



plain chant



Polyphony



HARMONIC
Polyphony
(BACH)

THEORY vs. PRACTICE:

a practical application of aesthetics



HARMONY
(WAGNER)



WEBERN



NEW SERIALISTS

ethan blackburn

The following text of this thesis is part transcription, part rendering. It was delivered as a private lecture on the 26th of June, 2024, in Conservatorium Maastricht, as part of the requirement to finish the Masters programme in Composition.

In the first part, text in standard font (left side) will represent actual transcribed material from the spoken lecture. Text in *italicized* font (*right side*) is added after the fact, either as a contextualization or an abstract posit to complement the material.

In the second part, text in the left column (still standard font) will represent actual transcribed material. The middle column (*italicized*) will contain contextualizations. The rightmost column will contain excerpts from my writings. There is no specific order or method as to how the text should be read.

• • •

The thesis was made under the coaching of Miriam Pascual Benavent and Vyintas Baltakas. This work is thus dedicated to their patience and understanding in helping it come to fruition.

• • • • •

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part 1.

postulation

1. hegemonic.

Contemporary music composition in the past 50 years is by now accustomed to its lack of an ethical and aesthetic edifice; in fact, there is a duality that contemporary art as a whole finds itself within, somewhere between academically formalizing radical novelty while incongruously trying to appeal to aesthetic honesty.

....

this continuous albeit intermittent roadblock manifests itself deeper-

this continuous albeit intermittent roadblock manifests itself deeper-

.... that many more propositions can in actuality do further to obfuscate the reason many of us compose or create art at all.

this research ~~may~~ will not answer any questions.

Hello, my name is Ethan Blackburn.

The aim of my research is to understand how composers, (and maybe myself), through their own written reflections, their essays and interviews, reveal their aesthetic principles, and how these principles can inform and shape my own artistic identity.

This

research focuses on several aspects, the **first** being non-theoretical language,

(meaning I'm specifically focusing on the composer's own words and experiences, rather than any technical musical theory or music theory analyses.)

The **second** is understanding aesthetic principles.

meaning no musicological studies, outside sources, no causal inferences. although all we work with happens to be inference. I purposefully object to Schenker, or Allen Forte, or Perspectives of New Music¹ or anything of that nature.

There is no way to actually 'understand' aesthetic principles. everything I say is through my own perspective. If you want objectivity in thought, perhaps art isn't for you.

Even though the essay is heavily contested, I very much resonate with Morris Weitz' 'definition' of art:

"What I am arguing, then, is that the very expansive, adventurous character of art, its ever-present changes and novel creations, makes it logically impossible to ensure any set of defining properties."²

¹ <https://www.perspectivesofnewmusic.org/> . a popular music journal for contemporary music. I have nothing against it. I just don't want my music to sound like it comes from an academic journal.

² Weitz, Morris. "The Role of Theory in Aesthetics." The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, vol. 15, no. 1, 1956, pp. 27–35. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/427491>. Accessed 27 June 2024.

My goal here is to uncover the underlying compositional, sociological, and practical values and ideas that guide and influence the composers I choose, in order to inform my creative process.

The **last**, which is the most important, is aesthetic development, or style.

the capacity for a work of art to be molded into something, or rather its malleability in aspects to form, timbre/pitch, or rhythm.³

What terminology is relevant? Within the research I use a few certain terms with particular emphasis that deviate from their common meaning.

*The terms I will define here are **plasticity, indeterminacy/aleatoricism, mimesis, and entropy.***

Plasticity *in the context of this research entails*

Plasticity also refers to an object's susceptibility to deformation, in terms of stress or strain.⁴

³ Feldman, M. (2010). Vertical thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts. Irish Museum of Modern Art. *This dissertation of sorts done by the Irish Museum of Modern Art beautifully defines plasticity as where it is unclear where "material substance 'ends' and where the void 'begins.'"*

⁴ Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "plasticity". Encyclopedia Britannica, 28 Jul. 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/science/plasticity>. Accessed 27 June 2024.

This term plasticity goes hand-in-hand with my next term, which is indeterminacy, otherwise referred to as aleatoricism.

I loathe “otherwise” referring to terms, as it is a bit misleading. Separate words exist for separate reasons. Aleatoric is umbrella’d as a subset of indeterminacy, but they are by no means the same thing.

John Cage, a composer I will reference (and further contextualize later) is known for his usage of indeterminacy. However, I often group indeterminacy and aleatoricism as objects of a pre-set notation/direction for the performance of my music, which can include (but need not) improvisational elements. Aleatoric is commonly defined as music left to ‘chance’ or ‘randomness’, which is quite an opposite logic from improvisation, a tradition itself not native to (later) European classical music.

Why am I even trying to ‘clarify’ European music, or the European classical tradition? The very fact that ‘new music’ stems from European classical music is an ironic tragedy, seeing how forward-looking the medium presents itself to be. Regardless, new music and European classical music for that matter do not contain every possibility or necessitate all possible sublime dimensions of artistic or musical expression... but studying at a classical conservatory necessitates that I have to give some scope on what I am presenting.

Now the applications of indeterminacy may entail having the choices for pitch, duration, or timbre to be left either to a predetermined

process, which is the case of John Cage, who pioneered this term,

or in performance, by asking the performer to intuitively make decisions based on given prompts or directions.

Plasticity and are basically manners which ensure that a piece is never played the same way twice, or that rather the weight and responsibility of materials is given to performers in the moment, rather than beforehand notated in the score

don't worry, I already clarified this.

indeterminacy

or decided in the practice room.

*The next term will be **mimesis**, which is normally a Greek philosophical topic related to the Platonic theory of forms.*

The sensations we feel when assessing anything (importantly here a piece of art) stem from 'supra-sensible entities'⁵. A large part of my research was founded on mimesis. In fact, the original title of this research was "Image, Relation, Manner: an auto-pedagogical approach to Aesthetics".

Constantly meandering between two sources of aesthetic bases is however convoluted and makes it impossible to efficiently and effectively summate the context of this research.

However, I believe that mimesis is the strongest backbone of everything I am

⁵<https://iep.utm.edu/plato/#SH6b>, The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy.

arguing. A large focus of this research, as you will see, is based on synthesizing my own writings in the vein of the composers' writings that I will address. In a writing from October of 2023, I write the following on mimesis that can be used as almost a disclaimer for my research.

herein lie the boundaries for what quantifies an artistic expression. everything delineated is as improper, fragile, and irrational as what is trying to be described, but art has always existed as a heuristic medium.

- 1. everything that exists in-itself, away from human perception, can be classified as an **image**, which is the only thing capable of existing outside ourselves. the artist doesn't live here.
essence, thesis, affirmation...
- 2. everything that exists for-itself, i.e only within our reaction thereof, is a **relation**.
a relation is an observation, a reflection, an introspection... importantly, a relation is untouched and also incommunicable in its most essential form, becoming capable of being fully processed and realized only should someone contain the same experiences, knowledge, and idea as the artist who formed it.
idea, antithesis, negation, intention, comparison...
- 3. the crux, or synthesis of both, becomes distributed through its **manner**, or how a relation is represented in the physical world. it is at this point where the artist lives and breathes. in this stage of my ontology, the *relation* breathes itself into either perpetuity or ephemerality; the respective quality of the *image* and the *relation* are diluted into something that has been destroyed (in this instance a synonym of created) to the point where it has begun to be understandable by other people.
only at the points of *relation* and *manner* does subjectivity become relevant; for example, the distinction between a bad performance and a bad piece. this is why i label *craft* as a relevant term to manner. representation is the sole function of an artist, yet it is more nuanced than simply if something is well represented or not; the observer serves just as high of a role as the artist in any creation.
this is only because of the parasitism that is inherent to creation. in a lecture at the 2023 Darmstädter Ferienkurse, Lachenmann proceeds to tell us, as the first participant to completely silence a small classroom, that we as artists exist as parasites, born in a world whose design we had no consent or input in. simply, *how* things are related, namely how they come across once the artist cedes involvement.
craft, synthesis, simulacrum, composition, performance, imitation...

see: <https://arscul.us/pages/writings/oct23.html>

In the case of the artistic process, I use mimesis to argue that all artistic creations represent either concrete images from life, or phenomeno—logical or abstract representations of things.

is normally a term that's relegated to thermodynamics, but here I use it as a subset of indeterminacy.

In the musical context, it describes the tendency of a given expression to be interpreted

this is where the origin of my research begins.

entropy

as more than what's depicted on the physical notation, in the case of this research. This aligns with how much the composer wants to relegate freedom to the interpreter.

And thus,

• • • • •

2. problem(s) in focus.

Is efficiency a criteria of honesty? In some respect, I believe there to be several layers where 'efficiency' can begin in the process of artistic creation, and not all lie in between the process of communicating an idea (e.g notation) and the processing of realizing it (manner).

However, it is undoubtable that for a very medium to exist (especially in the context of West-centric models of thinking), there must be inconsistencies or tautological thinking taking place at every level of the general intellectual circle that decides to dictate the right direction for a medium to continue (academia).

Nonetheless, any time an object is communicated it immediately risks developing a subversive body that wants to oversee it, whether this happens at the local or micro-level or at the macro-level. Later I'll talk about inter-subjective and inter-observational validation, but here lies the very irony of this entire thesis.... a thesis that is trying to strip the artist of a certain way of thinking by essentially subverting in the exact same manner (by writing my own academic paper.)

While of course I believe theory and academia are valuable frameworks, as they certainly formed the basis of my beginnings in composition, they fall short in honestly depicting subjective, emotive aspects of artistic creation. Thus, only focusing compositional practices on theory deprives the artist of saying something honest

(or in easier terms, deprives the artist of saying something.).

At this point of the presentation, I present an excerpt from a score by New Complexity composer Michael Finnissy.

The New Complexity school of thought in western composition was initially formed as a

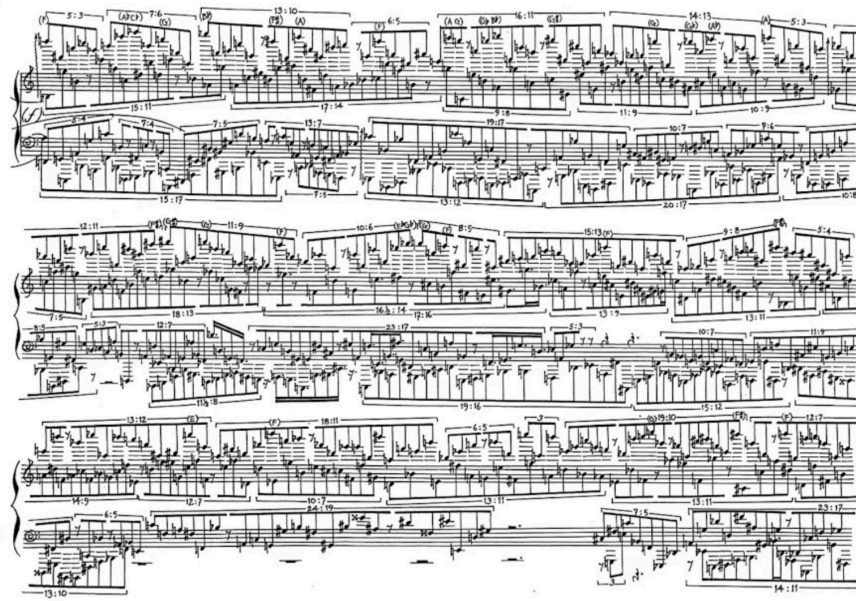
reaction to minimalism, or it's seen as a highly ornamented music- to me, it doesn't matter. The time to utilize this type of music-as-reaction is over, yet it's New Complexity that either intentionally or unintentionally creates the most polarizing void between new music listeners (basically us as cult members) and everybody else. The issue with purveyors of New Complexity that I have become acquainted with is when they act as if their way of notation or conception is at all superior to any else's. In fact, New Complexity seems the most synonymous with academia, so it's a fairly useful scapegoat for an issue that goes way beyond just New Complexity. You can compare this way of thinking with any austere persuaded subsection of any artistic discipline. Nothing can be made with the label of "new". To make a piece of art for the very reason of it being "new" is the most misguided appropriation of our creative capabilities.

Additionally, the most popular written outlets of compositional journals were essays by musicologists that described the pitch system's complex forms and austere methodologies that stripped composers of

personal agency.

Problems for this research include (but are not limited to:

academic hegemony, leveraging abstract processes, approaching subjective reasonings, and voice.



Finnissy, M. (1996). Piano Concerto no. 4.

(pictured): *very example of the problem I talked about. In clearer words, I want to write music that doesn't require extraneous materials in order for it to be understood. I believe the same (or at least a very similar) result can occur for the expression shown above in much simpler ways, and regardless I always prioritize the aural result vs. the way it's communicated.*

academic hegemony,

leveraging abstract processes, or rather as Peter Ablinger (a composer to be studied later) states:

which we just discussed, concerns the role of theory in academia and its relation to the personal artist.

“Transgressing subjectivity by making its construction visible.”⁶

In approaching aesthetics, I asked, ‘can

⁶ Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.

basing aesthetics on metaphysical ideas from composers create a shared experience that transcends individual subjectivity?’ Or rather, is there a way for me to show my work in a way that is applicable to more than one person, being myself?

And of course, there's the most important issue, which is

or

It is this question that ultimately decides who I am in relation to me, to my peers, to everything that came before me, and to everything that will come after me.

While thinking about these aforementioned issues of aesthetics and academia, I had the privilege of attending, in August of 2023, the Darmstädter Ferienkurse,

voice,

what do I have to say? and how will I say it?

which is, in case you don't know (which you probably shouldn't), probably the most formidable ~~institution~~ festival for contemporary music in Europe, if not the entire west.

There I had a lesson with Anthony Braxton, another polarizing musician/esoteric who falls into a similar semiotic identity crisis as mine- am I a jazz or contemporary musician? Participating in global artistic (or even non-artistic) institutions partly require you 'align' yourself with a label for your discipline or



*pictured left: Braxton, A. (2003).
Composition No. 340.*

pictured right: Braxton, A. (1988). Composition Notes C. Synthesis Music.

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COMP. NO. 41-14

ore to open new worlds of sound activity that
raw on many different factors. In Composition
o. 41 we can experience solo statements - that
emphasize the sound color and realness of a given
instrument - or duo interchanges, trio and
finally the collective body of the chamber ensem-
ble.

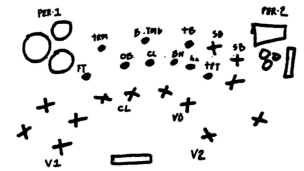
Composition No. 41 was the first chamber
orchestra work of mine to be publicly performed.
In fact this work was the first large notated
work of mine that I ever heard - and as such the
seliness of this experience will always have a
special place in my memories. All of the large
notated structures prior to this work were writ-
ten and filed in my drawer for safe keeping. Up
until this performance, my relationship with
large notated structures had to do with recording
my ideas on paper as an exercise in theoretic-
al postulation. This is so because music is
about sharing and existence - which is to say it
means nothing if you can't hear it. Having Com-
position No. 41 actually 'actualized' in a per-
formance would give me the first opportunity to
hear what I had recorded on paper - not only for
Composition No. 41 but the realness of that
opportunity gave insight into my earlier efforts
as well. It was only after this experience that
I could begin to really develop and understand my
own affinity nature. The reality of that experi-
ence would dictate the next cycle of my creative
growth - not only for the works I would pursue in
the future but also to correct earlier models
from the past. Composition No. 41 would really
be an important factor in the nature of my
creative growth.

The first performance of Composition No. 41
was in

COMP. NO. 41-15

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and Newer, 1977 at Alice Tully Hall by The New
Music Ensemble under the direction of
Harvey Solberger. This version, which was the
second revision, has since been performed at
Michigan State University (under my direction)
and at Antioch College. The final version of
Composition No. 41 that will be published for the
greater public is a third version (that contains
only light changes in its dynamic components and
tempo markings). Composition No. 41 was con-
ceived to establish language music material
groupings as a basis for alternative procedure
and material specifics.



LAYOUT NO-41

*method. Now I realize I couldn't be
bothered.*

In our lesson, the one thing he told me
was to document my process.

Now here you see in these pictures two
items, an example from his scores, and his
Composition Notes C, which is just one of
five books, each book being about 400
pages, by Anthony Braxton, in which he
meticulously details thoroughly aspects
of his compositions and process.

This was something very inspiring to me -
it ultimately led me to structure my
research based on writings such as these,
which rely more on words,

more on ideas, rather than more on
systems and methodologies.

(which are admittedly unreliable)

• •

In what ways do composers' reflections, as expressed in their words and writings, provide a framework for understanding their aesthetic principles and inform my own artistic identity?

Namely,

analysis, synthesis, *and* re-analysis

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linear in the sense that all these three things, *analysis*, *synthesis*, *re-analysis*, were being undertaken at the same time.

My research, as you see, is presented as these three steps, the first being *analysis*, wherein I establish the criteria for the texts and materials that I read. The reading of these materials counts as a qualitative analysis itself. In *synthesis*, I annotate and write down all my reflections, and within these reflections, I'll choose three topics, or three studies of severe personal interest within aesthetics that I want to specifically fine-tune within my own process.

This of course includes not just materials from other composers, but also conversations with my present and past teachers who already have a knowledgeable disposition of my music.

Unfortunately it is still necessary to set disclaimers that all research is conducted non-linearly, and for the sake of consistency and clarity I will not present these topics here in this order.

The re-analysis consists of publishing all my writings that I make during the research process, which can be found in the appendix. For this presentation, each "study" will include at least two examples; at least one unconnected to my final recital, and one from my final recital, entitled Faces, which is a song cycle containing mimetic tone-poems of important artists in my life (E.E Cummings, Fernando Pessoa, Gertrude

I have had multiple opportunities to enact my readings within my compositions, one being extracurricular, which includes festivals, for example, attending Darmstadt and attending ContemPLAY, a contemporary music festival that takes place in Vilnius last February, but also countless other festivals and opportunities that I undertook to personally present my music with musicians and really internalize the concepts I learned.

the texts should be about non-work-specific attitudes and observations rather than using texts that are distinct analyses of specific works or forms.
I'm prioritizing here idea over craft.

The texts also must be primary sources, meaning they should either be essays by the composer or interviews with the composer themselves and not from a musicologist.

I classify these texts as distant and non-distant sources. Distant sources would be essays by composers not personally known to me, and non-distant sources would be interviews conducted with teachers close to me who already have a close disposition with my music.

Stein, Ryuichi Sakamoto, and Chick Corea).

Again, to be academically consistent, I had to present a criteria for the composers I chose. In simple terms, I chose three composers whose music I liked. That explains the criteria the simplest. But, I also mentioned that

The three composers I mainly chose were John Cage, an American composer, Morton Feldman, also an American composer, and Peter Ablinger, an Austrian composer.

The first composer, John Cage, was an American composer known as a vanguard figure within the avant-garde since the 1950s. He is known for using chance operations, for his timbral explorations (including prepared piano), and for an ontological approach to composition.

The two books from John Cage I'll be using primarily for his essays are his *Silence Lectures* and *A Year from Monday*, both containing essays and interviews with John Cage about his aesthetic approach and compositions.

'Chose' here is a lackluster term. The choice never ends. If I repeat myself in ten years, it's a good sign I've been getting closer to the right idea.

Moreover, his compositions started to question construction in a very beautifully honest way.

For the sake of being aesthetically clear, I also omitted essays from composers that specifically cover on work, in order to get a more holistic idea of their entity. I wasn't very good at keeping this rule, as a key methodology I gained came from a section of an essay from Cage about his approach to chance in his piece Music of Changes, but that was part of a larger essay, so I'll give myself a pass.

The second composer I'll be investigating is Morton Feldman, also an American composer, who was known for his use of graphic notation and exploration of time, timbre, and drawing inspiration from extra musical sources.

Feldman was known for an almost-obsessive study of Persian and Middle Eastern rugs, using their symmetries and asymmetries to inspire his conceptions of time, form, and space in his compositions.⁷

The two books I'll be using from Morton Feldman are Give My Regards to Eighth Street, which is his first collection of essays, and Vertical Thoughts, which is a collaboration with the Irish Museum of Art, which demonstrates his relation to various prominent artists in New York in the 1950s and 60s, including Jackson Pollock, Philip Guston, and Robert Rauschenberg, who all alongside Feldman and Cage often held conversations with another about art.

The final composer I'll be studying is Peter Ablinger, an Austrian composer whose approach acts upon the nature of sound.

A fitting description of Ablinger can be found on the website where they sell some of his CDs: "As in all these cases of music deliberately involving noise, noise is the case, but for Ablinger: this alone."⁸

⁷ Feldman, M., & Friedman, B. H. (2001). Give my regards to eighth street: Collected writings of Morton Feldman.

⁸ <https://www.soundohm.com/artist/peter-ablinger>

The two conversations I held for my research were with Vykintas Baltakas, my current composition teacher, and Liviu Marinescu, my former composition teacher from my undergraduate in Los Angeles.

With Vykintas, I discussed the compositional process using three questions from a very popular resource for composers⁹, and with Liviu Marinescu, we talked mostly about the sociological aspect of composition and contextualizing the self against a larger picture.

And now, I will discuss the three main studies— or three main concepts that I utilized to approach based on the materials that I used.

The first, as I mentioned, is

Within this, I asked, *how can I adjust the plasticity of my music to elicit clearer expression?*

plasticity, syntax, affective qualities.

.
plasticity,

Plasticity being rendered here as indeterminate procedures or notation.

⁹ Varga, Bálint András. Three Questions for Sixty-Five Composers. Boydell & Brewer, 2011. *An incredible resource from a beautiful human being. It is difficult to classify who Varga is.*

Within plasticity and these two other topics, the main issue of focus was the communication between me, the performer, and the audience.

It is impossible for me, however, to think of the audience, as it is impossible for me to think for the audience. Therefore, I will not write anymore considering the audience directly. I will make an important distinction now that the composer is not the sender and the audience the listener; in fact, the composer is equal parts the listener, and cannot place themselves as above or below anybody. Sound has no regard for people.

Claiming to make a 'delineation' or method to 'fight limitations' presents itself limitations. In order to make arguments, we sometimes have to contradict ourselves.

And, so for

I mainly discussed construction/syntax
in the terms of my notation and
organization of my materials.

How can constructions become visible?
How is composition syntactically
assembled, and how is mimesis, the Greek
concept I discussed, an apt model for
categorization or postulation?

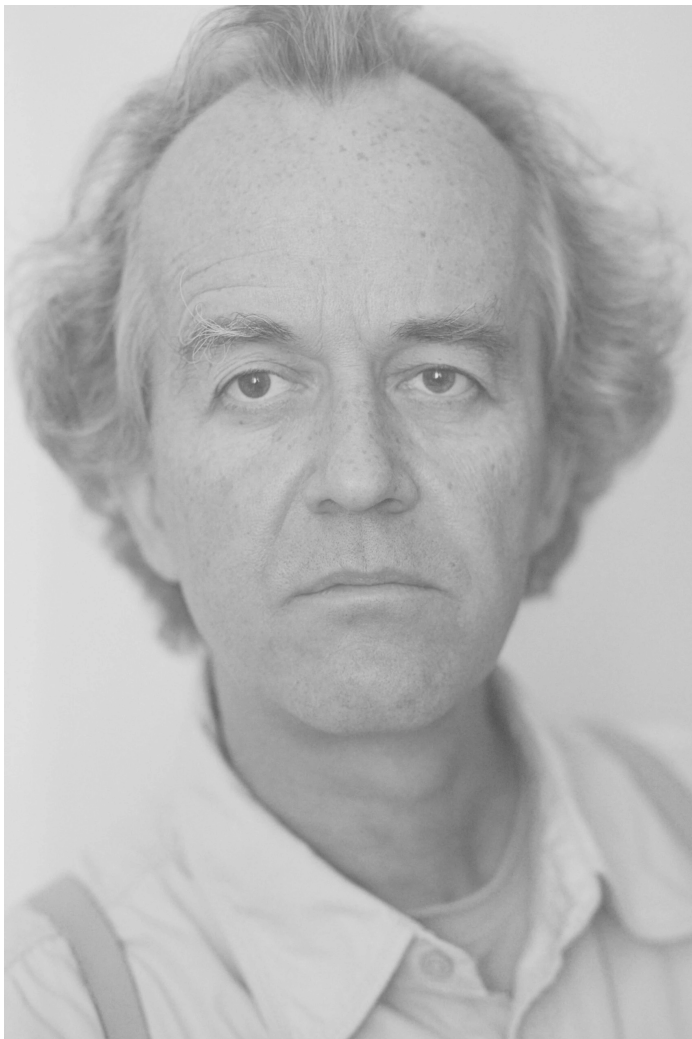
.
syntax,

*Although I group them together, I by no
means am trying to imply that they mean
the same thing. They deal with similar
attitudes in the context of this research.*

*Syntax sometimes dictates the area of
sequences in music formalization/
composition, but here I use a looser form
of syntax that describes how construction
sublates itself into mannerism/dictation/
synthesis.*



(above): John Cage, (below): Peter Ablinger,
(top-right): Morton Feldman



pictures clockwise from top left:

*Britannica, T. Editors of
Encyclopaedia (2024, April 12). John Cage.
Encyclopedia Britannica.
Photograph Irving Penn, 1947.*

Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia
(2024, March 1).
Morton Feldman. Encyclopedia Britannica.
Photograph Rob Bogaerts, 1976.

*Peter Ablinger. (n.d.).
<https://brahms.ircam.fr/en/peter-ablinger>
(Photograph)*

.
affective qualities.

*Spinoza touted affect as bodily experience.¹⁰
The important part of the term for me is its
predilection for the idea of becoming.*

It's a precognitive, immediate response that precedes conscious thought.

But in music, I talk about it in terms of artistic distancing, which is, composers may use various techniques to create a sense of distance between the listener, performer, and the object or concept.

This distance can be created through notation, but also through the image of the piece in the first place.

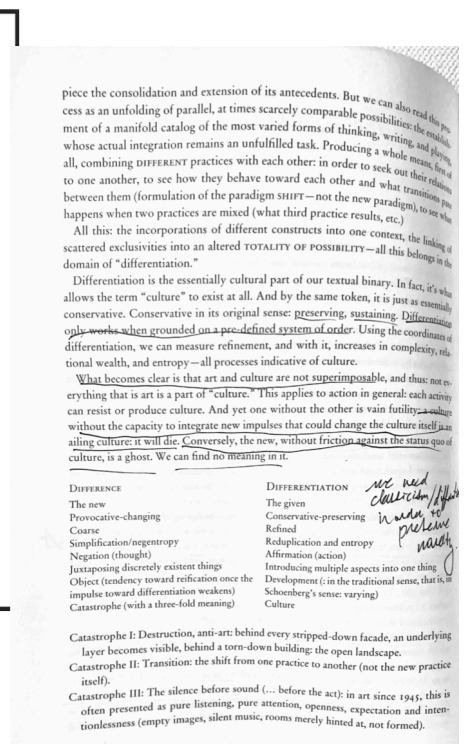
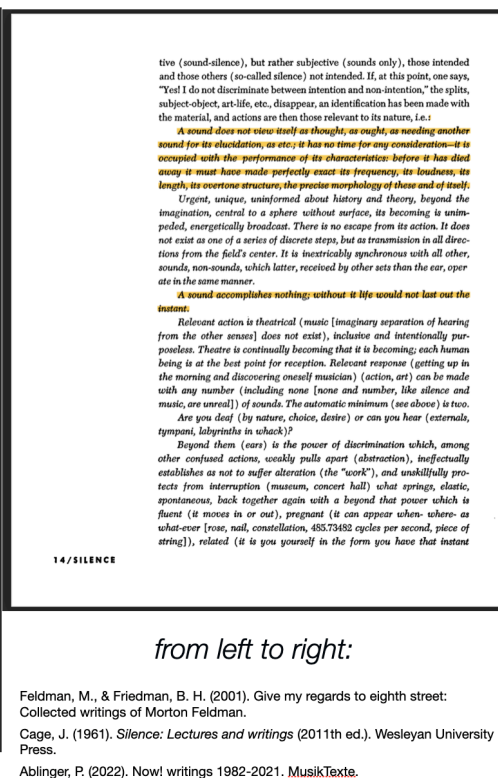
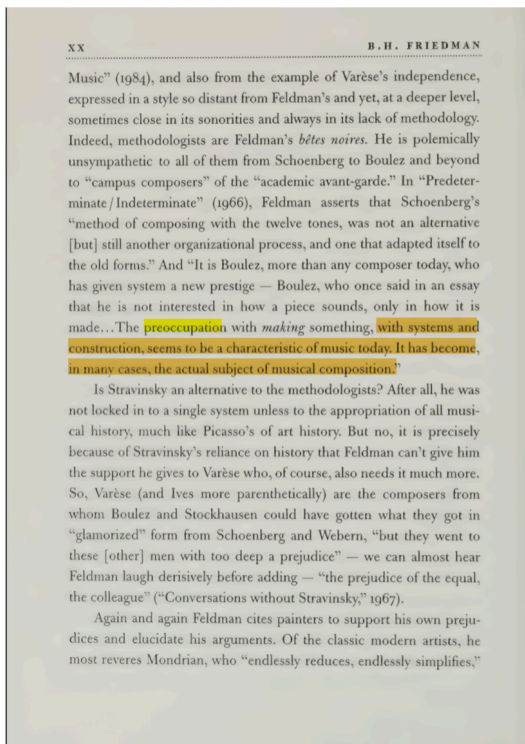
Affective qualities that I describe are the inevitable sociological attachments to this reasoning and the artistic relevance of my music beyond sound itself, which is mainly its memetic transformation, its idea of process, and the meaningfulness of theory versus practice.

It's very hard to explain what I mean.

The second step of mimesis. relation. the sublation of an image (which is noumenal itself, and exists without observation.) This is the paradox but the most beautiful albeit tautological part of mimesis. I pick apart image, relation, and manner, but they are not possible to be perceived-in-themselves. Nothing can be perceived without relation, which is why I slightly detest Cage's notion of 'absolute sound'.

¹⁰ Cross, D. J. S., 'Affectus Becoming l'Affect', Deleuze and the Problem of Affect (Edinburgh, 2021; online edn, Edinburgh Scholarship Online, 19 May 2022),

We have to exaggerate to argue effectively.



Here you can see an example of the writings I used and the annotations I made.

The left example is from Morton Feldman, give my regards.
The middle example is from Cage, and
the right example is from Ablinger.

Now just as an example, these three pages talk about preoccupation of idea of system, viewing sound itself as a *thought*, and differentiation within the context of

affect.

As Braxton suggested, I made my own documentations on my reflections and process.

And to show this, I have an example of the writings I made.

jan. '23, *interview Vyintas Baltakas*
oct. '23, *mimesis*
nov. '23, *disclaimer for my research*
nov. '23, *"no ontology of sound"*
2023, *portrait of stein*
jan. '24
dec. '23 – feb. '24
jan. '24, *some notes on quem está falando?*
jan. '24, *some thoughts on rondo a year la*
feb. '24, *some notes on 16 lovesongs*
feb. '24, *true nature eludes itself.*
mar. '24, *face*
mar. '24, *a demonstration of process*
apr. '24, *plasticity in writing*

interview vyintas baltakas

28th of January, 2023. Maastricht, Netherlands, in a restaurant near Vrijthof.

[E] - Ethan Blackburn
[V] - Vyintas Baltakas

[E] The first question says, have you had an experience similar to Lutoslawski's?
He heard John Cage's second piano concerto on the radio, an encounter which changed his musical thinking and ushered in a new creative experience...

[V] No, I know, I know.
I have two experiences, two very strong experiences.

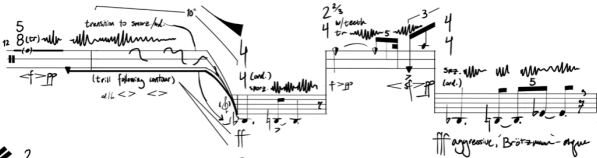
in school.

place was very specific about contemporary music, and my dad was
my very early pieces.

where there I was in buildings, I didn't know the name of Ligeti.

...there is not a single situation in life which is exactly the same as the previous one. The moment today, the 7 o'clock today is not the same as 7 o'clock yesterday. There is not a single idea, if it's really an authentic idea, which is exactly the same as a previous one... What pitch system do I use? What's the manner in which I represent my idea? You could have a single idea and the idea is interpreted by many people.
vyintas baltakas, personal interview.

a usual way to arouse plasticity in performance is to make the notation reflect this, by abandoning certain traditions and obscuring the surface in order to make the product malleable. a composer with no intention with a gesture will receive the most plastic product (though obviously low-effort), while the most strict intention will produce a rigid surface incapable of allowing the idea to breathe.



three interruptions, interruption 1

the use of graphics does not automatically imply freedom for the performer, as they are required to interpret them within the constraints of their experience. not unknown to most, a player unexperienced in graphic notation will feel reticent at the point of revealing something personal to them in the performance that doesn't originate from the score.

source: arscul.us/writings.html

Now, I will present my studies, with the first being *plasticity*.

♩ ≈ 90, Reverently

process

part 2.

Musical score for part 2, measures 1-4. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature (C). The first measure contains a half note G4, a half note A4, and a half note B4, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The second measure contains a half note C5, a half note D5, and a half note E5, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The third measure contains a half note F5, a half note G5, and a half note A5, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The fourth measure contains a half note B5, a half note C6, and a half note D6, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The score is written on a single staff.

Musical score for part 2, measures 5-8. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature (C). The fifth measure contains a half note E5, a half note F5, and a half note G5, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The sixth measure contains a half note A5, a half note B5, and a half note C6, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The seventh measure contains a half note D6, a half note E6, and a half note F6, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The eighth measure contains a half note G6, a half note A6, and a half note B6, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The score is written on a single staff.

Musical score for part 2, measures 9-12. The notation includes a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a common time signature (C). The ninth measure contains a half note C7, a half note D7, and a half note E7, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The tenth measure contains a half note F7, a half note G7, and a half note A7, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The eleventh measure contains a half note B7, a half note C8, and a half note D8, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The twelfth measure contains a half note E8, a half note F8, and a half note G8, with a dynamic marking of *pp* and a tempo marking of *≈ 90, Reverently*. The score is written on a single staff.

plasticity

My first study is on plasticity.

Just a reminder, plasticity is the capacity for a work of art to be molded into something, or rather its malleability in aspects of form, timbre, pitch, and rhythm.

Now in order to achieve plasticity in my work, I rely on indeterminacy as a means to allow freedom for the player in the moment.

When I use such plastic or indeterminate forms, I rely on two methods, intersubjective, which is verifiable by others, and inter-observational, which is

stresses on an object. pulling at something to test how strong the edifice is.

Indeterminacy can be in pitch choice, and to a certain extent rhythm, as demonstrated by the next example.

Direction and experience demand an approach that assesses who the sound belongs to.

I believe that a piece cannot only belong to me. Possession should imply that every tenet is accounted for beforehand. I cannot account for even 20% of my performance.

everything can be whittled into small semantic categories that provide convenient points of analysis based on our recognition of ____.

for example, if i state that (in a blind test simulation) a beethoven piece i hear is a sonata form,

this judgment comes based on the mental database of pieces i have heard in my life that were classified to me as sonata form.

to achieve recognizing

something means i have measured

the difference between what i'm

verifiable only by the self.

In order to derive my system of indeterminacy or plasticity, I relied on an essay from Peter Ablinger.

The idea of line as a formal structure has been previously used to help formalize composition in an oblique manner.¹¹

differential assessment.

*Ablinger, Linie
Absteigend. Linie
decreasing. Linie
Aufsteigend, Linie
increasing. reducing line to
rhetoric. what do we have
without it?*

hearing

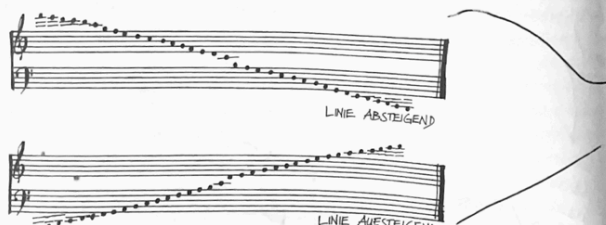
and what i've heard.

my willingness to
label
something comes
from

the distance i've
approximated
between the object
and its ideal form.

Klaus Lang
La Monte Young
María de Alvear
Maryanne Amacher
Michael Pisaro
Nader Mashayekhi
Pauline Oliveros
Robert Ashley
Rolf Julius
Silvia Fömina
Sven-Åke Johansson
etc.

In 1979/80, I wrote several versions of a piano piece, one section of which involved playing the white keys from high to low, and the other, from low to high. Two diagonal movements. Two lines. For pencil or piano. Offered as a conscious alternative to thinking in terms of harmony, counterpoint, and formal dramaturgy. This line was a personal manifesto of my fundamental principles. I later designated it as No. 1, the lead work of the *Weiss/Weisslich* cycle. (I had published the piece in my catalog of works and on occasion offered its world premiere to promoters, but it wasn't performed until last year, in a concert at CalArts in Los Angeles. The pianist was—marvelously, almost imperatively—the composer Michael Pisaro, whose modesty and artistic bearing are perfectly suited to this piece.)



Weiss/Weisslich 1.1 and 1.2, 1980

I am a painter!
It isn't so much that painting/visual art has a strong influence on or status in my work. That's not enough.
The painters of the sixties and thereabouts worked with sculptural means, others turned to video or photography, and still others to computers and network

34

¹¹ Example shown: Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.

But here, Ablinger in his essay focuses on direct connotations of basic elements.

Now my own writing focuses on this preoccupation with creating more holistic forms or more rounded forms based on examples of these basic elements, such as lines.

And on this next page,

Schenkerian analysis is useful tonality. At one point I adjusted it to analyze string quartets from Webern. Now I realized how in love I was with a process rather than result.

But there is something to be said about the love of process.

He says he's thinking of a conscious alternative to thinking in formal dramaturgy.

In the end, complex objects are constructed of very small parts.

Composition as prayer. The more you whittle the absurd out of your creation, the less it appeals to the original image.

“When sound is conceived as a horizontal series of events

all its proper ties must be extracted in order to make it pliable to horizontal thinking.

how one extracts these properties now has become for many the compositional process.

In order to articulate a complexity of such close temporal ordering one

might say differentiation has become here the prime emphasis of the composition.

In a way, the work resulting from this approach

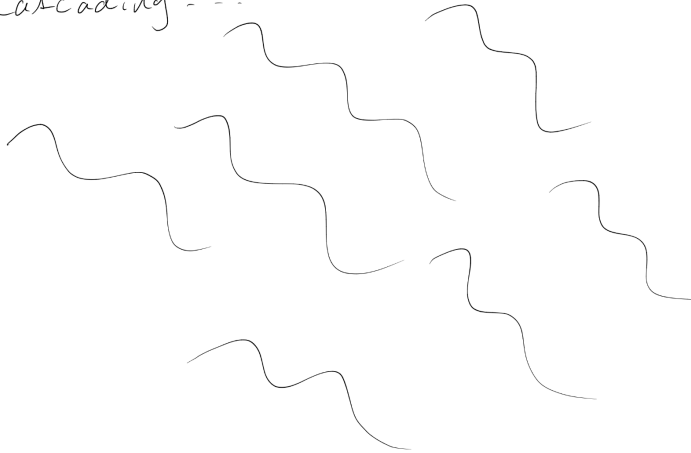
can be said not to

you will see on the left-hand side the sketch I used for the fifth song from my ensemble piece *16 lovesongs*.

“lines play an omnipresent role in these instrumental pieces, embellished lines,

have a ‘sound.’

Cascading - - - -



The idea of drawing in the *Überlegungen*:

Überlegungen: approximately 300 discrete pieces, written mainly in the years 1983–1988, often solo pieces for piano, flute, saxophone, violin, or viola. Also pieces for open instrumentation, or for two or more instruments, or involving discrete objects (a comb, a soda can), tape pieces, environmental recordings, cassette pieces, often collages of other musical pieces or material heard on the radio. Not only have I not published the vast majority of these pieces, but I also haven’t even shown them to anyone.

Lines play an omnipresent role in these instrumental pieces. Embellished lines, aimlessly floating lines, lines crossing through (crossing out) other lines, lines with clumps of notes around them like Giacometti’s knots of modeling clay, his fingerprints on the wisp-thin figures. “Giacomettism” was my code word for these perpetually self-cancel-line “melodies.”



Überlegungen, Folder 1, “Morceau d’Annoux,” 1983

line on form.

35

I asked, is an obsession with complexity or excess an issue with intersubjective validation or intra-observational insecurity?

(pictured left):
sketch for 16 lovesongs.

(pictured right):, excerpt.

Ablinger, P. (2022).

Now! Writings

simultaneously floating lines, lines crossing through, crossing out, other lines, lines with clumps of notes around them like Giacometti’s knots of modeling clay.”¹²

What we hear is rather a replica

i.e.,

¹² Ibid.

is a system (or a score for this matter) written for the actual substance or the content itself? Or is it used to validate a different body or person?

Substance refers to idea, rather than tangibility.

In this case, cascading lines were seen as ground elements. One beautiful excerpt from Kurtág's Játékok instructs the player to play with ground elements. 34

of sound..."¹³

music is invariably plastic.
its plasticity
(measured in difference)

from the beginning is the only reason

5.

asynchronous play until you've reached the end, then stop. rhythm value determines max rhythmic speed to play.
vary speed greatly, but keep around ♩ = 50 - 77 [n ≈ 1"]

Audio Example 1.

¹³ Feldman, M., & Friedman, B. H. (2001). Give my regards to eighth street: Collected writings of Morton Feldman.

Indeterminacy here is controlled, as I pictured the form only as the curve. Pitches and rhythms are chosen by players in real time.

*everything is sine waves,
anyway.*

which is exactly the
same

28

asynchronous

[illegible]

Audio Example 2.

The second example that I'll be referencing is from my second-hand recording of the first piece, entitled *which stutter and sing*.

This piece, or excerpt rather, focuses on the score as a choreography.

The importance here is determining within this notation on how close I, the composer, want to be to the actual result.

In early sketches, I had actually made the notation some what of a 'transcription' of the image for the piece. In a sense, I never wanted the pitches to be exact.

The notion of score as choreography is something so entirely simple that I wish I thought of first. I very much like Ablinger's description of a score as a self-opposed choreography.

Notation is a manner of communication. Sometimes this communication takes place with or without the composer present.

The most common instruction I find myself giving to players when first approaching my music is to take one's time... in this way, a score lies to the performer, as it implies that it contains the entire temporal narrative abstractly on paper, linearly- when this never has existed in actual interpretation. When does the piece end, or more importantly, where does it begin?

as the previous one."¹⁴

the composer must decide beforehand their place as mediator between

concept (relation to idea) and

manner

(performance).

globalization

and over-saturation of content,

scores, ideas, and networks entails

a re-orienting

of the issue of whether something we create

exists for us or itself.

¹⁴ <https://arscul.us/pages/writings/apr24.html>

[illegible]

Handwritten musical score for the song "The Rose Tree". The score is written on ten staves, with lyrics and musical notation. The lyrics are: "The Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree." The musical notation includes a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The score is written in a cursive, handwritten style.

The lyrics are:
 The Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree, the Rose Tree.

The musical notation includes a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 4/4. The score is written in a cursive, handwritten style.

original sketches of *which stut*ter and *sing*, using precise pitch as a 'suggested dictation'. gesture as line preserved.

This was an early premonition, an early sketch of the work, where I had specifically notated each pitch and each contour for the player.

But then, in an interview with my former teacher, Libby Maronescu, we talked about the efficiency in communication and expression.

And this ties of course to the aspect of academic hegemony, which deals with overcomplexity, with an obsession with pitch systems, and rhythmic systems, almost on the verge of monomania.

The role of notation in this cello piece uses several types of alternative notation.

The composer cannot separate themselves from the audience, as they are not ever in control of the sound that results in the first place.

An artist has no agency to credit. Artistic practice stemming from the idea of being perceived produces needlessly whatever came before.

The Maastricht I see now is not the Maastricht there was 100 years ago. Why should I make art or music that suggests that?

The irony of hegemony here is that I still use the methods of hegemony; I use systems, as every composition is itself a system or a game.

However, in workshopping the piece with the player and discussing with my former teacher and current teacher,

why do i find certain sounds cheap?

process is unavoidable,

inevitable of

our

attention therein.

it's terribly ironic how the modus operandi of contemporary practice

has been a hyper-focus into subtleties of creation

in an effort to detach oneself

from classicists,

just to make a new tradition/

prison

within itself.

honesty to a source
other than

ourselves is impossible
unless we could
somehow account

for every individual
event or expression
that lead

up to the
creation of
something.

*I decided on a different
mode of notation, which
incorporates plasticity and
indeterminacy to make
the product not only more
organic and musical, but
more alive by its ability to
be produced as a different
product each time.*

44

ric. sim.

sf > *sim.* 3 3 *pp* 5 6 *f*

47

ric. marcato non-ric. ric. s.p. molto flaut. sul tasto

sf 5 6 *f* *sf* *ppp* *p* *ppp*

50

p.n. x3 pizz short arco, ord.

sf > *sf* > *ff* *ppp* *sub.f*

54

m.s.t. poco rit. molto flaut. molto espress.

sfpp *p* *p* *sfpp* *ppp* *p*

Audio Example 3.
excerpt from *which stutter
and sing*.

The final example I have for the study of plasticity is my piece entitled *disquiet*, which comes from my final recital, which I have entitled *Faces*.

...the methodologies I used to create these mimetic transform—ations come from these three composers I mentioned in my research.

To elucidate the process of writing this piece, I'll use an excerpt of an essay from Morton Feldman.

In this essay from *Give My Regards to Eighth Street*, Feldman writes, "sound in itself can be a totally plastic phenomenon, suggesting its own shape, design, and poetic metaphor."¹⁵

you already know.

disquiet uses a type of pitch plasticity seen in the earlier cello example, where rhythms and form can be more or less organized while the pitch is left to the player. But there are several layers to this- contour is defined, so obviously if contour is defined, as well as rhythm, what is left? Is a pitch system just essentially used to enact a contour?

sax, horn, piano, celesta, harp.¹⁶

In this case, I viewed it as a timbral envelope. A pitch is essentially a specific timbre. Which would mean, all music is spectralist music, which would also mean that no music is spectral. Spectral's basis in harmonic series is a relation we choose to make in the organization of music. The idea of a "pure music" is actually used as a Euro-nationalist

form is prescribed as an errant offspring of theory;

a bastard child to practice.

things that are inevitable are best sensed

holistically and intuitively,

requiring

no explanation

or

delineation of process.

"I cannot make a relationship between music and society.

¹⁵ Feldman, M., & Friedman, B. H. (2001). *Give my regards to eighth street*: Collected writings of Morton Feldman.

¹⁶ *this being the instrumentation of the piece.*

*sentiment to discredit
non-tonal systems around
the world.*

I don't know what
society is."¹⁷

*Shh, shh, shh, shh, shh,
shh, shh, shh.*

a word, that

(didn't start at a
word)

*Shhh, shh, shh, shh, shh,
shh, shh, shh.*

becomes a *line*,
(which was

Shhh, shh, shh, shh, shh.

never a *line* to begin
with)

*Shhh, shh, shh, shh, shh,
shh, shh.*

6

Video Example 4.
excerpt from *disquiet*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

syntax

My next study in my research regards syntax, namely syntax as reflected within the notation and the form of the piece.

The sub-questions I have chosen for syntax are,
how does the syntax of the notation, or rather its construction, affect its interpretation?

“A composition, for me, forms sentence structures within a scenario of beginning, middle, and end, very much the way Picasso uses a rectangle as a ready-made protagonist.

With assemblage, there is no continuity of fitting the parts together as words in a sentence or paragraph.”¹⁸

Assemblage is simply one part of construction. construction is invariably a part of syntax, but it does not encompass everything within it.

Syntax for me is either pre-meditated, or instantaneous, as syntax itself is an observational phenomenon.

Things have no choice but to have a syntax.

Gibberish is thus a very honest expression of absurdity.

“The only clear conclusion here is that structure and methods are as indispensable as they are hindrances.”¹⁹

a creative process is ongoing from birth until death...

ergo i am always writing.

only sometimes do i sit down,

like a radio operator,

to try and fine tune myself

into the frequency

i want to

dictate.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.

Rondo mainly deals with form as the caricature.

rondo began as the first concrete statement of my divorce from harmony, though it only proved how inherent a harmony is, once a harmony can be considered as more than just a vertical summation of pitches.

rondo is a concerto for bass clarinet, ensemble, and electronics.

abject departures require breathy, taciturn movements. it is required of a creator to lie to himself, in order to express themself most honestly.

theory is an abbreviation for what was, or rather what was _____ enough times to be called _____.

form under theory usually derives as descriptive rather than prescriptive; the tight structure of a rondo, in its established sequence from an A to a B to a C and so on feels to me

...act as if what you are about to read never existed...

the choice to read something

is a choice to destroy it....

a rondo most typically occurs as 5 parts or 7 parts,

but if we really cared to we could write an infinite rondo,

that consists of constant distinctions of sequences

that last infinitesimally smaller than the previous

for proper part-distinction.

This work, *rondo* itself, is a memetic representation, namely of Eric Dolphy, a famous American bass clarinetist in jazz and avant-garde, who I based the material of the bass clarinet part for.

This example from Rondo shows how I approach rhythm as a gesture, as you can see with the graphics in the percussion and the bass clarinet part— rather than giving precise direction, I give again the contour. It's a suggested contour that will result in an instant syntactical organization by the player.

prescriptive, but what it prescribes is usually not so easily delineated.

A rondo premeditates the need for a 'tonic'.

but how did I come to this? to garner a clear idea, you need to 'unfix' precision. abstraction demands this.

tonic here, is the most faithful recreation of the original idea of *tonic*, which in Greek means a stretching, tightening, taut string, a tight string that has an infinitesimal amount of divisions, each existing as one singular element (*tonic* applied as a concept of **one** rather than a key).

29

109

Tempo 1, ♩=92

(split tone)

b. cl.

f

sf

ff

fl.

sf

Presets 2

e. gtr.

expression pedal, ring mod. amt.

100%

0%

sf

p

mf

ad lib.

to chain 6

kbd.

perc.

sf

large

(tam-tam)

p

f

vla.

ord.

sf

p

slow descent

faster...

c.l.b.

f

vc.

ord.

sf

p

slow descent

faster...

c.l.b.

f

Audio Example 5.
excerpt from *rondo*

This next essay from Cage, entitled *Composition as Process*, was paramount in my research.

This essay by John Cage describes the process of chance in Cage's music, specifically his piece *Music of Changes*, alongside other pieces of course.

I know this deviates from my rule of no specific piece, but the mannerisms in which Cage explains his own processes applies to his music as a whole.

This essay can be summated as order of pre-eminences.

In some cases Cage mentions emphasizing structures, for example a form or concept, against less prominent structures, such as materials, pitch, or rhythm.

syntax here is conceived as divisions.

rational vs. irrational.

in some cases, Cage mentions emphasizing structure (e.g form, concept) which allows for less prominence/de-emphasis of materials (e.g pitch, rhythm).

this concept inspired a personal system of syntax based on divisions, in this case on ratios of entropy allotted.

Entropy, again, being the relative amount of indeterminacy within a piece.

for example, a preeminence (or emphasis) of pitch or rhythm can allow for a de-emphasis in structure (form, phrase) or the inverse.

alternatively, sections within categories can be balanced (emphasizing

in a normal tonic relationship, the distance between the *tonic*

and the next *non-tonic*

is objectively measured and calculable, just as the switch from densities.

these airy distinctions

formed the bases of ensemble as tonic and non-ensemble as non-tonic.

alternatively,

mass as tonic

and an anti-mass

as the non-tonic.

*pitch and form while de-
rhythm).*

*a pre-eminence casts itself
into rondo in an atypical
way;*

*consider this passage from
the bass clarinet part
of rondo:*

technically
achievable,
technically
reasonable, but the
use of graphics
implies that the
notation should be
taken at face-value,
and that an
expression should
be found underneath
that pertains only to
the player (not me).

$\angle J \quad JJ \quad \triangleright ppp \angle J$

The image shows a musical score for a bass clarinet part, starting at measure 96. The notation is in 4/4 time and features a variety of graphic elements. Above the staff, there are several horizontal lines with diagonal hatching, labeled 'spl. tone'. A large, thick, black wedge-shaped graphic is positioned above the staff, indicating a dynamic or intensity change. A bracket labeled 'c. 5"' spans a section of the music. The score includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'ff' (fortissimo). The notation is highly expressive and experimental, reflecting the Cage method of emphasis and de-emphasis.

rondo, bass clarinet part.

The first piece with
which I employ this
Cage method of
emphasis and de-
emphasis or pre-
eminence is my piece
entitled *three
interruptions*.

*there is nothing
inherently wrong with any
other composers'
preoccupation with system
as product rather than
sound.*

*The entropy in my music
stems from my mimetic
view towards composition,*

whether their result
aligns with my
intention is not a
primary
consideration... in
fact, an addressing
of a technical
importance has little
to do with musical
expression. rather,
my music constitutes
an assemblage of

And so I thought, applying this to another theory within phenomenology, specifically Umwelt theory²⁰, how the relation or experience is inseparable from the world, namely how the observer is simultaneously being the observed.

Within *three interruptions*, I give the freedom to the player to see each measure as a ratio of a whole, while preserving two characters, an indeterminate character pitted against a determinate character, a syntax of two characters from two different entire conceptions of contemporary notation and contemporary performance pitted against another.

Of course not in a specific sense. The scope of what I say is not claiming itself to be based in any sort of concrete philosophical thinking.

Improvisation implies immense self-perception.

In the case of three interruptions, the performer assumes the role of overseeing two seemingly opposite mentalities in organic syntactical construction.

the use of graphics does not automatically imply freedom for the performer, as they are required to interpret them within the constraints of their experience. not unknown to most, a player unexperienced in graphic or flux notation will feel reticent at the thought of revealing something not explicitly written in the score itself.

gestures that belie a purpose or syntax. a syntax is instead interpreted, unlike this very paragraph which very clearly, and syntactically expresses my thoughts.

the use of stricter signatures and irrational signatures belies the actual interpretation of the performer in this instance.

the score acts as almost a trojan horse of sorts, superficially demanding precision of time but inward actually asking the performer to forego precision and calculate an inner sense of form and progression based on the ratios they create in the

²⁰ Kull, Kalevi (1998). "On Semiosis, Umwelt, and Semiosphere". *Semiotica*.

ii. ≈ 90 , reverently

Video Example 6.
mvt. ii of *three*
interruptions

This gesture is a
syntactical use...

I cannot predict
beforehand how it will
be interpreted.

from the program notes:
"the piece as a whole
should not be perceived as
a finished/fixed message
but a springboard for
improvisation for the
player (despite how
meticulous it may look to
read). gesture/color is
always prioritized over
exact pitches/rhythms. the
player is enabled to change
any aspect of the piece,

moment.

determinacy better
purports itself as the
interruption to a
*gesticology*²¹ favored
by entropy, allowing
faithfully for the
player to assemble
their experiences
and sublate them
into *actual-*
time experience.

²¹Stockhausen, K. *Texte zur Musik, Band 4* (1970 - 1977). Stockhausen, though a staunch academic, wrote beautiful explanations of gestures, labeling his music as a series of gestures (*gesticology*). It is the seemingly staunch academics who often find beautiful things to say.

Namely, forfeiting conventional systems and theoretic analyses of music promotes honesty of expression, and the expression thereby becomes less diluted.

This [Feldman essay] goes hand-in-hand with another Cage essay, which quotes how Cage famously wrote unplayable passages to force approximations as expression.

One example being in his Piano Concerto²², a one-measure cadenza for a contrabassoon, famously basically unplayable.

*An essay from Morton Feldman,
“Predeterminate/
Indeterminate”
thoughtfully questions the
responsibility of the artist
in presentation and
construction.*

*“Unfixing elements” of
music allows sounds to
exist within themselves,
rather than as “memories
which were memories of
other music to begin
with.”²³*

true dishonesty belongs to the academic,

as the main role of the academic is to

maintain a tradition rather than to ‘further’ it.

the issue of ‘academic’ writing is the

intent of the composer to make their music sound *interesting*.

the main evidence of this is the orchestral work,

one that was conceived with the idea stripping any agency from the players.

x should be played like y,

because we *have essentially*

*done it that way forever.*²⁴

²² see more here: <https://arscul.us/pages/writings/mar24demo.html> . in the silence lectures, Cage says in a dialogue: “Q: I have noticed that you write durations that are beyond the possibility of performance. A: Composing’s one thing, performing’s another, listening’s a third. What can they have to do with another?”

²³ Feldman, M., & Friedman, B. H. (2001). Give my regards to eighth street: Collected writings of Morton Feldman.

²⁴ *of course a gross over-exaggeration. but take the premise for what you will.*

In this final example from my study on syntax, I explore the idea that a (premeditated) syntax is unrelated to the complete overall idea of a piece, but rather encompasses simply a small section of it.

My piece entitled, *in everything and there are*, is an homage to the American cubist writer Gertrude Stein, who was known for her at-that-time unusual use of language that prioritized rhythms and sounds over meaning.

In an essay, next to the image *Square*, from Peter Ablinger, he writes, “In pre-literate art, one does not make and creates no works. One simply arrives at an arrangement in which something can occur.”²⁵

in everything and there
are *is written for clarinet
quartet and electronics.
all the material for the
electronics stems from
recordings of the quartet;
in essence, the everything
is occupied by all that can
be seen, even if it is not
physically or currently
manifesting itself.*

*at the top of each system,
there is a line of text which
acts as a personal ground
of interpretation rather
than any oblique
performance instruction.*

*always always always
often there are very much
mixing, some I am only
beginning knowing I am
only beginning knowing*

*very many very puzzling,
and always always
always, having their way
of eating, drinking,
sleeping, loving, hating,*

yellow is
sympathetic.

green is useable.

pink is almost
palpable.

yellow was sense.

blue is beyond
nonsensical,

blue is the beyond.
purple.

all the joy in weak
success,
all the joyful
tenderness,
all the section in the
tea,
all the stunted
symmetry.

the silent is the
mediation. delayed
entrances, influence
the authority of the
performance
without ever
playing a note.
approach as if you
will enter,
without ever
stepping foot.

²⁵ Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.

is that the structure can define the shape, while the details of the shape are arranged by performers in real time, rather than with pre-existing time values, at least in the context of this piece.

wakening,
understanding,
sensitiveness in realizing
anything, realizing
something, dullness,
stupid being in them

*quickness and slowness In
Everything and there are*

*very very very many men
and very very very many
women always existing
and always*

*each one having their own
being listen to each one
telling about their very
own virtue of being.*

it takes much
effort to

lea- rn,

but it takes

even more to

ignore.

[illegible]

Audio Example 7.
excerpt

affect

To remind you the definition of affect, or as I put here affective attenuation,— it normally refers to feelings, emotions, and body sensations.

It's here used to talk about distance, namely the distance between the listener and the concept.

It is important to note here that when I say listener, I'm not referring to the non-composer.

In fact, the composer here is equally a listener and a receiver as to the audience.

I quote two main pieces here, one being *quem está falando?*, which is a piece for soprano, speaking clarinetist, and speaking pianist,

and *WHAT IS?*, which

Affect here can be also seen as a dichotomy between two types of rhetoric; intended, and non-intended. it's really fun to label everything, because in the end none of what I'm saying can be universally validated anyway.

John MacCurdy has three phases of emotion, as related to affect; (a) the arousal of nervous energy in connection with the instinct or tendency; (b) the propensity for this energy to become manifest as behavior or conscious thought once the tendency is inhibited; (c) the manifestation of the energy as affect if also behavior and conscious thought are inhibited.²⁶

This second phase, or the phase of propensity,

voice as sound
object is
unfortunately

inseparable from

its heuristic function
in music.

sound requires
expectation,
something

lacking in some
objectivities,

which hangs upon
timbre as

a signal.

²⁶ Laszlo, Ervin. "Affect and Expression in Music." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1968, pp. 131–34.

comes from my final recital.

quem está falando? deals with the hierarchical uses of speech.

A form of speaking supplants harmony, allowing the strain of concrete information in complete contrast to the subjectivity of pitches yearning for words to take a harmonic shape itself, this time creating harmony with the dramaturgy awarded by an intensity.

Affective attenuation here is connected to a relationship between music and emotion.

I asked, do composers believe music inherently expresses emotions, or do they see it as a tool to manipulate or influence a pre-existing agenda?

features the most interesting aspect of my considerations of affect, which is distance. a propensity necessitates a previous established relation. this relation itself is primarily influenced by the distance between the sound object and its similarity to a previously understood sound object, unrelated to the current situation.

The moment this relation is called upon, a whole web of branches root and connect to everything, everywhere, all at once...

This is the secondary response. Affect is not the familiarity between two comparisons (differentiation), but rather what happens when these 'outlets are blocked'... herein lies the sublime. There is a distance (which can still be a familiar distance) between sublime and reason, which undoubtedly reasons every decision I make, but this is almost unmeasurable.

we are so belittled,

because we've reached the point of time in delivering artistic

expressions

where we worry about whether our expressions are gimmicks

or not.

i want to get to a point where i don't have write

my music

as

answers

to

questions.

Within this question, I found the idea of hierarchies equally valuable.

And to explain hierarchies, I quoted an essay on differentiation from John Cage and Peter Ablinger.

Cage writes in his essays about art as existing for itself, and how it orients the effect of causality to be in the piece's process, rather than its result.

He writes, "the responsibility of the artist consists in perfecting his work so that it may become attractively disinteresting."²⁷

A similar notion is described by Peter Ablinger when he states that a piece of art is only defined or measured by its difference to another.

The distance I'm more interested in is more sociological, less personal, while still being the most personal thing possible. The distance effloresces as a hierarchy between objects, that are weightless themselves.

Why does a Casio keyboard sound cheap, compared to a Steinway? We've really been led to a point where we attach prices and hierarchies to literally fucking air vibrations.

Cage tries to state that music means nothing as a thing.²⁸

Affect theory postulates that music acts as a conduit to emotional processing.

But the value of an object's use have nothing to do with that object "being a thing".

relation is *inseparable* from our perception,

since the act of listening,
and
experiencing

, remains as creative and integral

as the role as the sound object itself plays.

this intensity comes from content.

this content

forces the musician to draw

upon themselves,,

²⁷Cage, J. (1961). *Silence: Lectures and writings* (2011th ed.). Wesleyan University Press.

²⁸ Ibid.

when he writes, “the history of music has been always involved in controls, rarely with any new sensitivity to sound.”²⁹

The rest is, well, noise.

even 'deconstructed' pieces, such as Ablinger's *voices & piano* series, recognize cognizant and incognizant presences of rhythm in voice.

it was out of this that
we have the ability to
create anything.

[illegible]

excerpt from quem está
falando?

²⁹Feldman, M., & Friedman, B. H. (2001). Give my regards to eighth street: Collected writings of Morton Feldman.

...

"The systems extend music's vocabulary, but in essence they were nothing more than complex ways of saying the same things."³⁰

When I consider syntax, or when I consider indeterminacy and affect, it is not merely to come to a result, but to produce and achieve the most efficient way of expressing the primary substance of my work.

In *quem está falando?*, the goal of the piece is to change the perception through dismantling a musical hierarchy by eliminating a leader.

I view hierarchy as a remnant of academia and as a remnant of hegemony.

Is it the job of anyone to say anything new?

Is it through saying new things that we make an impact?

The artist must consider firstly that their art will not save the world.

The audience completes the art work, as its meaning can only weigh on the relation we have to it. This is something incommunicable, yet we still pretend it is.

Opposing myself 'to the grain' is not certainly the right option, but right now it is the most interesting.

silences/rests are equivalent to spaces,

spaces that look empty

but contain something much more introspective.

who is speaking?

better to start with the premise

that i *hate* music, and

find every decision afterwards

³⁰ Ibid.

And so my solution to the hierarchical influence of hearing a soprano within an ensemble setting is to give all the musicians a voice.

To do this, first of all, I make the text nonsense.

In my piece, I used artificial intelligence-generated prompts in Portuguese about yoghurt, about love, about random philosophical sentiments, and I juxtaposed them throughout to all instrumentalists to disguise who the actual leader or who the actual soloist is.

This notation allows the clarinetist and the pianist to interpolate different rhythms based on the text that they're speaking at the given moment.

And thus, this hierarchy as an affective aspect of this music is diminished and equalized, elucidating the overall aural and sociological

This feeling comes also from Fernando Pessoa. I like to view each speaking instrumentalist (voice included) as a different pseudonym of the same source, much like how Pessoa does... Bernardo Soares, Ricardo Reis, and to a degree himself.

based on the criteria to either further this suspicion or to annul it.

finding the edge between

the idea and façade,

and using this to measure

the composition's

plasticity.

perception of the piece.

Investigation into affect as part of my studies poses the question, *what counts as music?*, in order to support my previous question of the inevitable sociological attachments to reasoning.

“Noise is music’s dreams of us.”³¹

In my piece, What Is, for improvising group, (arranged for trio in this setting,) I founded the

For this question, I used two excerpts of essays from John Cage and from Morton Feldman.

These affirm that music is made of sounds that are not only exclusive to musical sounds, namely that these essays mostly focus on the inclusion of noise or non-musical sounds as part of the entirety of music as a whole.

Ablinger’s notion of the transcendental work draws lines on the hierarchy of music when discussing the fact of the quantum observer principle in an essay, having culture and perception as contrary sides to reality and to the world.

He says, “perception is learned, thus we ultimately cannot claimownership of creative endeavors.”³²

an image can be represented (*related*) in myriad ways,

which often means the source, disrupted to begin with,

is being represented by the

very minimum

of two manners

at any given moment.

³¹ Ibid.

³²Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.

principles of the piece
on the relations between
the perceiver and the
perceived,

also keeping in mind the
distance between the
concept and the listener.

In performance, I use
familiar languages to
select audiences, such as
jazz and free
improvisation, but the
construction of the
piece attacks it from a
much more general way
than pure imitation.

The work, and I write
in an essay, is
irremovable from its
relation.

Noise is inevitably a
part of us.

*Gestures are not
immediately portrayed or
traditionally suggested.
Colors, symbols, and
verbal instructions instead
generate the impetus of
distance and its manner.*

“If he does not wish
to give up his
attempts to control
sound, [the artist]
may complicate

his musical
technique towards
an approximation of
the new possibilities
and awareness...

Or, as before, one
may give up the
desire to control
sound, clear his mind
of music,

and set about
discovering means to
let sounds be
themselves

rather than vehicles
for man-made
theories or

expressions of
human
sentiments.”³³

³³ Cage, J. (1961). *Silence: Lectures and writings* (2011th ed.). Wesleyan University Press.

Very slow, brooding...

A handwritten musical score on a single staff. It features a variety of chords including G6, Bb, Am, D7, F7, G6, F#7, A7, Em, E7, Bm, Bb, Asus, A7, Dm7, D#7, Em7, A7, Am7, D7, G6, Bb, Am7, D7, Am7, D7, Am7/G, F7, G, Dm7, G7, C#7, B7(b9), B7(b9), Em, Em/D, C#7, C-6, Bm7, E7/bb, Am7, D7(b9), G6, and (Am7 D7). The notes are written in a fluid, expressive style with some red and blue markings.

pp ~ p

THINK OF ONE COLOR AT A TIME.

R.S. swell, think.

A diagram showing a sequence of sound waves or pulses. It starts with a double bar line, followed by a series of pulses that increase in amplitude, then a series of pulses that decrease in amplitude, and finally a series of pulses that are of varying amplitudes. The pulses are labeled with 'A' and 'D'.

interlock

w.w/trb.

air to pitch

Handwritten musical notation showing a 7-measure rest, followed by a series of notes. The notation is written in a fluid, expressive style.

Handwritten musical notation showing a sequence of notes. The notes are written in a fluid, expressive style.

Handwritten musical notation showing a sequence of notes with a 7-measure rest. The notation is written in a fluid, expressive style.

Handwritten musical notation showing a sequence of notes with a 7-measure rest. The notation is written in a fluid, expressive style.

Audio Example 8.
WHAT IS?, sequence
one.

This piece within the examples, to me, contains the largest amount of affective distance, since such an abstract piece of notation can create so much distance between me from the actual auditive result of what I think the sound will be in my head.

I put together this kind of synthetic notation, this kind of indeterminate notation,


to produce something that still sounds organized to the listener, and still sounds musical and organic to me..

the most insipid parts of art are often

intellectually conceived.

15"

(1/2 slide sempre on this system)



15"

tr



15"



part 3.

no end.

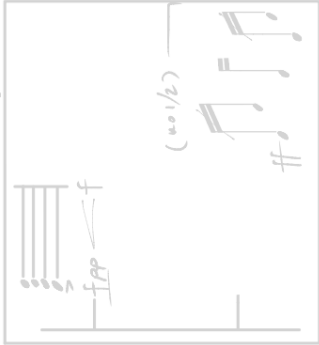
≈ 5"

(no 1/2 slide)



≈ 4"

(no 1/2)

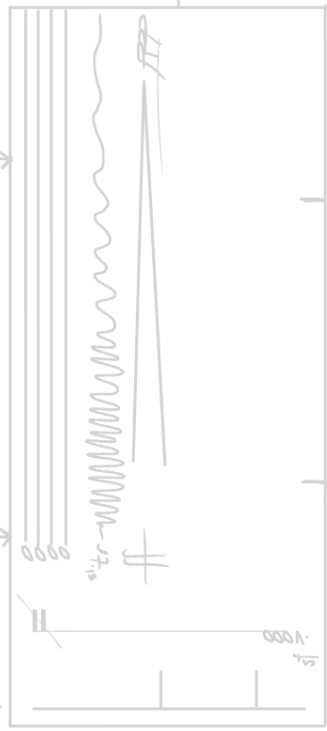


or.

(no 1/2)



7"



5", ≥ 2x take 2" fragments

stuttering



3"

(no 1/2)

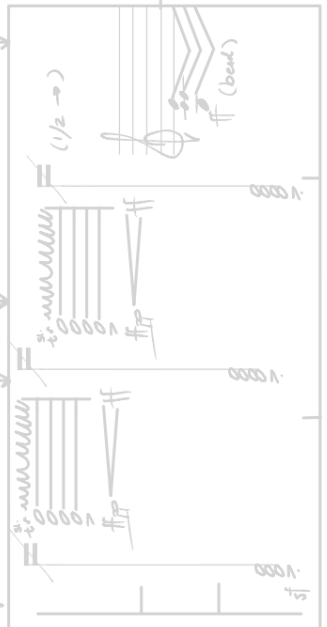


≈ 7/6

(1/2 →)
rit. each repeat piece apart...
4x



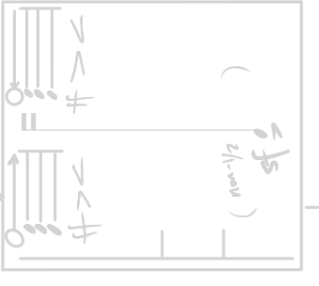
7"



or.

3"

(no 1/2)



3"

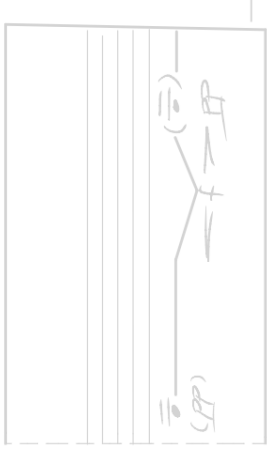
(no 1/2)



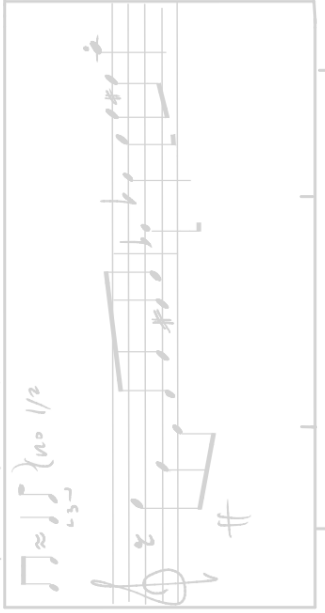
7"



15"



as fast as possible, ad lib.



no beginning.

It's difficult to give a brief or succinct conclusion to a research that is so everlasting in my life.

The goal was never to give answers. The goal is never to give answers.

Is repetition a conscious attempt or something inevitable?

We all write for more

or less

the same instruments, in the same

*music without this kind of
substantial edifice is completely
unsustainable.*

And music without this

without,

further estranging

itself from the public when it fails

to acknowledge

or

Rather,

sources cited.

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appendix

Documentations written by me during the process can be found here:

<https://arscul.us/pages/writings.html>

A repository of all the relevant audio/video examples can be found here, corresponding to their figure number:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VgpVgQoQUi391wWm9GZQGg-xjE2APnKz?usp=sharing>

Thank you,