



INTERNATIONALES
MUSIKINSTITUT
DARMSTADT

Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik

Herausgegeben von
Michael Rebhahn und Thomas Schäfer

Band 24

 **SCHOTT**

Bestellnummer SDP 167

ISBN 978-3-79-572508-2

© 2021 Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Als Printausgabe erschienen unter der Bestellnummer NZ 5043

© 2017 Schott Music GmbH & Co. KG, Mainz

Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik | Band 24

Herausgegeben von
Michael Rebhahn und Thomas
Schäfer

Inhalt

Vorwort

Steven Kazuo Takasugi: On Musical Content (from a Composer's Perspective)

Alec Hall: Acoustics of the 21st Century

Marko Ciciliani: Music in the Expanded Field – On Recent Approaches to Interdisciplinary Composition

G Douglas Barrett: Toward a Critical Music After Sound

Nico Couck: When New Music Turns Old

Ashley Fure: Reflections on Risk. Pigeonholes, Precarity, and the Zero-Sum Game of Time

Jörn Peter Hiekel: «... es gibt keine Philosophie der neuen Musik» Zur Relation zwischen Gegenwartsmusik und Philosophie heute

Dieter Mersch: Kompositorisches Denken und Neue Technologien

Bernhard Waldenfels: Mehr oder weniger als Musik

Christian Grüny: Countering Constriction: Modest Proposal for a Discursive Reversal

Harry Lehmann: Was ist politische Musik?

AutorInnen

Vorwort

Musik repräsentiert, wie Kunst überhaupt, eine eigene Weise des Denkens und der Erkenntnis, die der Philosophie in nichts nachsteht, sich zugleich aber anderer Mittel bedient und anderen «Logiken» folgt. Versuche der Bestimmung eines begrifflichen Instrumentariums, das diesem spezifischen Zugriff Rechnung trägt, prägten die Darmstädter Ferienkurse des Jahres 2016; im Rahmen der Lectures ebenso wie im Kontext der dreitägigen Konferenz «EXCESS. Forum for Philosophy and Art», die sich explizit der gegenwärtigen Relation von Musik und Philosophie widmete. Die in diesem Band versammelten Essays dokumentieren unterschiedliche Auseinandersetzungen mit jener prinzipiellen Frage nach den Konstituenten und Potenzialen eines musikalischen Denkens.

Steven Kazuo Takasugi beleuchtet den Aspekt des Gehalts von Musik aus der Warte des Schaffenden und stellt die Frage nach Zeichenhaftigkeit und Metaphorik des musikalischen Kunstwerks. Aus «ontologischer» Perspektive erörtern Alec Hall und G Douglas Barrett die Brüche und Unzulänglichkeiten, mit denen der vermeintlich definierte Begriff von *Musik* gegenwärtig versehen wird. Welchen Entwürfen kann eine musikalische

Sinnstiftung folgen, die im Zuge des Verlusts definatorischer Schärfe zur Konstitution neuer Bedeutungen aufgerufen ist? Marko Ciciliani diskutiert den ursprünglich kunsthistorischen Begriff des «Erweiterten Feldes» im Sinne eines veränderten Umgangs mit künstlerischem Material und Referentialität. Nico Couck wiederum wendet die Frage nach dem «Altern der Neuen Musik», die Theodor W. Adorno bereits 1954 aufwarf, ins Pragmatische: Mit Blick auf die Tradition interpretatorischer Details registriert er den schleichenden Verlust eines aufführungspraktischen Wissens.

In den Essays von Jörn Peter Hiekel, Dieter Mersch, Bernhard Waldenfels, Christian Grüny und Harry Lehmann, die im Kontext von «EXCESS. Forum for Philosophy and Art» entstanden, werden die thematischen Stränge der Konferenz reflektiert. Den synoptischen Texten von Hiekel und Mersch folgen Reflexionen jener Fragestellungen, die im Rahmen von «EXCESS» diskutiert wurden. Bernhard Waldenfels und Christian Grüny fassen das Musikalische aus phänomenologischer Perspektive, während es Harry Lehmann in seiner Funktion als Instrument des Politischen beschreibt.

Der programmatische Text von Ashley Fure dokumentiert schließlich einen weiteren Aspekt, der bei den Darmstädter Ferienkursen 2016 Aufmerksamkeit beanspruchte: Das Netzwerk GRID (Gender Relations in Darmstadt, heute GRiNM = Gender Relations in New Music), das die Kurse in verschiedenen Formaten durchzog, widmete sich nachdrücklich einem Themenfeld, das sich im kulturellen Diskurs - zumal in dem der Neuen Musik - lange Zeit marginalisiert fand.

Die Herausgeber danken allen Autorinnen und Autoren für die Überlassung ihrer Texte zu diesem Band. Weiterhin gilt unser Dank Schott Music für die zuverlässige

und angenehme Zusammenarbeit. Auch danken wir dem Institut für Theorie der Zürcher Hochschule der Künste für die Unterstützung von «EXCESS. Forum for Philosophy and Art».

Wie unerlässlich das Hinterfragen der Bedingungen und Wirklichkeiten der Gegenwartsmusik ist, stellen die unterschiedlichen Positionen der vorliegenden Essays unter Beweis. In diesem Sinne folgen die Darmstädter Beiträge zur Neuen Musik seit nunmehr sechzig Jahren ihrer Verpflichtung: Anreger eines produktiven und konstruktiven musikalischen Diskurses zu sein.

Michael Rebhahn und Thomas Schäfer
Darmstadt, im September 2017

On Musical Content (from a Composer's Perspective)¹

Steven Kazuo Takasugi

Introduction

Will a composer contemplate the content of his or her work, while the pages stare back from the desk with gaze so resentful, so scornful - yet familiarly so - when the attempt is no less than to force-stuff an entire life into the music, like *gavage* in the hopeful production of a rare delicacy for some listener's consumption: musical *foie gras*, or of something far less palatable, illusive, pungent with a strange aftertaste, or out-and-out nauseating, repulsive, pointless? And since the composer's path is paved with every possible obstacle: technical, aesthetical, spiritual, ethical, psychological, logistical, even the mere question of stamina - the mundane idea of awakening, day after day, to take up once again the exhaustive wrestling with ideas or materials or commitment - is it then presumptuous at best to talk so readily about the content or substance (*Gehalt*) of composition from the point of view of the composer? Musical semioticians, after all, have made illustrious careers with their theories of interpretation and musical

meaning from the point of view of the listener, today's inheritor of the creative enterprise. Why ask a composer about the content of his or her work when every listener has the right to this? One wouldn't receive a straight answer anyway. And if one did, it would come with the feter of so much sweat and personal filth, the pains and pleasures therewith, hardly the subject of respectable discourse.

Content? Any like-minded composer knows he or she needs *it all* and to what degree! *Extremis malis extremis remedia!* Desperate times call for desperate measures! But this truism is most always concealed by the idea of the single work: even the weighty masterpiece misleads us. For once something is momentarily achieved – again from the composer's perspective – a great devaluation takes place: the difference between *hunted* and *hauled*.

In contrast, were we to listen to and study the nine hours of the complete Beethoven string quartets as a single work, having taken a lifetime to complete, perhaps we might then come closer to understand musical content from a slightly different angle: one more allied with the composer's perspective. We could continue in this fashion: the same composer's two volumes of piano sonatas as Books I and II of a single work. Or the entire *Clavierübung* of Bach. This is more conventional, more inclined toward credibility, in the case of literary authors: Dante, Proust, Musil come to mind.

An entire life crammed into a single work.

Good ideas cease to be so if they do not age well, if they are not travel-worthy, if they prove more capable as ideas *spent* than as ideas in their possible *movement* when subjected to decades of sojourn, if they exhaust their fire in

one all-encompassing display only later to be repeated mechanically or jettisoned along the way. Once subjected to a sea of time, the idea must flee through an endless series of futile attempts to be born again, each time re-awakened and re-inspired, the record of which resembling the concentric rings of trees, each trial and failure embracing all previous trials and failures ... as an entirety: *as a life*. Content may have much to do with this struggle to overcome the eternal return of the same, the seasons' circuitry. And the composer knows these failures better than any outsider, any observer, no matter how astute: the composer lives inside these. This is content from that inner residence. This is content when the form of the complete works, arduously sought for, reflects the life well enough that its mystery is retained despite repeated penetrating analysis. It is unfortunate for some that art is not mere craft, as then mastery might be the primary aim of one's endless activities. One would simply become more skilled, better and better, like the immortal lobster that only becomes larger and larger, succumbing to an end not by anything inherent in its biological processes. But an artistic life is much more than the mere additive process of ever increasing artistry and expertise. There is also this fundamental *vertical* dimension, manifest as cracks and fissures, which allows for ... rather demands ... substantial self-evaluation. Some may call this a failing of sorts, others may call it a crisis. How this is related to content is a very difficult yet intriguing question, one worth seriously investigating along the path of general inquiry and awareness into one's creative process.

*

So what does it mean to put a life into the music? Is it only a metaphor? Is it the justification of a workaholic,

sacrificing the majority of his or her waking hours to the knitting away at notes, rhythms, dynamics, timbres? And then adding the important dreaming hours as well? Is composition like a loyal comrade, a fellow companion who escorts one through the most brutish and hellish in life? Or a nit-picking accountant, bespectacled, bothersome, intruding, and always taking notes? Or a parasite that attaches itself with mandibles or tentacles, grabbing on and never releasing, or far more heinous, growing and developing from within? Is it translating one's personal life into a secret, encoded message? Is it an encrypted diary? Is it a spiral scroll that one carries on one's back like the mottled, dotted cones of certain sea snails, resembling some ever broadening text? And does this narrative really change over time, or simply come into focus?

One could ask the question from another angle: why does it take so long to get it right? Why would the content of individual works be depleted, evaporate, poof! - disappear, if it isn't exactly right? And this plays itself out not only in the concept and form of the work, but in its local specifics: in the way it is interpreted, performed, and brought to realization. The devil is in the details. And so this wayward expedition, despite its lofty ambitions, feels more like driving under the influence, swerving left and right, experimenting, conjecturing, groping, advancing, retreating, endlessly redefining: the symptomatic staggering of "desperate times, desperate measures", a realm uninhabited by the "weekend composer", membership not by privilege or snooty exclusivity, but only by a certain criterion of artistic demand or weight. And so much of this takes place in rehearsals, in practicing, in revising, in finally getting it right. Without multiple performances of a work, one has no chance. The overly polished performance is a problem of privilege requiring

other remedies. And the mere reading of scores in a context when one cannot possibly imagine the sonic results or the consequences of staging is a terrible compromise. Even the composer of fixed media works, eternally subject to the misapprehension that performance is the mere push of a button, knows all too well how the content and substance of a piece can simply disappear if the ideal playback conditions are not met within certain limits that are only occasionally obtained in concert.

*

But all this is not without humor. Even critical music mustn't always take itself too seriously, or it wouldn't be adequately self-reflexive. There is much room for humor in the pursuit of a music's content, even when the intent itself is to show the machinations and factitiousness of music's own contrivance. One only need to be reminded of a work such as the *Diabelli Variations* to see how the content of a transcendent music benefits from excursions at times into sheer, unadulterated wit: crusty, impertinent, cheeky; a thumbing-of-the-nose at the illustrious, albeit appropriated inheritance of tradition; a sober remedy for when the clouds of the incense play tricks on the eyes, when the conjuring of mystical shapes and presences seems to justify an acknowledgement of greatness. What better preparation for the final variations could there be, than to approach his signature *anabasis* with an impertinent stroll through the hallowed halls lined with marble busts, each predecessor in turn until his very own pedestal (his own Arietta supplanting the Diabelli theme in the end)? It is a rare instance of self-reflexivity in the early 19th century.

And what distance there is from this posturing, this temperament, to the near child-like innocence of the closing passages of op. 111, his boyhood double-trills, as if

awestruck before a starry night, preceded by the most extraordinary descending sequence in the literature, a seemingly endless precipitation, each downward step imbued with an ever-deepening hue of lingering wistfulness until the perfect light is discovered again.

“Would that one’s childhood were here now, it is as if buried. Perhaps one must be old, to be able to have contact with all that.”²

Who can blame us for exiting ... escaping ... through such illuminated portals in which the soul takes flight, searching for that place where music would stop and linger for a moment in its inexorable path forward. Karl Kraus puts it more maliciously, “Vienna has beautiful surroundings, to which Beethoven often escaped”. One simply asks of the traveler today the burden of carrying this load forward into the future of music ... the contents of which are not lightweight.

*

Which reminds me - what better way to show the contents of a work than by means of a stroll through its *table of contents*. So a program note these days lays before the reader the entirety of a Table of Contents such as that for my work *Sideshow*, in hopes of demonstrating how the conceptual content of the five-movement work relates to its musical material content, the nature of which requires some explication.

So the conceptual formulation, often through metaphors, is readily able to represent or construct the existential circumstance, predicament, or crisis at hand: one deeply entangled with all of life’s absurdity, meaninglessness, nihility, doom: it whispers from its lips, “all is lost”, or other such utterances, with *eyes in their last*

extremities, though in the case of *Sideshow*, through the catastrophic image of a failing American entertainment business in its seminal days. Strangely, it is the musical material content - much like the human body often independent of the mind's fatalism, with its own will, DNA, its own reflexes, its own programming for survival, audacious, determined, and seemingly fanatical, in each and every cell, as if it had a mind of its own and rebelliously follows its own course - that understands this life is not a given, but something that must be struggled for through constant self-redefinition, constant self-transformation, to the very end.

This is the dialectical relationship between the conceptual and musical material content: on the one hand, destructive and self-destructive, and on the other, existential and survivalist - impulses, drives, and processes intertwined with one another, the fate and outcome of which is unknown, often in combative extremes, often paradoxically complicit one with the other. The colors, exclamations, and energies of depression and euphoria, melancholy and heroism, despair and hope, all are inescapably linked to both their scientific and poetic formulations: *precision and soul*, as one might call it. And what is the soul? Is it something that one only knows if one has lost it unwittingly over time: that which one attempts to recover only after it is too late? Musil states it well: "It is easily defined negatively. It is simply that, which creeps away and hides when one hears any mention of algebraic series."³ This latter, seen from a slightly different view - with a little playful thinking, that is, from the angle of musical material content - might include any mention of the pragmatic or any attempts at reasonable pursuits. To make *impossible* is therefore only an indication of the soul's attempt to announce ... to declare itself. Phenomenology ...

that is, *sound*, is the means by which material content attempts to erase it ... the soul. Nature has its own terrible and exquisite patina, a decoy, its own sleight of hand, which momentarily distracts us ... lures us ... towards the beauty as it conducts its concealed processes of decay and forgetting.

That decay and forgetting occurs perceptually. *Ambiguity* as the aim of content, paradoxically, requires a much greater degree of precision than say *certainty* when this becomes translated into musical experience. For a composer to have vague perceptions about something is not the same as creating the experience, in the listener, of having vague perceptions. One can easily see that the latter would require a technical mastery of the highest caliber: one that is near algebraic, scientific in its precision.

*

As an aside, it is often said of antiquated notions that we no longer live in *the days of the horse and buggy*. But observe today's automobile manufacturers ruthlessly competing to invent the better "smart car" that prevents accidents caused by human error, oversight, or inattentiveness via sensors integrated into sophisticated collision avoidance systems with autonomous braking and steering components. This was indeed the advantage of the good old horse as an independent consciousness. A horse wouldn't hurdle itself off a cliff. It is the stupid, mechanical car that would blindly follow the controls of an inattentive driver. Perhaps more composers, dismissive of material as an exhausted enterprise, might again become invested after their long hiatus: material is not only there blindly to fill in the form or fill out the concept of the work, as if its only function is to follow the conceptual mind of the designer.