* In terms of the history of absolute music, which focuses only on “sound and motion,” it would seem to be a less developed method of composition. However, if one takes into account that the performative lens is aimed at a much different goal than “sound and motion,” the notion of development becomes unclear. Is it not in a sense more developed to have a nuanced understanding of the relation between the constituent elements of the musical situation, even if those elements are outside the “absolute” materials? This is part of my main artistic thrust: to question the fundamentals behind such assumptions of progression and regression as it relates to the state-of-the-art. If going backwards means gaining a more direct world-relation in my compositional practice that point back to the reality of the situated spectator, then I do want to regress. On a multidimensional axis, directions frequently reverse.

### **IIIb. Boredom and time-dilations**

But perhaps a more friendly way to frame this discussion of progress is to refer back to what I wrote earlier about the semantic context of an artwork. As one may realize, even the *negative aesthetic* of New Music has its own stylistic centers. Complex clusters of chromatic tones, irrational rhythmic figures, noises produced by rethinking instrumental technique – all



of this builds the semantic context of New Music. Of course, this subgenre also shares features with other forms of music – exciting structural contrasts, moving crescendos, contractions of sonic density, attention-grabbing events, pounding rhythmic motives, deconstruction of material into cells, and so on.

As is expected for some artists, I grew disillusioned by these familiar elements of music-making, perhaps because I didn't sense a direct enough world-relation to my own experiences, just the same as Cage and Smith. By largely rejecting these usual formations in music, I found myself working with unbroken streams of material that resisted many of the usual tools of composition.

This led me to make the case for boredom. Boredom, as I perceive it, is an aesthetic device, which can be described with Harry Lehmann's "ästhetische eigenwerte"<sup>39</sup> as an event type of minimal suddenness and intensity, but still possessing the emptiness and endlessness of the sublime. It has already been present in the work of the fluxus artists and early performance artists in their application of long durations and the lack of salient events that capture the attention, generally speaking.

The opposite of boredom is when something catches our attention: a loud noise, sudden movement, or strange cessation of background sound, operating on a physiological level built into our biology.<sup>40</sup> A mouse is startled by a cup falling. Subjectively, it also has to do with our ability to understand information (to the unfamiliar ear, gamelan music may induce a higher degree of boredom than *W.A.P.* by Cardi B), as well as our own *desire* to understand. A documentary about microorganisms may induce boredom easily in someone who would much rather watch a romantic comedy. *Boredom is therefore a condition that points back to the agency of the situated spectator.*

Usually, boredom is thought to be undesirable. We go to great lengths in our modern lives to "kill" time. But what if we view it as a useful state of perception? Does it have sociological ramifications for today? Is there place in New Music for *underwhelming* moments, in which our attention is not toyed with and titillated?

When we talk about boredom, we are really talking about the way we interact with time. This point is illustrated by the word for boring in German: *langweilig*. Quite literally, it is

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<sup>39</sup> A brief description of these can be found on his website: Lehmann, "ästhetische eigenwerte".

<http://www.harrylehmann.net/begriffe-2/#aesthetische-eigenwerte>.

<sup>40</sup> This is the level of cognition that Pauline Oliveros ascribes to *hearing*.

something that has a long duration (*lang weilen*). One says, *das ist mir langweilig* – to me, it has a long duration. Less literally, it means that something is not interesting to us. When we say something is interesting it means it *holds* our attention, it *excites* our curiosity, thus it is something we enjoy doing. When a piece of music bores us it does not hold or excite anything, and therefore we don't enjoy it. It doesn't *do* anything for *us*. Thus boredom has a connotation of something being unenjoyable for its lack of actively generating interest, which corresponds to a dilation in time perception.

We can however, be curious about anything at all. This is what Cage means when he writes in his "Lecture on Silence," "It is not irritating to be where one is, it is only irritating to think one would like to be somewhere else."<sup>41</sup> Is it the goal of music to escape the world, or to understand and accept the world? Returning back to the model of deep listening, I would mention again that the situated listener can actively focus and refocus, or *scan* through the experience, and this can be trained – in truth this is always trained in us by our musical education and filtered through cultural conventions.

I propose that it is when we are most bored, we are most creative, have the most agency over our experience. It is precisely when we are confronted with a lack of stimulus do we face the reality of our own existence, the unavoidable affirmation of being. And we can indeed control certain aspects of our thinking process. When we are not bombarded with outside information this becomes quite clear.

While working as a waiter (sometimes a supremely boring job), I developed these thoughts in relation to time. During this work, I was fascinated with how my time perception would dilate depending on the intensity of swells and complexity of work cycles (the endless take-order-prepare-drinks-serve-food-clean-up-repeat rhythm of gastronomy) I was faced with, as well as the level of preoccupation of my mind with other thoughts. Often, the days where I was quite busy cycling, I could turn my brain off and let the flow of the work carry me quickly into the afternoon. By contrast the days where nothing was happening often felt the longest. However, rather more unexpectedly, there were busy days that felt like an eternity because I was so concerned with other matters in my head. With that, there were also empty days that flew by for my head being full of thoughts. In this sense, I could get *bored without actually being bored*, and vice versa.

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<sup>41</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 120.

This cyclical sense of time, where cycles made up of smaller cycles passed at various speeds, became the basis for a new work. Following my work with *dicht*, I wanted to keep the flowing surface of music, but use the recursiveness of the cycles to generate a consistent and procedural structure that had its own internal polyphony. With this aesthetics of boredom that also allowed for a highly structured work, I could compose outside the typical New Music attention-grabbing techniques, and create an experience that handed the responsibility for interest, for listening carefully, for entertainment, over to the listener. Just like Cage and Feldman sensed back in New York in the 1950s, there is also an intense confrontation in writing subtle and quiet music that gives the listener little orientation.

My basic method was (naturally after Cage) to choose a duration and divide it into sections. I had been reading about Greek creation myths, and found the idea of dividing something successively to be an interesting way to generate a structure, so I divided the duration into segments of 7, 6, 5, and 4 respectively. These divisions were superimposed onto each other, each controlling different structural parameters (for example, tempo changes, harmonic changes, playing technique, metric changes). The result was a large polyrhythm of parametric shifts over the course of the work (see Fig. 1 for more detail).

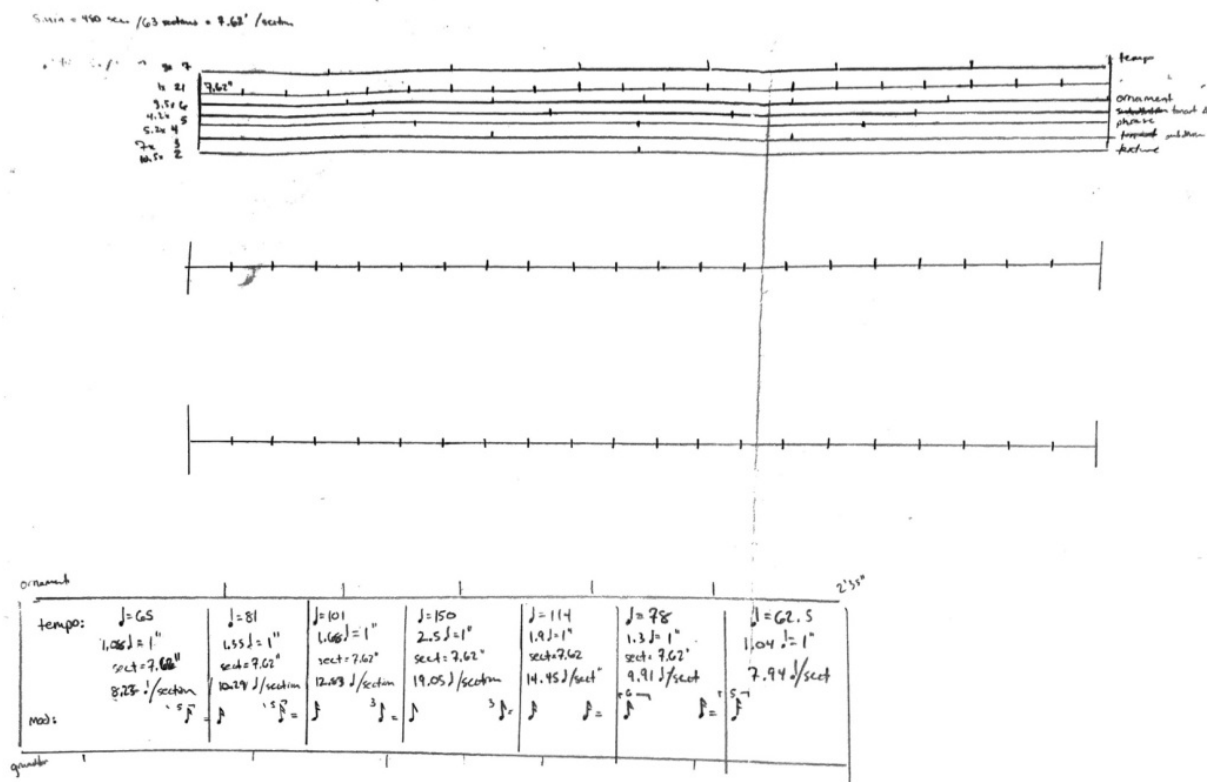


Figure 1: Formal and tempo structure for *arch i*

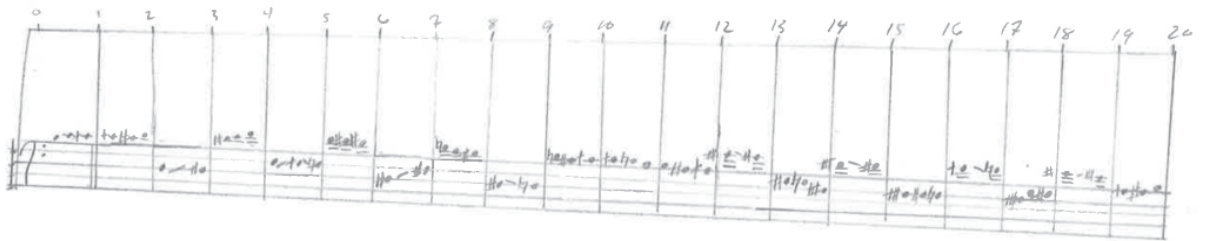
There were thus seven different tempi, increasing and decreasing over the course of the work (hence the name “arch”). Each instrument was given a fixed number of sound materials to cycle between, each with a particular duration (7:6 and 6:7 quarter notes, then 7:5 and 5:7). Interpolations between cycles in each part grow within themselves and trigger a contrasting material in the center of the arch. The pitch material was based on a gradient between the high partials of a C and F# spectrum, with the tone collection for each section changing by only one or two pitches. This plan is depicted in Figure 2.

The image displays a complex handwritten musical score for a piece titled "arch i". The score is written on multiple staves, including a grand staff (treble and bass clefs) and several individual staves for various instruments. The notation includes notes, rests, and various annotations in German, such as "Hauptlage" (main position), "Fidelage" (bridge position), "Fidelpunkt" (bridge point), and "Fidelpunkt 2". There are also numerical sequences and ratios like "2/3 3/4 3/4" at the bottom right. The score is densely packed with musical symbols and handwritten text, indicating a highly detailed and intricate composition.

Figure 2: Harmonic plan for *arch i*

After writing *arch i*, I began immediately working on another piece to expand upon these methods. This was *holy wind*, which began as a commission for a concert done with the FACERE collective in a baroque church in Graz. We worked with a recorder consort, and I was fascinated by the sub-contrabass Paetzold recorder, perhaps because of my personal relationship to low instruments, and found myself at home with the general unwieldiness of the thing.

Since architecture and space were very present in the curatorial concept, I conceived of this piece as a way of *scanning* through the architecture of the instrument. I was also very interested in generative procedures at the time: I mapped all the chromatic tones one could produce on the instrument, and used a sinus waveform to interpolate between them, with some octave dispositions (Fig. 3).



**Figure 3: Harmonic structure for *holy wind*.**

I also had been recently influenced by Stockhausen's article "...wie die zeit vergeht..." and found his method of gradual scales useful: I made a scale of eight different durations and used permutations of the sinus wave (phase offset, reciprocal) to control when each duration appeared as a base unit in the structure of the piece. I also decided to interpolate silences (generated from the same method) in between sounding sections, resulting in time dilation being employed as a material (one pause was over a minute long) (Fig. 4).

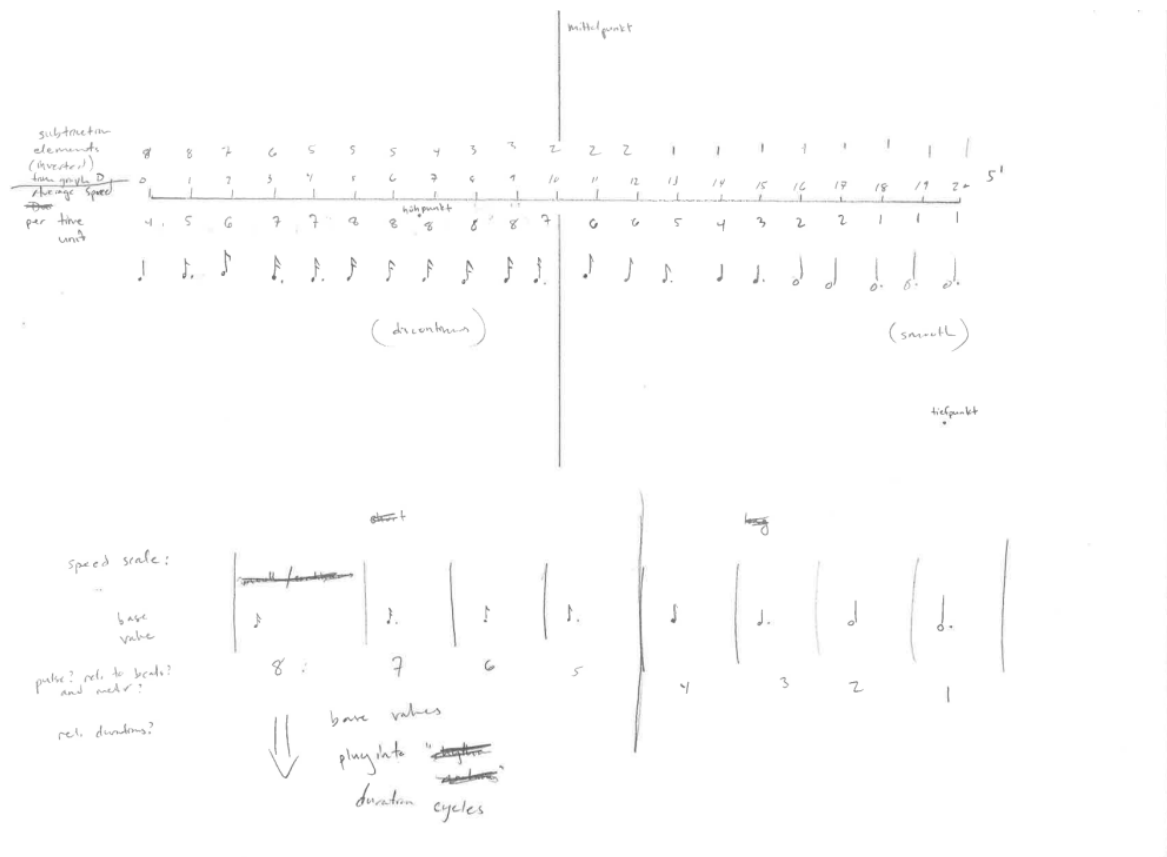


Figure 4: Duration scale for *holy wind*.

Similar to *arch i*, the sound materials rotate in cycle (which is also a sinusoidal interpolation within an array of values). These materials were: mechanical sound of the keys, the noise sound of the breath, and tone (produced either vocally, through the instrument, or both). Due to the acoustic properties of the space as well as the delicate nature of the sound material, it was necessary to amplify each sound source closely, like applying a microscope to project the sound to unnatural proportions.

The theme of nature is closely tied with the work. The title *holy wind* comes from an anecdote my good friend and colleague Guy Ben-Tov told me about a misconception in the idea of the holy spirit in translating the bible. He said that in the original Hebrew, the connotation is of the spirit being wind. I don't know if this is true, and I don't care – I found the metaphor of the spirit as animated wind very provocative: it is the same force that blows through the apse of the church, or indeed, a recorder. This force is one of the natural world, given energy from a supernatural (or unnatural, non-nature) force. At the center is the

phenomenon of wind, with the sinus wave being the supernatural, abstracted version, the “perfect” version found nowhere in nature. A consequent step would be to claim god is tone.

I don’t believe this and I find institutionalized religion suspect. But what I do believe is a certain immanence of being in the world (certainly influenced by the Transcendentalists, although I reject spiritual explanations of the world). Thus it seemed logical to fill in some of the silences with recordings of wind, processed through granular synthesis in order to push it past its “natural” instantiation.

### IIIc. Nature and Artifice

The idea of the “natural” is also something that has preoccupied me for many years. I believe that one of the more valuable artifacts from US-American culture is an underlying reverence for the immediate surrounding world. This can be seen in the work of early American literary figures<sup>42</sup> who placed great meaning on nature (in the classic sense of the flora, fauna, and phenomena of the physical, non-human world), or in the banal goings-on of their communities (in a sense, also an extension of the natural, or already-given world outside the mind of the individual). This attitude developed as a result of a “new” civilization confronted with a (violently) depopulated wilderness and can be seen in the roots of all things labeled distinctly “American.”

It is important to note that this attitude serves as the basis for the aesthetics of John Cage, who boldly claims “Art is the imitation of nature in her manner of operation.”<sup>43</sup> For Cage, the natural world seems to be the ideal operational model for his compositional practice. This is closely linked with the aesthetics of boredom I outlined earlier: when the *artifice* of art is removed and with it the manipulation of our attention, we are left with a presence of being, which, in line with Cage’s philosophical influences from the east, can be said to be the “nature” of existence.

However, as Cage’s solution also shows, this ideal of nature brings itself into opposition with the very notion of the artwork. Art is the practice of artifice – it is an aesthetic experience *not of this world*. This is why the classical music of Europe almost exclusively employed

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<sup>42</sup> Some well-known examples include Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden: A Life in the Woods*, or Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Nature.”

<sup>43</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 100.

harmonic relations based on Pythagoras' mystical mathematics. It is precisely the otherworldliness of the material that, for the larger part of history, made the aesthetic experience of music so *special*, added a sense of *magic* to the rituals of the ancient world.

One must also remember that Cage's position is a reactionary one. It was not in relation to the magic of ritual he was situating his own work (a quality which was certainly reclaimed by many American artists working during this era – the music of LaMonte Young and Terry Riley can be viewed in this way), but rather in relation to the institutionalization of the European tradition, which after the emigration of composers like Arnold Schoenberg and Ernst Krenek to the American universities in the 1930s, had become entrenched in the “new world” as well.

I would postulate much more that the Cagean aesthetics of nature and art, of exalting the mundane, is actually a gesture *against the commodification of art in the bourgeoisie lifestyle*, or against an ever-increasingly mediated and consumeristic society.<sup>44</sup> As Cage writes extensively about Satie, it is quite logical to claim he adopts a very similar anti-bourgeoisie, nearly Dadaist attitude. Indeed, the presence of the absurd can be found in both of these artists' work. Cage, however, mixes in a healthy amount of “American” transcendence through nature.

This, again, is a hardline stance that leaves some problems to be resolved. The philosophical issue: if it is not art, and it is not life (as Noël Carroll points out), then *what* is it? The technical issue: what to do with the tools of the past? As clearly someone who has been engaging with this strain of thought, I venture my own solutions:

Besides revealing to us the situated presence of the listener, Cage also reminds us that art is an illusion. Artifice is not real. It is a primarily mental construction, mediated by physical materials that trigger sensations and suggests meanings in the individual human being. Outside of its historical moment, the radicality (while still appreciable) of this anti-art attitude is less relevant, but the awareness that it brings, of what is not only outside the semantic context, but *outside the illusion of the art*, is. I share this belief with Cage that it is worth resisting the easy assimilation of art into the market, whether for entertainment or “high culture” (which has a market of its own), and worth carrying the reminder with us that we can never truly escape our material existence.

This is why, as an artist interested in pointing back to the presence of being, or in terms of Erika Fischer-Lichte's performance aesthetic, *pointing back at reality*, I turned to narrative as

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<sup>44</sup> Cage, *Silence*, 69. “For it is the space and emptiness that is finally urgently necessary at this point in history.”



an oppositional device through which one could better understand both world-relations of the performative aesthetic and the nature of art itself.

The narrative is the basis of artificiality in art, forming the fundament for the earliest forms of myth and ritual. To echo the work of Mircea Eliade, a mythic story fixes meaning on an otherwise undifferentiated plane of experience.<sup>45</sup> This is also the roots of composition. Creating an order of otherworldly sounds (tones) is akin to creating an order of otherworldly beings (deities). This order orients the listener within a musical space and time.

Although composition may be somewhat more abstract than mythmaking, the analogy still holds: artificial structures create not only sensations foreign from everyday life, but also artificial space and time. This *simulated world* (as in the absolute music of past centuries) can provide us with powerful aesthetic experiences that re-present some experience from the world, and by proxy point to something that really exists. An obvious example is a theater performance where the lead actor's character dies. We know the actor herself has not actually died. It is a simulation of death, that may or may not trigger feelings of empathy, grief, pain, or fear in the audience. These feelings are very real in the body of the individual spectator, and insofar as they are actually triggered in the actor herself (various methods of acting may or may not embrace this approach) they are also real. Yet while the death itself is only simulated, it gains legitimacy by the simple fact that death *is* real, for every one of us. Thus, a simulation is always connected to reality by means of its world-relation.

Music, on the other hand, is less mimetic than theater. A cellist performing the Bach cello suite is not directly simulating any real-world event. Instead, she is simulating a *mood* (or a series thereof) connected with the perception of abstract objects (those with relatively little world-relation). As I mentioned briefly in the introduction, this is very much connected with our own processes of self-identification. We engage in the art-rituals that promote the values we like to see in the world. A tender, expressive performance<sup>46</sup> of the cello suite promotes identification with tender, expressive perception of the Bachian sense of abstract order (consistent, rational rhythms, warm and modest harmonies, intricate yet gentle linearity).

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<sup>45</sup> This is my paraphrasing of one of Eliade's main arguments in *The Sacred and the Profane*. He states "The manifestation of the sacred ontologically founds the world." (Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 21). The myth is one of the main tools of early religions to orient the individual within a cosmologically understood world.

<sup>46</sup> This would seem to be at times difficult to judge, but as in theater, I assert these qualities can be, if not exactly pointed to, at least roughly assumed by details of physical gesture and body language in the performer, and articulation and dynamic in their interpretation.

Although this contains drastically less world-relation than in the theater, it is still present, albeit minimized or ignored in the practice of absolute music. Music, while absolutely not the “language of emotion,” as the common adage goes, does indeed seem to possess a tendency to trigger physical sensations and their associated meanings in relation to systems of order. Depending on interpretation and performance practice, even a Stockhausen *Klavierstück* can have recognizable qualities that relate to our lives: that of cool neutrality and dazzling skill, or raw kinetic energy and motion, both of which can be judged by not only the sound-formations, but their generation from the body of the performer. I have always perceived this world-relation, and, in light of my view of music as a performative situation, I seek to emphasize this aspect of the musical experience.

This leads us at length to my next work, in which I employ narrative both as a way to foreground the world-relation of a musical experience and as a foil against which to contrast the nature of being, or the reality outside of the artwork.

### III.d. Der Zwiebelkönig

*Der Zwiebelkönig* is a narrative film composition about a fictional creature from an alternate reality. Like the humanoid creatures in literature like *Frankenstein* or *Die Verwandlung*, *Der Zwiebelkönig* is a lens through which to view the human being, the art object, and the act of musicking<sup>47</sup>. The piece is presented as a documentary (which is later deconstructed) observing the creature as it tells its story and plays the violin.

As I have tried to show, this work follows directly in the chronology of works outlined above, creating a composition where the base material was, instead of atomized sound-units, whole sound-actions, a character, a situation, a narrative. This requires broadly viewing the act of composition as putting-together (in-time) *in relation to* the musical experience, which is made possible by an understanding of the performative situation of music. Since the musical experience is located in the (willing and active) perception of the spectator, since music always involves world-relations, I assert this work is *a musical composition proper* and not primarily film, concept art, visual art, sound art, or performance, though it does draw from understandings of all these disciplines. Basic questions I addressed in this work were: how to reconcile the

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<sup>47</sup> “Musicking” is a term taken from musicologist Christopher Small to denote the processes or activities related to performing, listening, composing, rehearsing, or composing music. See Small, *Musicking*, 1–29.

character and narrative with compositional tools? How to reconceive connection between sound and body outside of instrumental playing technique?

Aesthetically, this work follows a strain of absurdism in my output. Absurd means being extremely unreasonable or illogical, so as to become ridiculous. It is derived from the Latin word *absurdus*, meaning ‘out of tune.’<sup>48</sup> My usage of the term follows the discussion of the absurdist theater of Ionesco, Jarry, and Beckett, among others, by Martin Esslin in his book *Theater of the Absurd*. Generally speaking, this position attempts to *represent reality by rejecting clear meaning, logic, or purpose*. Insofar as an artwork can represent something, absurdism frames reality as symbolically charged, yet tangled and beyond comprehension in full. To quote Ionesco: “theater for me is the outward projection onto the stage of an inner world; it is in my dreams, in my anxieties, in my obscure desires, in my internal contradictions.”<sup>49</sup> Thus, I cannot present one source for the meaning of *Der Zwiebelkönig*, rather aspects that feed into the symbolism and its treatment.

An onion is a ubiquitous vegetable, used in cuisine all over the world. It is a cheap crop, a “raw material” of cooking. Raw onions are rather nutritious, and infamously release a chemical that irritates the eyes and causes tears – a physiological reaction that is commonly associated with pain or emotions such as sorrow or joy. For this reason, I found the onion to be a good pairing with the act of making music. Music, as I described in the previous section, also triggers physiological reactions commonly associated with emotions such as sorrow or joy (and pain, too). It is often said that music is a sort of nourishment for the soul,<sup>50</sup> and music and art are commonly treated as objects of consumption (the very activity I claim Cage is reacting against) – one goes to the symphony in regalia as one would attend a fine restaurant. The two are frequently visited on the same evening, or even paired side-by-side.

Similarly, the use of a monster, or humanlike monster as a critical lens also has strong associations, especially in literature. As noted, Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Franz Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* both use these devices. In *Frankenstein*, different narrators are employed as framing devices to show multiple perspectives on events: first a ship captain at the chronological end of the story, then Dr. Frankenstein himself, then the monster. These perspectives shift at various points during the story. Frankenstein’s monster is notably portrayed as very thoughtful,

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<sup>48</sup> Does this imply one normally laughs at out of tune instruments?

<sup>49</sup> Esslin, “The Theatre of the Absurd,” 6.

<sup>50</sup> “If music be the food of love, play on!” is the famous quote from the opening of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. (Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*.)

sensitive, and articulate, although he does end up murdering several people over the course of the novel. Frankenstein himself, while clearly human, makes absolute moral judgements about the monster and its capabilities, leading him to the same cruelty he fears from the monster (he creates at the monster's request a female companion, but then destroys her out of fear).

Meanwhile, in *Die Verwandlung*, Gregor Samsa, upon waking up as a beetle, never once questions the origins of his predicament, instead thinks very calmly and rationally about the quite absurd situation. The real transformation, however, is how his family members treat him. They first act like he is still human, talking to him, bringing him food, and rationalizing his condition, but by the end they are so revolted by his beetlelike state that they try to stamp on him, injure him, and eventually abandon him to die.

The narrative of *Der Zwiebelkönig* mirrors these depictions of monsters. The Zwiebelkönig itself is a humanoid non-human who also questions value and morality, directing the question "is it good?" about its onions and its violin playing towards the camera and thus the viewer. Like Frankenstein's monster, the Zwiebelkönig, despite its somewhat grotesque appearance, seems to be benign, and has a (mostly) sensitive touch on the violin. At the same time, it has an otherworldly effect on the instrument, the product of digital manipulation. The entire composition is framed as a documentary, as a narrative device that reveals its own construction (subtitles commenting on subtitles, speech bubbles, revealing the camera crew, presence of the author) which shifts perspective towards the end. Furthermore, like *Die Verwandlung*, the *why* of the Zwiebelkönig is never directly addressed.

Additionally, monsters and onions find an odd, yet relevant meeting point in popular culture<sup>51</sup>. In the DreamWorks animated film *Shrek* from 2001, the ogre Shrek tells his companion Donkey that "ogres are like onions." Shrek is a grumpy swamp dweller who at the beginning of the film would prefer to live alone, rejects early attempts of friendship, and even gets upset when others disturb his peace and isolation. Over the course of the film, Shrek meets Donkey, a persistent friend, fights an ill-intentioned prince, and inadvertently falls in love with a beautiful princess. Shrek believes that his love is destined to go unreturned until Fiona, the princess, reveals that she turns into an ogre at night as the result of a curse. In a classic Hollywood climax, Shrek breaks the spell by kissing Fiona, transforming her into "love's true form," which, as it would be, is an ogress.

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<sup>51</sup> Which, as I have mentioned at multiple points in this discussion, is a site of identity-construction, thus heavily involves the perception of the situated spectator.

On the surface a quirky love story that breaks clichés with its self-referential fairytale moments and its lovable yet irascible anti-hero, Shrek actually presents us with a powerful symbolic framework for the onion-monster: that of the antisocial male who isolates himself and rejects outside disturbances because he, like an onion “has layers;” inside he is truly sensitive, yet this core is hidden, unreachable, or has a stinging, bitter outer shell. In this model, it is only the woman who can (in Shrek’s case, quite literally) transform to meet Shrek’s form which makes the meaningful difference in his world and allows for “true love.”

Although the Zwiebelkönig is not meant to be as direct as this modern-day fable, they are quite related to each other. The Zwiebelkönig has also a fairytale mood (the purpose of this may become clear if considered in relation to my earlier statements about mood and systems of order in music), despite the strangeness. Whereas Shrek lives in a hut in a swamp, the Zwiebelkönig lives in a “swamp” (dirty, plant-inhabited environment) inside a “hut” (actually an abandoned building). While Shrek rejects intrusion on his life (“What are you doing in my swamp?”), the Zwiebelkönig welcomes the spectator, greeting the camera, stating that it will “show,” and posing other rhetorical questions at the viewer. Shrek, on the other hand, is seemingly unaware that he is being filmed. The Zwiebelkönig also seems more aware of its own feelings (if feelings can even be applied to such a creature). It states multiple times that it needs to “cry” (assumed to be an approximate translation from the creature’s own language), a need which seems to lead it to tenderly stroke the violin. Shrek, on the other hand, is not so in touch with himself – the only tender feelings we see him express are romantic/sexual love for a woman, and companionship for a friend who he initially rejects. Viewed this way, the Zwiebelkönig can be seen as an anti-Shrek: the anti-anti-hero.

I would be careful to note that this not the primary meaning of the Zwiebelkönig, although it is a strongly present current. The Zwiebelkönig is also an alien creature that approaches human music from a foreign perspective. Thus, it is a lens through which to represent the activity of musicking. If one has onions for hands, is blind, and has no knowledge of how a violin is really played, how would one play the violin?

Following an understanding of music as a performance situation and performance as *twice-behaved behavior*, this conscious, intentional action of stroking the violin is indeed a musical performance, albeit somewhat distanced from conventional violin technique.

This deserves a short note about the preparation involved in the production of *Der Zwiebelkönig*. In order to alienate the human form (it was indeed a human performing in the

video), the body was prepared to alter certain human physical characteristics. A silicon mask without eyes both neutralizes the human face as well as creates a very real effect of blindness, which in turn affected the movement. The performer (myself) could not see and thus had to alter their movements accordingly, staggering awkwardly around the performance area. In order to further alter the movement quality as well as provide a direct (and also very real, not simulated) link between the physical body and sound, the entire body of the performer was wrapped in a tight layer of tape, making fluid movements more difficult and creating noise whenever the body moved. This tape also had the effect of simulating an onion's skin. Although it does not look exactly like an onion, the brittle, shell-like qualities constitute a world-relation because it points towards something that does actually exist. Furthermore, the fingers of the performer were prepared with spring-onions, extending and alienating the digits of the hand, providing for a particular musical treatment.

By removing sight and altering the hands, a practical explanation was thus given for the technical approach of the *Zwiebelkönig* to the violin. One cannot play the violin "correctly" if one cannot see and if one's fingers are also onions. Accordingly, the preparation of the *Zwiebelkönig* became the conceptual framework for a new approach to the instrument.

Just as it strokes the plants and the pile of onions, the *Zwiebelkönig* strokes the violin. The action of stroking is not only a tactile mapping of a surface, a gentle, exploratory gesture – it is also the same action used to produce sound with the bow on a string instrument. Instead of a wooden stick prepared with horse hair, the *Zwiebelkönig* simply uses its onion fingers (thus creating a vegan violin), and instead of limiting the stroking to only an ideal contact point on the strings between the bridge and fingerboard, the *Zwiebelkönig* strokes the entire instrument indiscriminately, producing a very different sound quality.

The environment in which the *Zwiebelkönig* is found was also prepared. The entire production took place in an abandoned building on an industrial site in Graz. This building was chosen because of its clearly human-constructed quality, as well as the possibility for significant alteration. Thus, we transported some hundred liters of dirt to the site, as well as relocated a large amount of plants, grass, and small trees to create a nature-in-artifice environment for the creature. As mentioned before with the aesthetics of the narrative and the presence of being, the opposition of natural and artificial was one of the driving themes of the work.

In this way an environment was created for the Zwiebelkönig, in which a violin was found, in this context an alien implement that produces otherworldly sounds. Laid on the grass in this “onion-garden,” with the Zwiebelkönig rubbing its onion hands on the instrument, one of the holiest relics of western music becomes transformed into a foreign noise-object. Its sound profile becomes thus not so different from the sounds produced by the other actions in the piece. As the Zwiebelkönig moves, its body produces high-frequency noise whose morphology varies in correspondence to the action being taken out in any given moment. As the Zwiebelkönig exerts itself, we hear its breathing. As it strokes its pile of onions, we hear the sound of its onion fingers rub against the onions in the dirt. As it crawls, we hear its limbs striking the ground and the tape on its body crackle. This indirect way of using the actions of the Zwiebelkönig to determine sound is a reflection of the treatment of the violin, as well as an extension of John Cage’s *organization of organization* I wrote about in the first section. This mirroring shows that *the capacity for music is not inherent in the tools developed out of the history of music*: if our perception shifts, and the tools suddenly become alien, we can still find our way. The tools themselves are not necessary.

Structurally, the Zwiebelkönig follows a form in which alternating “musical” variations of the Zwiebelkönig’s violin playing is alternated with narrative sections that feature expository text. Each of these musical variations features extensive digital editing by means of fast cuts, changes in the size of the frame, and pitch manipulation. This is intended as a representation of the Zwiebelkönig’s otherworldliness and ability of telepathy. Although it can’t physically do much in the human world, through beaming images and sound directly to the heads of the spectator it can achieve virtuosic feats. This can additionally be seen as the presence of the reality – illusion dichotomy earlier outlined. We thus receive two views of the Zwiebelkönig: the “reality” as seen by the documentary crew, and the “illusion” of the telepathic image that occurs when the Zwiebelkönig plays the violin. The video itself also receives a colored filter to reflect this differentiation.

The piece is bookended by the two documentary sections which serve as a framing device in order to further manipulate the narrative. A documentary is already a self-reflexive tool that acknowledges the constructed nature of the narrative situation, making it suitable for my ongoing interest in showing reality in the artwork. The first three minutes of the piece include an exposition through subtitles of the situation with some commentary that veers into being ridiculous. The basic technique of using the documentary to disrupt the illusion of

narrative is to explain the piece. One text in English gives an account of the situation that develops into ridiculous details. At the same time a German text gives a semi-translation that has its own logic, somewhat more seriously presenting the underlying theme of “alien music.” The final documentary section quite literally reveals the construction of the work by featuring shots that show the cameraman filming the performance, the camera crew, and moments where the performer is no longer the Zwiebelkönig, but themselves. The sound and visual materials also become deconstructed, yielding sine tones and colored squares that correspond to the earlier colors of the “manipulated” violin sections.

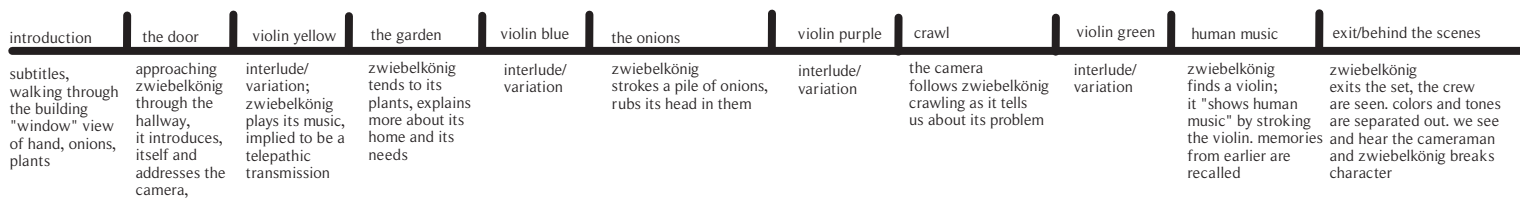


Figure 5: structural diagram for *Der Zwiebelkönig* featuring descriptions.



## IV. The Implications

### IVa. Purity in Art

For most of the modern period, it has been a virtue of a work if it functions according to its own logic: the logic of operations of the medium constituting the work. The art critic Clement Greenberg, writing about abstract painting in 1965, clearly outlines this stance, stating that “each art had to determine, through the operations peculiar to itself, the effects peculiar and exclusive to itself,” which seeks “to eliminate from the effects of each art any and every effect that might be conceivably be borrowed from or by the medium of any other art. Thereby each art would be rendered “pure,” and in its “purity” find the guarantee of its standards of quality as well of its independence.”<sup>52</sup>

This is the same as Hanslick’s assertion of music being essentially sound and motion, and was crucial in forming a particular justification and method for art in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, this, too, rests on a powerful yet unacknowledged axiom: the value of essentialism. Insofar as essence can be seen to exist in any meaningful sense as an unshakeable, irreducible identity of a thing, it can also be questioned to which extent an essentialism is desirable or necessary in an artwork. Perhaps it was once prudent, in a particular historical moment, in the face of great instability of the perceptual world, to search for and insist upon fixed properties for things. This moment has passed. Digitization of information has changed everything. We no longer need to insist upon hard-edged quantization in our own minds to make our world clearer: the machine does it for us. This automation of knowledge is so fundamental that it frees us in the most basic sense to use our bodies for other, more synthetic processes of connection between the world and the other.

Outside the technological imperative is the transience of our own biology, long obscured by mysticism, religion, and ideology. There is no ideal moment to look back to, against which an identity can be judged. Is the essence of the human the ability to use tools, have conscious thoughts, or a soul? The more we discover about ourselves and the animal world the less clear this seems. One might protest and think: surely there are some properties that, throughout the ages, mostly fall into the category of human being as opposed to rabbit,

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<sup>52</sup> Greenberg, *Modernist Painting*. 102.

horse, monkey, dog, etc.? My answer is that not only are these only seeming to be the case for the moment,<sup>53</sup> but also that this does not on its own necessitate insisting upon a separation of human-from-world. One must first answer the question: what purpose does it serve to continuously separate things based on a supreme difference that can be identified in particular moments? I can only give the answer as it pertains to music: doubling down on a position of essentialism in art primarily serves to deny the interconnectedness of things by minimizing or ignoring the *world-relation* in the face of, as Greenberg proposes, a comfy standard of quality, which is just coded language for professionalism – a quality that is completely irrelevant for art.

#### **IVb. Conclusion**

In the final analysis, it can be said that emphasizing the world-relation through the performative aesthetic in music *thereby destroys its purity, its essentialism, its guarantee for a standard of quality, its professionalism, its abstraction, and any absolute capacity for self-definition in opposition to other media and disciplines*. What is left? The network of influence between the creator(s) of a work, the perceiver of the work, and the work itself (in whatever form it manifests itself) in relation to particular modes of behavior in society that revolve around performative sound-practices: music *in relation to* musicking or listening, theater *in relation to* acting or performing, art *in relation to* seeing or depicting.

I maintain that this is a desirable and necessary shift in thinking about music and art. We should not be afraid of the destruction of traditional boundaries. The buildings of the old city must be torn down to build new ones. The forest floor must eventually burn to allow new plants. Open the doors of the palace to the people<sup>54</sup> and they swarm in, ousting the aristocrats, destabilizing the values the monarchy had produced; in its place, however, comes something new. In the revolutionary moment where a sudden turn takes places, it is the individual who is radically free to redefine themselves. They receive the greatest responsibility to build something in place of the old. The value of the task is not to simply replace the old hierarchy with a new one of a different color, or let values dissolve into incomprehensibility – the value lies in chopping the bush to find the roots, and from there grow in a different direction.

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<sup>53</sup> An imaginable future, where, for example, monkeys gain humanlike intelligence, no matter how ridiculous seeming, is still a future. We also cannot rule out the possibility that animals have quite complex inner lives, but have utterly no interest or need for the means of expression and communication that humans busy themselves with.

<sup>54</sup> Definable only in opposition to those who are allowed into the palace.

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