

Hearing [Hören] is Defenseless—without Listening [Hören] On Possibilities and Difficulties L'écoute est désarmée — sans l'écoute

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Qui écoute? 1

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article, paru en Allemagne en 1985 et dont nous proposons la première traduction anglaise, est un point de départ capital pour une réflexion soutenue sur les conditions de l'écoute et a eu un impact sur divers courants de la recherche musicologique, particulièrement en Allemagne et en France. Lachenmann entame sa discussion avec une analyse de la place de la musique moderne dans la société, pour ensuite aboutir à une théorie de l'écoute qui frôle des territoires phénoménologiques : le compositeur compose des situations d'écoute inédites, plus qu'il ne fabrique du langage *in abstracto*. À travers des oeuvres du répertoire traditionnel (Beethoven), ainsi que dans d'autres plus près de nous (Webern, Lachenmann), il fournit des exemples concrets de ce que pourrait être une écoute qui « ne se laisse pas assoupir par les rituels convenus ».

Hearing [Hören] is Defenseless— without Listening [Hören]

On Possibilities and Difficulties

Helmut Lachenmann

Translated from the German by Derrick Calandrella

For Clytus Gottwald

To speak about the possibilities and difficulties of listening would ultimately mean to speak about the inner and outer presuppositions of hearing; it would mean to philosophize about the conditions of being and consciousness¹. I do not feel entirely capable of this. But I have chosen this theme in order to react once and for all as composer to that well-known gap that seems to have opened up between the habits of listening as they dominate in the public music life of a music-loving society, and the ways that musicians have pursued them in this century since Schönberg and in his name.

I have in mind the gap between the amateur and the composer. The former loves music and practices it because of the power of expression manifest in the works of the tradition, because of the experiences of beauty rooted in the tonal-experiences in which the subject shines forth as emphatically exalted—while the latter responds to the tradition in the sense that he moves it forward rather than conserving such experiences. The composer neglects the *a priori* enjoyment of art as bourgeois service-industry because for him—both now and out of traditional obligation—music cannot just be a question of “saying” something (which would presuppose a coherent language), but is rather a question of making something—something that can be heard, experienced; something conscious. The composer attempts to broaden the experience of hearing rather than satisfy its expectations; he attempts to realize what has been the vocation of the human spirit, ever since it has had self-knowledge: to pass something on, to forge ahead into the unknown and in this way to experience itself.

1. [Ed. note] This essay, which began life as a lecture given in Stuttgart in 1985, was originally published in German as “Hören ist wehrlos — ohne Hören” in *MusikTexte*, no. 10, July 1985, p. 7-16. It was subsequently reprinted in the anthology of Lachenmann’s writings, *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung. Schriften 1966-1995*, J. Häusler (ed.), Wiesbaden, Breitkopf und Härtel, 1996, p. 116-135. It appeared in French translation in *Entretemps*, in April, 1986, and once again, with a revised translation in *L’écoute*, P. Szendy (ed.), Paris, IRCAM-Harmattan, 2000, p. 115-145. The present translation, the first in English, was commissioned especially for this issue of *Circuit*, and is printed with the kind permission of Breitkopf und Härtel, and Universal Edition for the excerpts from the music of Webern. It is difficult to translate the title into English, since, depending on the context, “Hören” can mean both “hearing” as well as “listening”. Rendering the title *Hearing is Defenseless — without Listening*, seemed the best way to capture Lachenmann’s meaning, even if it fails to capture the deliberately oxymoronic gesture of the original German title.

The gap was, in a sense, our destiny, ever since music in old Europe broke through the magical function in which it maintained itself in other cultures. With this, music made itself into an object of attention, of research, of progressive development, and thus into a mirror for progressively developing human possibilities in the domains of perception and sense impression.

As a result, music—which once existed in order to conjure up the powers latent in the human environment—was bound to adopt the course of the spiritual-historical development of the Christian West. This meant altering its approach and unfolding as a medium in which the subject just discovering itself could say “I” [*ich*]. Once there, music could not simply hold to this course but had to go beyond it by penetrating into unknown provinces of the ego [*ich*—into its “id.” We now see clearly that this way signaled the permanent disruption of the dominant visions of man and world always so futilely contrived in every era. We can also understand how this way would, in this century at the latest, come into conflict with a society that, although it has made a constitutional principle of the unimpeachable worth of the human being, finds itself on a case-by-case basis ready and willing, when coerced, to abuse this principle. We live in a society that has at its disposal only penal codes, “morals,” medicines and entertainment media as remedies for that other principle, that of Georg Büchner: “Man is an abyss; he leaves you reeling when you look down.” As long as we see behind Büchner’s insight only a disease to be eradicated and a distortion of the last coherent vision of the human being, the sheer instinct for self-preservation within our comfortable pieties will drive us to fend off such uncertainties.

It is a distinguishing characteristic of human behavior that, in the name of the values we hope to protect—values to which we lay an exclusive claim—we continually betray these same values. And beyond all more or less familiar threats, the very contradiction in the unimpeachable worth of the human being appears as the thing to be dispelled. Understanding music as the coherent reporting language of coherent human beings forcibly turns it into the parlor for a zeitgeist that is in essence totally uncertain; music becomes the pleasing carpet under which we sweep all the maladies, contradictions, superficialities and fears that, while produced by us, threaten us now more immediately than ever. Yet, society clings to a concept of music that it has derived and reinforced from a tradition which is for the most part idyllically abused.

Surely we have good reason for our fear and repression and desperate eloquence in the face of the all too perceptible speechlessness looming in our midst, a speechlessness linked to threats and fears that have come to defy our rational coping mechanisms. We would, incidentally, not be doing justice to this repression-strategy were we simply to brand it as a stubborn attempt to save face.

In reality we have all learned to dispel uncertainty by playing with it. We chase away our fear by frightening ourselves a little. The media’s skin-and-bones image

of a child dying in the Third World becomes an unconscious source of emotional edification, turning our sympathy and our sense of guilt into ersatz versions of themselves, and bearing the stamp of bourgeois virtue.

Even "New Music" has found its little niche in cultural life: as an official aesthetic challenge, as a popular roller-coaster ride. Its composer has become a celebrated, admirable and pitiful preacher in a desert of inconsolable dissonances. We view him as the occasional tourist-destination for those in need of frustration, and equally as the alibi for a tolerant intolerance.

Once incorporated in this manner, old and new music stand each in their own way. Music becomes the Walkman with which one hears and at the same time shuts one's ears. That one can hate music out of love for music is to be attributed to such an entanglement.

In thinking over this lecture, I perceive that I apparently return to the problem of hearing in seven-year cycles. Fourteen years ago, in 1971 at the Stuttgart theory conference during the time of the student protests, my thesis was called "Hearing [*Hören*] is Defenseless without Thinking." In 1978, seven years later, I reconnected with this and added: "Hearing [*Hören*] is also Defenseless without Feeling," and by describing the conditions of listening [*Hören*], tried to determine thinking and feeling as reciprocal conditions. Today, another seven years later, my trust in language is shattered—language too is often an obstruction to itself—and so I now say only: Hearing [*Hören*] is Defenseless—without Listening [*Hören*].

The immediate object of music is not the world, or the world's deterioration, which we may bemoan, laugh at, or respond to in some other rhetorical or emotional way. The object of music is listening, that is, perception perceiving itself. And only because this becoming sensible cannot succeed without a compositional-technical engagement with the facticity of the musical material does music, as product of such an engagement, depict the reality to which it reacts more precisely than any rhetorical effort could possibly manage.

However, the form of perceiving-listening does not offer itself up impartially; it must first be laid free. But laying-free means removing what is lying in the way, deactivating and locking out the dominating listening habits and listening categories preexisting in society. Listening is ultimately something other than the mere act of hearing contained in understanding. It means the capacity to hear differently, to discover in oneself new antennae, new sensors, new sensibilities; to discover one's own alterability and use it to resist the unfreedom which it uncovers. Listening means discovering oneself anew; it means changing oneself.

In overcoming the unfreedom of publicly predetermined listening it is therefore not a question of an excursion (or escape) into "new," "unfamiliar" sounds in the sense of new acoustical worlds, but of discovering new sensoria, a new sensibility in ourselves, or a newly changed perception. This new perception would be

open to contact with unfamiliar listening experiences: it rediscovers the intimately familiar, as something new, as a world that suddenly sounds unfamiliar.

In a situation where we all cling instinctively to the certain habits that represent for us security, home, such a breakthrough into a changed, changing hearing may even feel painful.

Think of the face of someone close to you, apparently familiar. Perhaps only an injury or estrangement of some sort would allow you to see this face as it really is; not just to look at it, but to perceive the actual structure of the physiognomy, the landscape of this face with its blemishes and refinements. It might take as much to perceive it anew, and thereby renew one's proper relation to this face, to this human being.

Where perception thus penetrates into the structure of the familiar, the familiar becomes foreign once again. As the perceiver radically renews his relation to what was previously familiar, he himself changes; he perceives his propensity and his capacity to recognize this and break through. The perceiver reemerges foreign to himself, returns as an adventure to himself, full of new possibilities and surprises.

Therefore listening also means drawing new hope from the creativity one discovers in oneself. Ultimately, that abyss that leaves one reeling is portrayed not only by Georg Büchner as a source of fear, but also by another poet, Paul Gerhard—in his familiar Christmas song—as a source of hope; and both visions belong together.²

In practice this listening implies mental concentration, i.e., work. Yet work as an experience of penetrating into the world, as progressive experience of self, is a pleasurable experience.

The key concept of such listening is called "structure".

However, as structural experience listening orients itself not only positivistically to the composition of the sounding object, but refines itself by ordering this object in its environment. The perception of the thing sounding grows simultaneously more narrow and more broad through the relations that unfold between the thing and its nearer and farther environment in time and space. In other words, listening simultaneously perceives—consciously and unconsciously—connections pertaining to the thing sounding, connections in which these relations originate, in which they now consist and from which every sounding moment is newly illuminated.

When in the first phrase of Beethoven's harp quartet we hear the beginning of the allegro which follows the slow introduction, we recognize an opening which is typical of Viennese classicism: an opening chord, accented through double-stops, an ascending arpeggiated triad figure which moves from tonic to dominant, accompanied by repeated chords (Fig. 1, A).

2. [Ed. note] "I contemplate you with joy — oh how I wish that my spirit were an abyss and my soul a deep sea, that I could kiss you."

The image displays a page of musical notation for Ludwig van Beethoven's String Quartet No. 10, Op. 76, "Harp". The score is arranged in two systems of five staves each. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, dynamics (e.g., *f*, *sf*, *piu p*), articulation (e.g., *arco*, *pizz.*), and performance instructions (e.g., *etc.*, *cresc.*). Measure numbers are indicated at the beginning of several staves: T. 25, T. 35, T. 43, T. 52, T. 62, T. 70, T. 74, T. 78, T. 88, T. 93, T. 96, T. 109, T. 119, T. 125, T. 125, T. 169, T. 221, T. 225, T. 227, T. 229, T. 240, and T. 246. Circled letters (A, B, C, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, R, S, U, V, W, X, Y, Z) are placed above specific measures, likely serving as section markers. The notation is in a common time signature and features a variety of rhythmic patterns and textures.

Figure 1:
Ludwig van Beethoven,
String Quartet No. 10,
Op. 76 ("Harp")

In what follows, however, this opening chord proves to be—for those not lulled to sleep by the common rituals of the sonata form—the first member of a chain of major chords again accented by double-stops and again arranged in an upward sequence. The obligatory half-cadence before the second theme is marked a whole note higher than the F-major chord (B). And the development begins with a G-major chord (C). The half-cadence before the return of the second theme in the recapitulation is logically B-flat major (D). The coda, however, begins with an accented chord played under a C in the melody (E), in which the deviation from the previous major character to the diminished seventh does not confuse me at all as far as the continuity is concerned. It must be viewed as a way to transcend the material, before it concludes the chain with the highest chord on the tonic, i.e., another major triad on the tonic (F).

The variants of the repeated chords (G) are equally distributed, as a projection over the entire piece. Immediately after the formulation of the main theme we find them in eighth notes, while at the same time there is a diminution of the broken-chord figure, occurring as a harmonic sequence (H, I). In the course of the exposition we encounter still other variants (K): at measure 70 we find a combination of the repeated figure and thirds, which amalgamate into a single motif (L); then, at the end of the exposition we find various augmentations, in half-notes and whole notes (M).

In the development we even encounter this repetition type in sixteenth notes (N). To continue to increase the density still further does not seem possible in this stylistic context. Instead, the sixteenth-note movement is subjected to an intense stratification of quantities: half notes are delimited by means of the accents (*sforzandi*), quarter notes by means of pitch changing (O). This stratification of quantities is then taken even further, when pitch begins to change with every eighth note (P), and finally the pitch changes with every sixteenth note, (Q), just like before in the earlier quantizing—as back-and-forth movement between notes in the second interval. As a result there emerges in this stage a static composition practically flickering in sixteenth notes (Q). A real continuation of such intensification is not possible. But it is now clear that in the subsequent rigid, or better, *stiff* thirds that follow, this flickering continues to mount and this triad is at once its culmination and its negation [*Aufhebung*] (R).

It now flickers in the micro-temporal realm, which continues for the perception explicitly mediated by this effect. This offers a further example of how a type projected into the total form—the repetition-type—transcends. Both sounds, the diminished chord and the triad, are by no means new sounds; yet the aspect that they respectively represent within this piece lends them not only a singular significance. They become absolutely new perceptual objects: old as they are, we hear them anew.

The different variants of this broken triad (Measure 25, S) work much more surreptitiously in the exposition (T, U, V) and in the development (W). But within that

interval of a third that continues to flicker in the imagination—which for its part represents the first member of a tremendously augmented arpeggiated triad (X)—there now gather the arpeggio variants (Y) that gave the harp quartet its title. These gather in ever diminished durations—quarter notes, quarter-note triplets, eighth notes, eighth-note triplets—wherein every more or less involuntary change in manner of playing, from pizzicato to arco staccato, makes the arco variety seem like an outright tonal alienation of the less familiar variety. It makes it seem like “bad” or “handicapped” pizzicato, which in its own way brings to light the sound as subject of bodily experience.

However, in the coda, resolved with the diminished seventh chord of which I spoke above, the broken triad figure is entirely transformed into a sixteenth-note form (Z), out of which its arpeggio-form then completely unfolds and changes definitively: into a figural work—completely familiar otherwise— that here, as a result of such a transformation, offers a wholly new way of perceiving.

Here I have only roughly pursued in their projection three elements that one might single out as formal constituents in this piece. But this reveals how what are apparently mere mannerisms, or in any case familiar moves, not only take on new significance as an aggregate situation of subordinate tonal categories, but make possible the very forms of their perception.

In this respect the works of our tradition hold in store as of yet unbelievable secrets for our perception.

Each of the three elements described here has its own arrangement and projection of its variants within the total form. At the same time, all three continually work together in different ways.

So I shall insist upon this formula: structure is a framework of arrangements in which each of these arrangements represents the temporal projection of a tonal aspect. In other words, they represent the mean variation of characteristic and in part vastly distinct variants of a tonal character.

In the second example, Anton Webern’s fourth piece from the *Five Orchestra Pieces*, Op. 10, we find ourselves left with the mere ruins of the traditional linguistic context (Fig. 2).

However, the field of ruins proves to be a highly differentiated field of force: the six-note mandolin figure at the beginning (a) corresponds on the other end to a five-note violin melody already rhythmically softened and no longer clearly anchored in the meter (b). In between there is a four-note trumpet figure (c) and a two-note trombone element. The extreme case, still to come, of a melody made of a *single* note lies in the viola part at the beginning. The expressive articulation (*cresc./dim.*) points clearly to the way these fit together.

Yet this single viola note also constitutes the extreme null point with respect to the internal rhythmic articulation. In this regard both clarinet entries are more lively

Fließend. äußerst zart (♩ = ca 60)

g rit. - - tempo

f rit. - - tempo

Kl. in B

Trp. in B
m. Dpf.

Pos.
m. Dpf.

c dolce

d sehr gebunden

Mand.

a dolce Zeit lassen

b

Cel.

l

Hrf.

m

i

kl. Tr.

k

Fließend. äußerst zart (♩ = ca 60)

rit. - - tempo

e

b wie ein Hauch

Solo-Gg.
m. Dpf.

Solo-Br.
m. Dpf.

Figure 2:
**Anton Webern: No 4 from
 5 Pieces for Orchestra, Op.10**
 © 1923 by Universal Edition
 A.G., Wien/PH449/UE5967

variants: the held note resolved in a trill (f); the earlier syncopated, regularly animated note sounded six times (g); and finally (after a variant once bowed and twice blown in the scale of the rhythmic tenuto), at the end of the piece, the mandolin note plucked seven times presents a combination formed of two different regularities—in eighth notes and eighth-note triplets (h).

Without the mediation of this mandolin figure, set to what is already a somewhat irregular rhythm, it would no longer be so easy to consider the remaining and even more roughly rhythmic note repetitions in the snare drum, harp and celesta as members of the same family. And it would seem a good idea again to layer the further irregularities backwards starting with the mandolin figure. Then the harp, with its five notes in all kinds of different intervals, presumably presents itself with the greatest degree of irregularity (i), followed by the drum, with 3 irregular strokes (k); and now not only the celesta, with its twice-sounded interval of a second, falls right into place, but the harp as well, with its single, simply plucked triad at the other the end of this scale (m). At the beginning the harp contrasts in full immediacy with its antipode—the held viola note.

However, it is precisely this last group of notes which makes clear in still other ways how context can newly determine the perception of familiar sounds. This happens because the apparently foreign body that is the snare drum (k) is not only mediately embedded as rhythmic figure, but the celesta entry (l)—with the latter not so much punched as struck—connects with it as limit case of noise in this piece; and then connects again the harp impulse, plucked in a manner both harsh and muffled i.e., flageoletto (i); and finally there is the normally-played, plucked mandolin (h).

In such mutual mediation within such a small space one instrumental sound works as the estrangement of the other: the harsh impulses of the beginning melody are answered by the still relatively violent trumpet blast, and, at the end, the softly played violin melody. The trombone comes across as an estranged trumpet; the harp sounds like a mandolin turned almost glass-like, etc. Everything is familiar and at the same time new, thanks to these overlapping projections, i.e., thanks to the form.

At the same time, the whole thing is nothing but a serenade beneath the moonlight of the flageoletto sound, with notes carried over on the wind, from whence the beautiful trumpets blow and the trombone answers with the promise of death. Then the martial drum calls for taps, disturbing the idyll, and the lover takes off with the mandolin still chirping away under his arm, while the beloved winks back at him with a violin figure.

As listeners we have no time to give ourselves over to this idyll, as would be possible in, say, Mahler, to whom the vocabulary of my interpretation may be due. What we have here is Mahler in bird's-eye view, radically reduced to the slightest signal, prescribed like a deflated balloon to be blown up at home. So we see that

the music of Webern is presumably as dimensionally vast in inner experience as the symphonic world of Gustav Mahler, that is to say, infinite.

Yet what is decisive is not the intellectual reconstruction of the idyll but instead its simultaneous refusal as comfortable pleasure. In any case, it is important to concentrate on the structural situation. Here lie both things: wistfulness, refusal, and the strength for new expression that—this too—Webern does not fail to deliver. Webern's piece is, like every conclusive work, not only a single self-contained sound structure [*Klangstruktur*] (a designation that might actually incite or condemn spirit to an intellectual report on the perceived); but to me it would be just as accurate, just as pleasing to designate such a total experience as a structure-sound [*Strukturklang*]. This way we get a sense for the sonorous-expressive unity, and in such a total experience the intuition can play a dominant role.

In such an experience the experience of form is just as inseparable from the experience of the subordinating sound-character (what pop musicians would simply call the "sound"); in other words, construction is just as inseparable from expression, in the way that, in listening, intellect is inseparable from intuition. The one spurs on the other.

This term "structure-sound [*Strukturklang*]", which I—in a conversion of the word "sound-structure [*Klangstruktur*]"—have introduced here relies upon a conception of sound that, precisely as a multi-dimensional structure of orderings, is not rapidly conveyed as a flat acoustical stimulus. It only opens out gradually through a multi-layered, multi-significant process of feeling out a transient construction, with its characteristic, self-referential sound components.

For me, the most helpful designation for such a form of structural experience is that of the "arpeggio." Imagine a harpist playing an arpeggio, i.e., a sequence of individual notes in which he equally displays himself. As he glides over all the strings from top to bottom (which is technically a glissando, although it corresponds to a scale arpeggio) he also displays his instrument, its sound. In just this way one might convey a musical work as sound-structure and equally as structure-sound, through a kind of giant arpeggio played on that imaginary sound-form-instrument built specially by the composer. Every single string on this imaginary harp would be not just specially chosen by the composer, but newly produced as a more or less complex formation of the available means. But even the ordering of the strings would be an essential part of this construction. Perhaps many of these imaginary strings would consist, for their part, of little sub-instruments, practically of string bundles. From characteristic kinds of kinship between particular strings at smaller or larger intervals would result the most different kinds of links forged within the arpeggio.

And this feeling-out procedure not only conveys the structure of the instrument, but indirectly that of the instrument builder and instrumentalist as well. It presents the structure of the composer himself.

I would like to maintain this model of structure as a polyphony of orderings, orderings that are felt through perception, and also experienced as expression and structural/sound idea.

Take structure as a polyphony of orderings. At the basis of every such ordering lies a scale of sounding events felt out in some way or another. These are events that despite all difference between them are nonetheless mutually bound to a single character, a sound idea that links them. Such an idea is, accordingly, not discernible without further ado in an individual event, just as little as a single member of a family would suffice to represent the family to which he belongs.

(Could it be that at this moment he isn't representing his family at all, but perhaps his nation, his race, his club? Only in a gradual amalgamation do his particular role and significance become more precise, more complete.)

Another helpful image, after the "harp" and "family", would be that of an imaginary organ, since here one can imagine those polyphonically overlapping families as separate manuals with respective scales that are entirely typical.

This interaction of manuals can be demonstrated in a section from my percussion concerto *Air*. The total aspect, the idea that operates throughout the entire work and orders all manuals to one another, appears within the title: "air" is a sung tune, a song form; "air" is a popular piece by Bach. But "air" also means simply air, referring to the musician's act of blowing. In traditional music this is supposed to remain hidden from the hearer in order to have a nice tone. *Air* reverses the usual relationship between action and sound-result while simultaneously enlarging this. To be sure, the action serves a very precisely designated sound representation, but it doesn't disappear behind this. The acoustic result draws attention to the fundamental action through its particular kind of corporeality. At the same time it makes conscious the mechanical and energetic conditions under which the sound structure was achieved. The violin note gives no information about its consonant or dissonant significance, but it indicates what is happening there; it shows how, under very particular conditions of pressure, the bow moves across a string of a particular material constitution and at a very particular height between bridge and fingerboard. This is how it "bows."

The piece borrows this conception of hearing from the prosaic context of the everyday, where we knock on things in order to test their material constitution by the resulting sound (thus not in order to enjoy the sound), and where the soft crunch of a snail crushed underfoot startles us more than the roar of a jet engine.

Following the technique of *musique concrète*, which records on tape such everyday noises and uses them in musical collages—and in view of the fact that for me such processes take place in real instrumental action—I have called such music "*musique concrète instrumentale*". Of course unconventional, often radically modified instrumental techniques come into play here. The normal way of playing is

also included as a special case, but in a context totally different from the original. The pure tone, now living in tonal exile, has in this new context no aesthetic advantage over pure noise.

Air, written in 1969—and thus at the time of the student protests—as an example of aesthetic refusal and protest against an established orchestral entertainment industry, was a piece welcomed by some, severely attacked by others, but basically interpreted one-sidedly by both sides. For me it primarily offered an exciting adventure in hearing, with sound relationships that had hardly been explored. It was all the more exciting insofar as this adventure did not take place in the exotic other-world of electronic sounds but in the familiar symphonic apparatus, in the lion's den, so to speak.

My diagram (Fig. 3) consists of three lines above which a kind of rhythmic border, a "time network," indicates the total rhythmic articulation that results from the stratifications given below. This serves to indicate, as it were, the rhythm of the "arpeggio" throughout the entire complicated "harp." In the first line, the manuals (or families) 1 to 4 b overlap, namely a sequence of whisking sounds on skin instruments, and a sequence of more complex rhythms made by whips snapping in the air, concluding with a broad *ritardando* into the inaudible. There is a third short sequence that consists of a rhythmic structure of blown gueros; and finally, from the middle of this part through the end, a sequence of more or less tonelessly blown combinations on flutes or brass instruments.

The overlapping families 5 through 9 in the following section are bound in part by a more violent gesture. This includes the ordering of whip cracks (precisely those that were previously snapped in the air) in the fifth family; a further group of little rhythms from a variable number of strings pressed hard beneath the bow; a sequence of cracks by the lion's roar (the lion's roar is a small skin instrument with one end of a string attached to the middle of the skin, the other wrapped around an extended neck, such that rubbing in the neck is transmitted and amplified to the skin). All these so-called violent actions appear simultaneously as smothered actions: where the string is pressed hard, there's no more back-and-forth after the first stroke. The subsequent silence represents the silence of reserve. The only entry that consciously deviates in this respect is the almost breathing entry tapped on the soundboard of the reverberating harp (9).

These violent procedures find their counterpoint in non-violent reminiscences where, for example, the toneless skin-whisking gesture continues (8), or the ricocheted bow *col legno* (6 a).

The following fermata, as gathering point for so much smothered silence, is of course full of music, full of negative reverberation. As the silence of the "black hole" this suggests a silence different from the inaudible repercussion at the end of the first section.

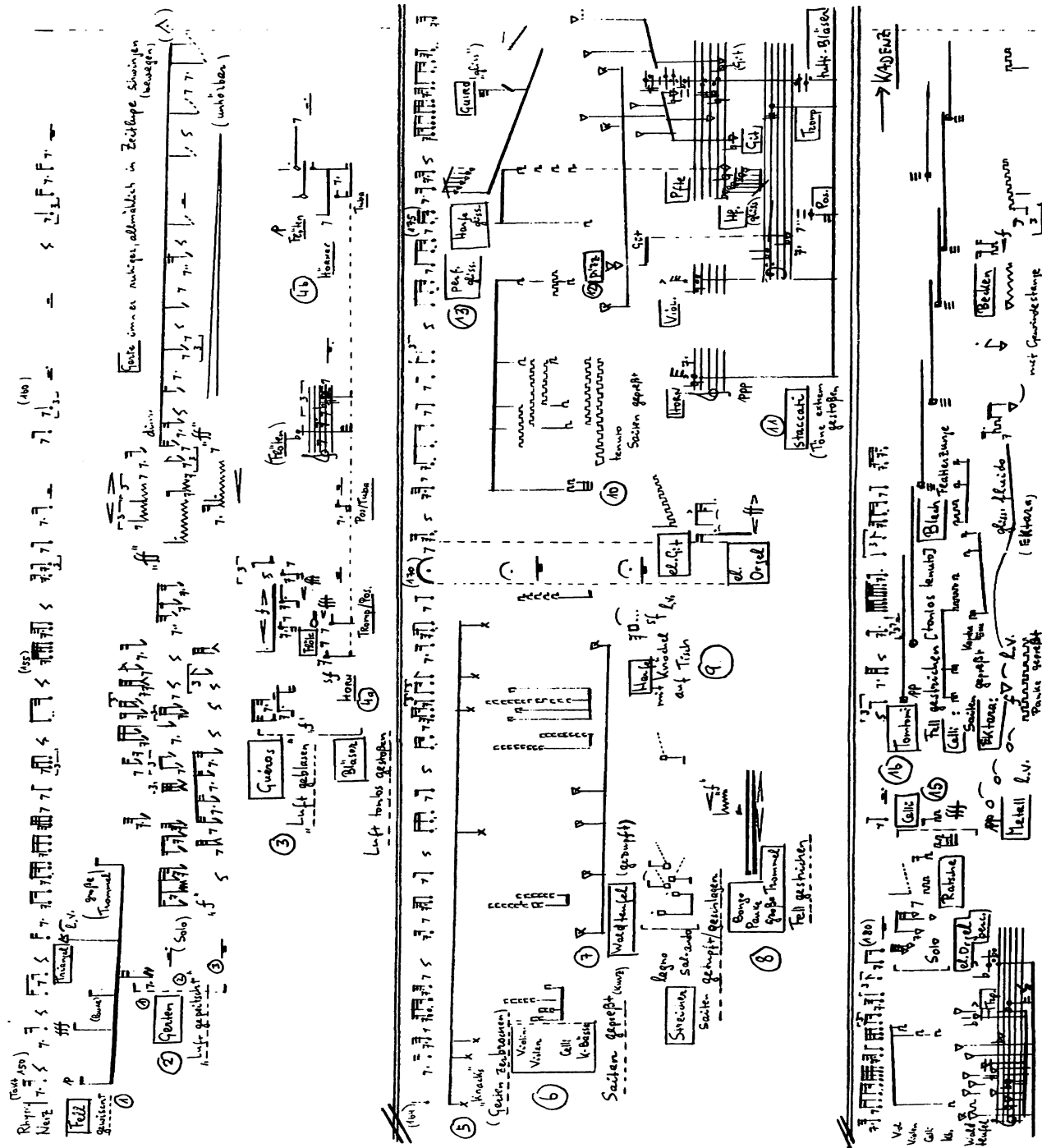


Figure 3:
 Helmut Lachenmann,
 Air, mm. 150-188,
 schema

The further overlapping groupings are more laborious to describe. In response to the tension of the violently smothered silence, we encounter the most mechanically effortless and tensionless form of crescendo blending—through electronic organ and electric guitar—where the wattage takes away the physical exertion of human beings. The seventh group, i.e., the lion's roar sequence, continues in group 10 beyond the fermata in three further entries: the hard-pressed string accents combined with held, almost perforated tenuto-action of the bow take up the tenuto sound of the guitar stroked above the neck.

Group 11 forms a sequence of accumulating blown note-thrusts, beginning with the high F in the horn and continuing in further staccato entries in the winds, whose naturally compressed entries—particularly in the brass—have an effect no more or less foreign than the neighboring sounds in the strings. Within group 12 we ultimately encounter natural and unnatural pizzicati as different as those behind the violin bridge, on harp and guitar—with strings both smothered and open—on the piano strings, and even on the strings of the lion's roar described earlier. Finally there is also the soloist's instrument, the *ektara*, on which the soloist begins his solo cadence.

I will simply mention the other groups, without being able to comment further on their supplementary role in the scheme of sound and form. These are, for instance, the especially rough perforations in the connections of *guero*, smothered guitar played in arpeggio and rattle; then the A-strings of the cellos are rubbed by separated bowhairs; and finally the contrast in form of a last reminiscence stroked on the skins, and of the toneless flutter tongue in the horns, trumpets and trombones (16). Everything described here is a form and at the same time a sound; a structure and at the same time a particle in the total sound, in the total form.

The following example presents another kind of listening experience with material comparable to *Air* at its center. This is *Fassade*, an orchestral work from 1973 which I call a secret march insofar as the time network spanning all the parts has a march-like, metrically simplified rhythm. In the course of the form this rhythm comes across as in part radically dilated and in part radically compressed.

In this time network there are now sound fields inserted in between. Since these sound fields are once again components of overlapping orderings, the march-like effect is partly lost in favor of the polyphonic sound relations that it communicates. Yet the march rhythm continues its effect as a secret pulse.

The more broadly this subordinating march rhythm dilates—i.e., the broader the mesh of the time network becomes—the more intensively the ear penetrates into the more or less rough structures in the interior. As a result it perceives processes that, as the natural rawness of sound surfaces, are not so much integrated but made visible. The extreme case of this appears in the fermata at the beginning of section 4. We hear a taped rustling lasting at first 140 then 90 seconds, the choppy character of which is now suddenly a part of a perception, which is heightened here

by other structures. Meanwhile the second track, which records a kind of family idyll, is transmitting children's laughter, shrieks, etc. Corresponding to this at the other extreme, we hear the dominant rhythm of jagged sixteenth-notes becoming radically denser.

The most diverse groups, families and manuals between which the sixteenth-note movement leaps along, remain clearly defined in this final part. It is full of so-called tutti-variants—all piccoli, all keyboards, all high instruments, all xylophones, all (two) taped bands; in brief, all elements organized with respect to a quality, which can also mean all electric organs, though in this case there is only one.

Not only is it not possible to penetrate into the individual brief sound, but the ear can hardly (if at all) distinguish these strokes following one another in such rapid succession. It can only try in the pauses between the groups to form a differentiated tableau of what has happened. The ear is practically "blinded" because of tempi, mass and volume. Both extreme cases—that of the fermata i.e., a time value that is much too long, and that of the all-too-dense sequence of almost simultaneous events—communicate a structure experience more hallucinatory than real.

The two last examples are from my *Tanzsuite mit Deutschlandlied* [*Dance Suite with German National Anthem*].

The time network I described in the previous example as subordinating rhythm (arpeggio structure) is here governed by rhythmic formations we can recognize as the skeleton of familiar, comfortable experience:

In the first part, the *Introduction* (Fig. 5), this results from the very gesture of the German national anthem itself. The anthem emerges through a temporally exaggerated projection onto the keyboard of an imaginary string instrument, on which pizzicato entries are strictly paired with either stark compressions or pizzicato double-stops behind the bridge (Rows 2 and 3). The fixed tone here forms a kind of coloration of the estranged, "concrete" sounds or noises. While the first lines play on this imaginary instrument, the instrument is not only twice transposed—as if one were playing the instrument while detuning it, whereby, incidentally, one could not even get one's bearings from the octaves—but we hear a dismantling of the "instrument" itself: the previously dominating noise portion which clouded the anthem dwindles to a mere tapping on the finger board. This renders the anthem recognizable, unless the overlapping of the first lines with their repetition have so much distracted perception in the punctual-structural scheme that it doesn't even pay attention to the citation.

The overlapping second line seems even more exaggerated on a second imaginary keyboard of pizzicato tetrachords (Row 1). Its graduated scale consists of intervals that increase as one descends, reshaping the original scale of pitches by almost denting them in keeping with the anthem. This repetition line outlasts the first one, but the second imaginary instrument falls apart as well, and the conclusion of

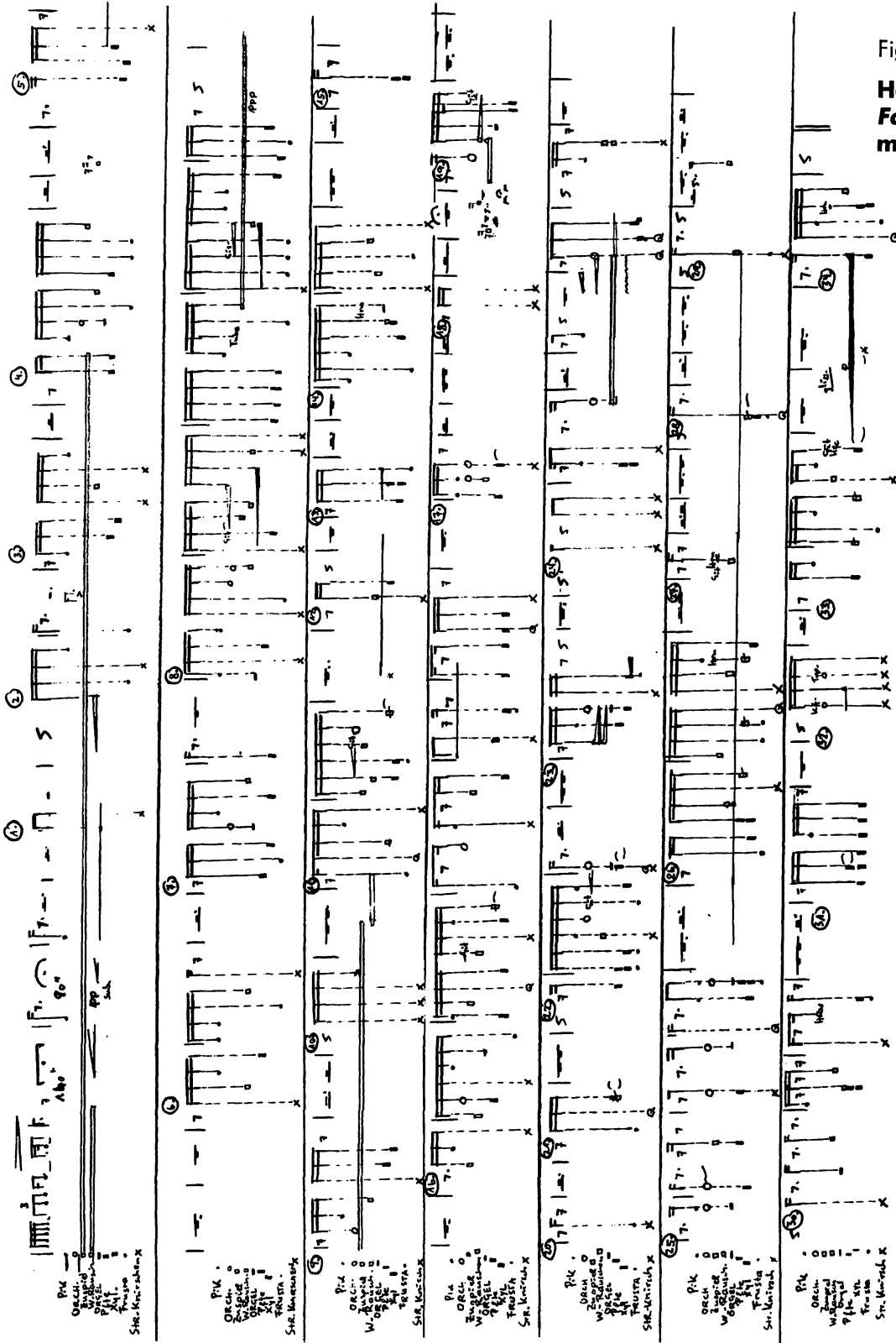


Figure 4:

Helmut Lachenmann,
Fassade, closing section,
mm. 219-325, schema

the first half of the hymn—which closes on a dominant—opens out into a toneless chord progression ad infinitum. The progression finally stops at an ostinato before everything starts to shake again, almost explosively spitting forth the second part (“*Von der Maas bis an die Memel*”) in a rhythm familiar to anyone who attends soccer matches in stadiums, and leading into the waltz (Fig. 6).

Since, as I said, I am more interested in doing something than saying something, the question as to whether everyone recognizes the German national anthem is not so important. More important is the fact that here a structure borrows its time- and sound-network from a structure like the anthem deeply rooted within us—a structure that contains no less logic than the serial principle. The result appears as complicated as any other pure structure; it is a landscape of impulse in which one can lose oneself in listening yet in which one feels oneself drawn along by the formal principle. This formal principle, with all the breeches and breaks, is that of the German national anthem. As a result we experience, however unconsciously, a reunion.

Finally, in the last example—the *Siciliano*—we hear a time-network newly determined by the familiar, i.e., by the *Siciliano*-rhythm and its manifold variants. The classification of the material according to its method of sound-production is insufficient, because “struck” or “pressed” can describe extremely varied results; such information does not adequately describe what are here the fundamental experiential categories. For example, the vertical combination of the categories beneath one another is at least as important; and the manner in which they draw together into more or less plastic rhythmic figures is most important of all. Accordingly, one projection (a “family” if you wish) goes straight through all the different manners of performance, one made of strictly delimited rhythms, e.g., the punctuated *Siciliano* rhythm, scraped on a single cymbal in measures 73, 76, 81, 92. Elsewhere we hear this played as pizzicato group or figure in smothered strokes (measure 70), but played in the second part of the *Siciliano* arco by violin as a part of the Bach citation from the pastoral music in the Christmas Oratorio (measures 104ff), up to the stifled piano solo dominant in the fourth part (measures 118ff).

Corresponding to such “closed” rhythms we have, on the one hand, other less closed figures, i.e., those shared among different instruments playing in alternation. On the other hand these rhythms find their counterpoint in the however “equivalent” periodic figures, and finally in held, static actions that sound like little, temporary fermata.

In the second stage, from measure 101, the whole crystallizes into a gestured shadow of the familiar pastoral music already mentioned. To quote Wilhelm Busch (and this holds equally for the German national anthem citation mentioned above), “Here one can still see them, finely ground and in pieces, whenever one consumes Master Müller’s poultry.”³

In the third section, measure 110, the material restricts itself to the string sound, in which the bracketing-out of wind and percussion first renders effective the inner

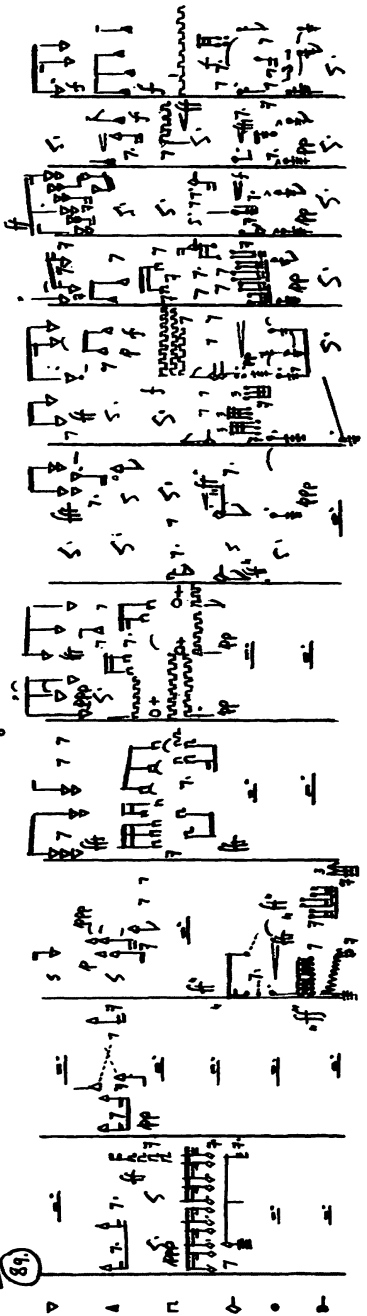
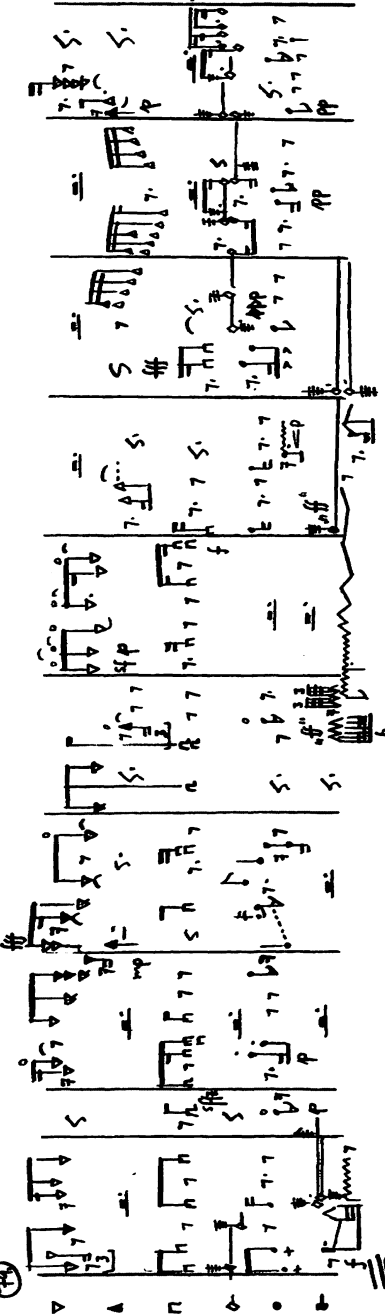
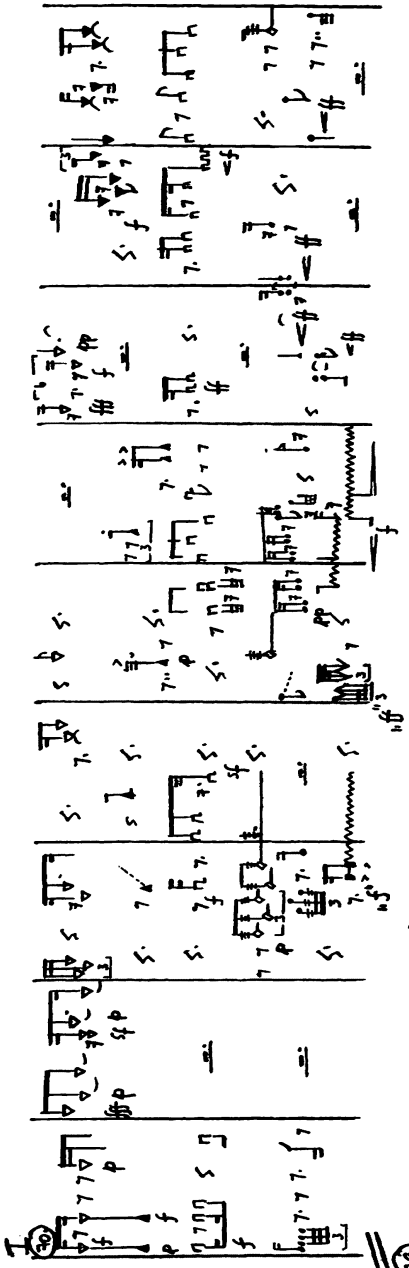
3. [Ed. note] A reference to an episode in the comic strip *Max und Moritz* composed by the German poet and illustrator Wilhelm Busch (1832-1908), very familiar to German readers. The episode in question can be viewed here:

http://www.spieler-internet.de/www.wilhelm-busch.de/geschichten/max_und_moritz/max07.php. In this macabre comic strip, the two boys, Max and Moritz, are inserted into a food processor and fed to ducks, who are in turn fattened and sold by the butcher Meister Müller. This passage was omitted in the published French version of this text (L’Harmattan 2000), no doubt because of the unfamiliarity of French audiences with Busch. Circuit has decided to restore the passage, since it engages with the ostensibly amoral universe of Georg Büchner, whose spectre is evoked at the beginning of this essay.

Handwritten musical score for vocal parts and piano accompaniment. The vocal parts are labeled with the lyrics: "VON DER MAAS BIS AN DIE ME- MEL". The piano part includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *f*, *ff*, and *fff*. There are also performance instructions like "Dorne. Stoe." and "i = 1/80".

Handwritten musical score for instrumental parts. The parts are labeled: "I. Viol.", "II. Viol.", "Hörner", "Solo-Viella", and "Fells". The score includes dynamic markings like *ff* and *fff*. There are also circled numbers "023" and "025" and a circled "15" at the beginning of the section.

Figure 6:
Helmut Lachenmann,
Tanzsuite mit
Deutschlandlied,
 introduction, mm. 17-25



The image shows a handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Siciliano" from "Tanzsuite mit Deutschlandlied" by Helmut Lachenmann. The score is written on ten staves. The first staff is labeled "BACH-HARTMANSINFONIE". The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "ff" and "p". The score is divided into measures labeled "a" through "q". There are also some circled numbers like "100", "101", "102", "103", and "104" at the beginning of some staves. The notation is dense and includes many slurs and accents.

Figure 7:
Helmut Lachenmann,
Siciliano from Tanzsuite
mit Deutschlandlied,
 diagram

richness, as within the pizzicato-landscape (dampened, flageoletto, glissando, as double-stop behind the bridge, as harp sound, etc.). Only two foreign bodies remain: the scratching marimba and the highest possible minor second on the piano, dampened. And the latter becomes central in the fourth section (measure 118) as the music is reduced to this, and the insertions of the soloists and rubbed marimba provide occasional counterpoint. In this total narrowing to the high-pitched piano sound, a highly differentiated perception world opens anew, through different accentuations of the same note and through its being simultaneously dampened and pedaled, with layered echo-nuances—something one cannot simply “compose,” but the experience of which one must first release through locking out and muffling away what lies on top.

Ultimately these sequential sections of “Sicilianos” increasingly narrow the material, while broadening the experience of differentiation. He who in the manifold of a landscape looks at a single tree sees a new endless “landscape” within it, and when he then narrows his field of vision to the consideration of a single leaf, he encounters once again new horizons of both seeing and thinking. One perspective allows another to appear in a new and mysterious light.

In what follows (not reproduced here) hoarseness [*Heiserkeit*] finds its way back to cheerfulness [*Heiserkeit*]; the music dares a little dance, but its vehicle—the Siciliano rhythm—falls apart and crumbles into the 4/4 time of the following *Capriccio*, where that projection continues to a point in which an overabundance of colours results in a shade of gray, as determined by the dialectic of hearing-extension through material restriction.

As for the possibilities and difficulties of listening, I haven’t kept to the theme, but this theme won’t keep to me either. It will confront us anew with every new work and with every traditional work as well; and it will challenge us anew with every new music movement.

This paradox—a leap out into the open by penetrating into the lion’s den, the den of one’s own socialized and imprisoned self—may be my own private problem; but this problem serves as an exemplary site from which to become aware of how difficulties and possibilities of listening belong together. These are, after all, difficulties and possibilities of thinking, of feeling, of knowing, of communicating in every domain.

A key to this penetration into what is both familiar and renewed as unfamiliar seems to me to lie precisely in the idea of structure-thought, as I have schematized and (perhaps in a one-sided portrayal) developed it here.

The major insights lie in considering music as framework of orderings; as an arpeggio on an imaginary instrument, in which sound and form emerge together, and newly determine one another; as a landscape that is left to us to feel out through perception. In this landscape we simultaneously recognize the orderings

already governing us as suspended, as broken through, as susceptible of overcoming, and we reconcile ourselves with them in the spirit of our newfound freedom, without subjecting ourselves to them anew.

The single, sounding moment laid free for perception through this structural breach proves mysteriously sufficient. It is itself a structure and proves to be, for its part, composed of structures; it is the product of structures working in the background that have released it. And as component of a work-structure, it remains ambivalent, as transformed object, as report from these structures in which it once originated. These are all realities to whose presence we, in hearing, react either consciously or unconsciously through our sensibility. I mean, there is in this sense no music that is not immediately "understood."

My definition of beauty as "refusal of habit" may certainly appear all the more provocative in that it precisely does not, in a moralistic, Calvinistic, or masochistic way, do away with the notion of beauty, but on the contrary considers it with all its virtues of purity, clarity, intensity, richness and humanity. Yet I consider this at a time when certain self-designated protectors of Western culture think these virtues need to be changed, simply because they're tired of the whole thing.

So in the end it is not about listening to a kind of music that laments the sorry course of world events through scratching sounds; but neither is it about music that flees before this world into some kind of sound-exoticism. I am concerned with music in which our perception becomes sensible and attentive on the basis of itself, of its own structuredness; music in which perception attempts to make the perceiving spirit conscious of the structures outside and within us, the very structures to which such musical composition is a reaction.

So in the end it is music that gives itself over to the adventure of once again grasping the concept of beauty under changed, speechless conditions, and in the well-known hope that what comes from the heart, though it may remain unspoken, returns to the heart.

Original German text

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