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## **The Future of Historicized, Nonrepresentational New Music**

### ***Keynote Lecture***

### ***New Tendencies of Contemporary Music in Germany***

### ***Harvard University Department of Music***

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In discussing new tendencies of contemporary music in Germany, many primary considerations came to mind.<sup>1</sup> Having studied in Germany in the 1990s and having a constant spiritual, linguistic and, last but not least, occupational relationship with Germany, both as a reality and, equally importantly, as a concept, I feel the need to first contextualize my perception of the topic at hand.

My perspective about German cultural developments is one of an outsider, who has lived in Germany and continues to have cultural ties to the country. Simultaneously, in the last twenty-five years, I have regularly travelled between Germany, Hungary and the U.S., in addition, in the last thirteen years, Canada, and Israel. This has given me a perspective about interconnections between and developments within these countries in the cultural, political and historical realms.

Today, in a globalized, technologically ever advancing world, one can ask: what is Germany? Where is the German soul found today? Just as the creation of the idea of Germany was an artificial group of states that were adjoined, divided and adjoined again in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we might imagine that this idea of Germany as going not only beyond these borders but into areas of the portable and the virtual. Heine's description of the Bible being a "portatives Vaterland"<sup>2</sup> - a portable home - for a post-second-temple Jewish society, finds its equivalent for the German spirit, as found in its music, literature, philosophy and way of thinking, often existing outside of Germany, as a intellectual stance toward the world, a wound, or remembrance about something that once was and still could be. Germany, by historical default, is attached to a *conceptual* approach to its culture and is portable, transferable, mutable and to be constantly discovered anew.

### **Americanization**

In the last quarter century, Germany has unified, changed, gone through a series of crises, and struggled to reinvent itself.<sup>3</sup> In this time, Germany has grappled with, questioned and,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a keynote address given at the conference *New Perspectives on Contemporary Music in Germany* at the Harvard University Department of Music on March 31, 2016. Parts of this text have been presented in "Crowns" published in *Kunstmusik* 9, (Fall 2007), pp. 2-8. and in "Existenz und Ablenkung" in *Musik und Ästhetik* 19, No. 73 (2015), pp. 95-99.

<sup>2</sup> Heinrich Heine, "Geständnisse," in *Sämtliche Werke*, Vol. 7 (Stuttgart: J. G. Cotta, 1887-1888), p. 47.

<sup>3</sup> During this time, Germany has gone through tumultuous political changes. After the euphoria of post-unification, the country has grappled with the rise of rightwing movements, debates about citizenship, immigration, the modification of the right to asylum (Article 16a, the right to asylum, of the *German Constitution* or *Grundgesetz*), the debates about Holocaust remembrance, as exemplified in the lengthy public discussion about the Berlin Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe. Within this time period,

in the end, embraced, for lack of a better word, an “Americanization” of the German cultural realm.<sup>4</sup> While Germany was “occupied” by the U.S. after the Second World War, cultural consequences of this “occupation” only came to full fruition in Germany after the fall of the so-called German Democratic Republic in 1989.<sup>5</sup> After the Berlin wall came down, a united Germany was able to become a major economic force on the world stage, with Western Germany assisting in “rebuilding” a capitalist economy in the east.<sup>6</sup> Germany was not only able to become a hegemonic power in the new framework of the European Union, it was also able to transmit the idea of a new and improved version of “German culture” within and beyond its borders.<sup>7</sup> While such a “German Culture 2.0” would retain strong connections to the German nation state – especially as the state still supplied arts funding – the new face of this seemingly internationalist, cosmopolitan and, lastly, if not always explicitly, “consumption” model for culture would become increasingly based on an idea of popular culture first propagated by the American “occupation,” and now fully integrated into the DNA of the German psyche.<sup>8</sup> The cultivation of this new understanding of German culture was connected to the economic development of the country and its expanding political role within the EU and the world.

These economic, political and cultural developments have had ramifications for the development of contemporary music in Germany. In recent years, a younger generation of German composers, many of whom studied with West German composition teachers who, for better or for worse, self-identified themselves as “Marxist”, became seemingly “liberated” from the problems of their teachers and, by extension, their parents and grandparents. Growing up in a relatively affluent social democracy, this new generation of young German composers was free to explore contemporary music as part of the playground of new media and created a contemporary music modeled after these experiences. In this way, cultural “consumption,” existing as a main conceptual idea for this work, would not only be critiqued but also celebrated, thereby giving this new music the possibility to integrate the ideology of popular culture, and its “American” variant

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these political developments have required new generations of post-war Germans to review the country’s relationship to Holocaust, the Nazi past and the cultural role of Germany within a new Europe where capitalism is (again) paramount.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the role of the United States in post-war and post-unification Germany see *The American Impact on Postwar Germany*, ed. Reiner Pommerin (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995) and the review essay by Akira Iriye, “The United States as an Occupier,” *Reviews in American History* (March, 1988), 69-70.

<sup>5</sup> While the U.S. presence was also important in Western Europe as a whole, the German situation was, in some ways, unique. See *The United States and Germany in the Era of the Cold War (1945-1990)*, Vol. 2, ed. Detlef Junke, Philipp Gassert, Wilfried Mausbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). About the intimate interactions between occupied and occupiers in post-war Germany see Atina Grossmann, *Jews, Germans, and Allies* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007). In addition see Francis Graham-Dixon, *The Allied Occupation of Germany: The Refugee Crisis, Denazification and the Path to Reconstruction* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013). Frank A. Ninkovich, *Germany and the United States: The Transformation of the German Question since 1945* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1995).

<sup>6</sup> Jack Ewing, *Germany's Economic Renaissance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Steve Wood, *Germany and East-Central Europe: Political, Economic and Socio-Cultural Relations in the Era of EU Enlargement* (Aldershot, Ashgate, 2004) and Stephen F. Szabo, *Germany, Russia, and the Rise of Geo-Economics* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Arnold Schuetz, “American Pop Culture Invades Germany: Some Love It-Some Don't,” *Journal of American Culture*, 24, No. 3/4 (2001), pp. 23-29.

into its core.

In order to contextualize and better understand recent developments in German contemporary music, and to find an intelligent response to such developments, it is necessary to review the functionality of music in terms of its historical development. This might allow for a more comprehensive contextualization for contemporary processes of music commercialization and reification and possibilities for a response – expressed through critique and compositional praxis – to the current situation.

## New Music and its Historical Becoming

Musical material presents the listener with dialectical relationships in regard to sonorous and linguistic comprehension, as it serves to be both syntactically and semiotically decoded by the listening subject. As music passes in time its linear form is heard as syntactical divisions, while large-scale structural form can be perceived as remembered, in non-linear manner.<sup>9</sup> In monotheistic cultures such a dichotomy was historically pre-determined, as the musical sign developed in coordination with sacred text.<sup>10</sup>

As music separated itself from the religious word, the shadow of text became longer and, in the same measure, the abstract, sounding sign became stronger: music became a hermeneutical activity.<sup>11</sup> With the Enlightenment and the development of absolute music, listeners' expectations changed, as did the interpretive communities and the nature of the sonorous signifier. In the course of the eighteenth century, composers gained economic and expressive autonomy. Composers endeavoured to create sonorous signs that would be recognized as part of a difficult, higher discourse that demanded further reflection and learning, transforming the listener from passive consumer of pre-existing forms to one of active exploration, discovering unknown musical realms.<sup>12</sup> The resulting "new music", in its form and content, existed not only to be passively enjoyed

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<sup>9</sup> Kofi Agawu discusses such a temporal dichotomy in his book, *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>10</sup> This evolution also has a pre-history that began with ritual. The historical relationship between ritual, text and hermeneutic interpretation is best described by Jan Assmann in *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (Munich: C.H.Beck, 1992), p. 17. "The more rites follow a strict order, the more the aspect of repetition can predominate. The more the rites allow for freedom of individual celebration, the more the aspect of representation comes to the foreground. With these two poles, within which text [Schrift] becomes significant as a connective structure among cultures, the scope of such a dynamic is circumscribed. Related to this development from oral transmission to text is the gradual transition from the dominance of repetition to the dominance of representation, from ritual to textual coherence. Therein occurs a new connective structure. The binding power of this new structure is not imitation and conservation but interpretation and memory. Hermeneutics replaces liturgy." (English translation by the author)

<sup>11</sup> See Kenneth Levy, *Gregorian Chant and the Carolingians* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998), p. 137. "The church musicians who opted for the inexact aides-mémoire of staffless neumes – for skeletal notations that ignored exact pitch-heights and bypassed many nuances – were content with incomplete representations of musical substance because the full substance seemed safely logged in memory. This simple calculus of notation and memory says that the Gregorian chants from their first neumatation were no longer 'improvised,' that few if any options were left for the strategies and vagaries of individual performers. The chants were "concretized reified entities," recognizable in their specific melodic dress, integrally stored and reproducible from memory."

<sup>12</sup> See Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*, trans. Roger Lustig (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989) as well as Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

but also to be re-discovered, discussed, reinterpreted, re-contextualized, read and mis-read. With the Enlightenment, such aspirations became the basis for a musical culture in which a listening individual was given the opportunity to strive for ‘self-enhancement’, *Selbstverwirklichung*, through musical education or *Bildung*.<sup>13</sup> The possibility for ‘self enhancement’ was inherently tied to the ability to respond to music that was challenging for both performer and listener: such progressive music needed edification, as it pointed to the possibility for  *klingende Philosophie*,<sup>14</sup> challenging pre-conceived notions of the goals and borders of musical language while moving forward to create new contexts for musical comprehensibility and incomprehensibility.

Such a dialectical relationship between musical comprehensibility and incomprehensibility continues to determine the production and reception of musical material in the present time. Even today, within the secularized temple of new music, it might be possible to witness the mystery of that incomprehensible sacred sound, which, historically considered, derived from the comprehensible or incomprehensible sacred word.<sup>15</sup> For while music has evolved since the Enlightenment to allow for an ever-increasing abstraction and redefinition of musical material, the composer also has had the ability to investigate the multi-directionality of this trajectory.

A main part of such a program also involved composers *consciously* responding to *history* and *music history* via *musical composition*. While many elements of such a cultural movement are still being carried forward, composers have recently had to reconsider how music responds to such a history, to which history and to whose history. Viewing music composition as a critique not only of the present but also of the past, it is necessary to investigate the changing functionality of new music and what it might still become in the complex, globalized world of today. Following this logic, it is equally essential to consider how *new music today* responds to both personal *and* collective histories. What is the functionality of such music that lives on the outskirts of sonorous experiences determined by normative experiences of commodified music industry?

Throughout history, composers have been able to present listeners with experiences outside of the aesthetic comfort zone of contemporary society, and have thereby expanded the definition of musical language. Such undertakings were often

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<sup>13</sup> Both concepts became pillars of the Protestant church reformation and development of modern capitalism; see Max Weber, *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (Bodenheim: Athenäum Hain Hanstein, 1993). Since the classical era the concept of ‘self-enhancement’ was tied to the concept of ‘difficulty.’ In response to his critics’ definition of his music as excessively difficult, Beethoven opined that such musical ‘difficulty’ was an important aspect of musical performance and reception. Writing to his publisher Sigmund Anton Steiner in regard to his Piano Sonata in A Major op. 101, he stated “[...] ‘difficult’ is a relative term, for what seems difficult to one person will seem easy to another, and thus the term says nothing at all [...] but viewed in a different light [...] the term says everything, for whatever is difficult is also *beautiful, good, great*, and so forth [...]” Ludwig van Beethoven, letter no.1061 (January, 1817) in *Ludwig van Beethoven: Briefwechsel, Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Sieghard Brandenburg (München: G. Henle Verlag, 1996), p. 8 as translated by Sieghard Brandenburg in Ludwig van Beethoven, *Ludwig van Beethoven Klaviersonate A-dur opus 101: Faksimile nach dem Autograph im Besitz des Beethoven-Hauses Bonn* (München: Henle, 1998), p. xviii.

<sup>14</sup> See Dieter Rexroth’s *Beethovens Symphonien: ein musikalischer Werkführer* (München: C.H. Beck, 2005), p. 30.

<sup>15</sup> In the course of history, the development of sacred languages, and their accompanying musical idioms for reading, recitation, and singing, created a hierarchy between sacred music for religious reflection and everyday music, unrelated to the sacred text.

deemed useless and irrational, as composers became imperative for a new aesthetic. Their music, negotiated by musicians and listeners, was often not understood and met with resistance, being often defined inaccessible, unmusical or offensive. Beethoven's *Große Fuge*, was described after its 1826 premiere as an "indecipherable, uncorrected horror" owing to its radicalism of sonority and form: it wasn't until the twentieth century that this work began to be widely performed.<sup>16</sup> The radical conservative, Arnold Schoenberg, thought that if his music would be 'understood' people would like it. But, as Herbert Brün pointed out, the reason why people didn't like Schoenberg's music was precisely because they understood it all too well.<sup>17</sup>

The ability to hear new music, the listener unable to "understand" the categories of its functionality, is based on the listener's ability to compare a "new musical experience" to previous ones. It requires, in some sense, a historical awareness in regard to hearing. So the question arises, in our time of rapid communication and change, what it might mean to hear historically today? Are we even able to hear historically? Is history still part of our cultural ecology? And if so how do we understand history as composers?

History can be understood as layers of time; the German term for history "Geschichte" points to such a temporal archaeology. Or history might be a record of "happenings" as the Hungarian term "történelem" or the Hebrew term "תִּירוּלִים." History might be personal or collective, as part of a "metahistory," wherein language, rhetoric and discourse forms an ideological stance, to be exploited by a person, group, movement or state.

While a musical work presents its own history in terms of presenting a series of events to be decoded within its given temporal structure, the succession of sounds is governed by musical-linguistic logic. For Adorno "Music resembles language in the sense that it is a temporal sequence of articulated sounds which are more than just sounds. They say something, often something human. The better the music, the more forcefully they say it. The succession of sounds is like logic: it can be right or wrong. But what has been said cannot be detached from the music. Music creates no semiotic system."<sup>18</sup>

Are we still able to hear and conceive of new music today as a system of logic or, rather, like a series of isolated sounds. The German music critic Michael Rebhahn has noted that "[t]he distance of young composers from their own profession holds the real opportunity to free contemporary music from its isolation."<sup>19</sup> What isolation is Rebhahn referring to? Might he be referring to the isolation of new music as it is presented in festivals and concerts for a given festival audience? What about other contexts? Which listeners are being isolated? In his essay Rebhahn refers to the fact that people think that composers are individuals who produce "something like that Stockhausen."<sup>20</sup> But, I wonder how many people outside of the so-called "new music industry" have even heard

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<sup>16</sup> Louis Spohr. For more on contemporary critique of Beethoven see Robin Wallace's *Beethoven's Critic: Aesthetic Dilemmas and Resolutions during the Composers Lifetime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Brün during a Princeton University Colloquium in October 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Music and Language: A Fragment," in *Quasi una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Rebhahn, "I hereby resign from new music: On the problem of an involuntary labeling including the taxonomy of the species 'composer'," *Darmstädter Beiträge zur neuen Musik*, 22 (2014), also published online (<http://www.goethe.de/mmo/priv/10734133-STANDARD.pdf>), p. 2, accessed September 10, 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 2.

one of Stockhausen's works. While some forms of aesthetic “isolation” prove to be more privileged than others, the idea of “resigning” from “new music” is contingent on the ability to be educated about new music in the first place. Perhaps the more pertinent question might be, as to whether a valid musical experience can exist today as isolated, above and beyond Rebhahn’s described realms of the cultural industry? What happens to the inaccessible musical expression, the endangered musical species, perhaps unheard of in the new music “scene” but existing in cultural ecospheres “out of reach” of the standardized new music festival landscape. We might remember that such “isolation” has a history. New music, a by-product of an aristocratic tradition, and adventurous new music, has a history of being specialized. But it seems that some believe that the next step in music history is for music to become connected “to the present,” as Michael Rebhahn calls it “a timely New Music.”

Rebhahn backs up his argument by citing Joseph Beuys who, in 1985, stated: “I hereby resign from art”. But, in 2016, if a composer “resigns from new music” then to where does the composer resign? Rebhahn’s claim is that the present composers’ position is that “essentially, what I do is not new music.” If this is indeed the contemporary stance of many young composers today, might we ask if theirs is a flight into more commodified musical realms?

Is the *history* of new music finished, allowing for a kind of Fukuyama end-of-history or Hegelian end-of-art moment?<sup>21</sup> Many new music movements in the twentieth century have functioned to delete history, as Cage proudly cited de Kooning as saying “History doesn’t influence *me*. *I* influence *it*.”<sup>22</sup> Part of the new music project, to supersede what has been before, was always connected to developments in technology. With new technology came the promise of new musical material. In this way, the ahistorical ideal of “new” musical material has also brought its own fetish quality. We might remember that part of the history and tradition of new music is that of writing being re-writing, including the re-writing of what was there before to make it become *new*. There was a time when it was common for composers to exploit paraphrase as a way to pay homage to another composer much as Schuman, in the fourth movement of the Second Symphony, paraphrases Beethoven’s “An die ferne Geliebte.” In Socialist Hungary, György Kurtág was such a composer who continued this tradition in a political system that taught composers, as part of state ideology, to respect and uphold the bourgeois music traditions of the past in order for them to be integrated into the progressive socialist new music – a very different situation than that of Western Europe and North America.<sup>23</sup> Such techniques of paraphrase exist as one side of a Bloomian “Anxiety of Influence” while the other side is negation.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992) and Eva Geulen, *The End of Art: Readings in a Rumor After Hegel*, trans. James McFarland (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> John Cage, “Silence: History of Experimental Music in the United States,” in *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), p. 67.

<sup>23</sup> For more on Kurtág’s music and its relationship to socialist ideals see Dániel Péter Biró’s “Bartók’s Quartets, Folk Music and the Anxiety of Influence,” in *The String Quartets of Béla Bartók: Tradition and Legacy in Analytical Perspective*, ed. Dániel Péter Biró and Harald Krebs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 261-284.

<sup>24</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).



To make an effort to negate history is also to respond to it, as was the case for many composers in the West after the Second World War.<sup>25</sup> Postmodernism was another attempt at negation of history or, at least, subversion. A central idea of postmodernism was the breakdown of the author's subjectivity within the musical work. For many, the postmodern work is seen as liberating. Not aiming to exhibit any kind of "truth content," history could never become a main parameter of the post-modern musical work but rather, a user-defined object for play, for composer and listener to switch on and off at will.

As we move further into the new century, we might reconsider the role of historical consciousness in the production and reception of contemporary music. Historical consciousness might exist for the composer of today much like the persona functions in literature, as described by Vivian Gornick: "Every work of literature has both a situation and a story. The situation is the context and circumstance, sometimes the plot; the story is the emotional experience that preoccupies the writer: the insight, the wisdom, the thing one has to come to say... [Literature] is written by people who, in essence, are imagining...themselves: in relation to the subject in hand. The connection is an intimate one; in fact, it is critical. Out of the raw material of a writer's own undisguised being a narrator is fashioned whose existence on the page is integral to the tale being told. This narrator becomes a persona. Its tone of voice, its angle of vision, the rhythm of its sentences, what it selects to observe and what to ignore are chosen to serve the subject; yet at the same time the way the narrator—or the persona—sees things is, to the largest degree, the thing being seen. To fashion a persona out of one's own undisguised self is no easy thing...yet the creation of such a person is vital...it is the instrument of illumination. Without it there is neither subject nor story. To achieve it, the writer...undergoes...the twin struggle to know not only why one is speaking but *who* is speaking."<sup>26</sup> This relationship between persona to story can be compared to that of the subjective composer to "history" and even "meta-history." Without this history might, in our own time, the "persona" of new music exist as a two-dimensional entity, spitting out a series of innovative sounds that are not to be decoded but heard?

### **The New Cool: Consumers' New Music Culture in Germany**

In light of this historical contextualization of new music, recent tendencies in the German new music scene show a relationship to the realm of the political. During the 2014 Darmstadt International Summer Courses for New Music, several composers discussed tendencies and problems of music composition and the sphere of creative production.<sup>27</sup> During this discussion, my own concerns went beyond the fashionable movements in the

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<sup>25</sup> For more on the historical nature of new music in Eastern and Western Europe after the Second World War see Danielle Fosler-Lussier, *Music Divided, Bartók's Legacy in Cold War Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007) and Matin Iddon, "Bartók's Relics: Nostalgia in György Ligeti's Second String Quartet," in Biró and Krebs, pp. 243-260.

<sup>26</sup> Vivian Gornick, *The Situation and the Story: The Art of Personal Narrative* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2001), p. 13 and pp. 6-8 as quoted by Judit Frigyesi, "How Barbaric Is Bartók's Forte?," in Biró and Krebs, p. 234.

<sup>27</sup> The discussion, entitled "New Conceptualism: A Dead End or a Way Out?" on August 4, 2014 with Max Murray, Kai Johannes Polzhofer, Ashley Fure, Harry Lehmann, Martin Schüttler and myself. The entire discussion can be heard at (<https://voicerepublic.com/talks/i-new-conceptualism-a-dead-end-or-a-way-out>), accessed on September 7, 2016.

German festival landscape, and I sought to ask more precise, more difficult questions to move the discussion into a productive domain. The following is a summary of the questions raised during the conference, allowing for a point of departure for questioning recent developments in contemporary music and to find a definition of critical music composition.

Within this discussion, it is useful to consider how contemporary music relates to political and technological movements within a society. While the ritual of music making has changed in terms of recent technological advances, composers have responded in their own ways to such developments. The “digital revolution” has been praised as a means to make musical creation and consumption more open, democratic and groundbreaking in terms of inclusiveness and innovation.<sup>28</sup> As with all technology-driven advancements, there exist positive and negative aspects to such a “revolution.” Like any Internet information platform, art can either engage with societal questions and problems or ignore them. In this way, it makes sense to critique the modes of engagement with music and technology and the resulting “culture of distraction.”<sup>29</sup>

As an analogy to questions concerning musical production and reception, it is necessary to discuss political issues in a country that is not far from Germany and part of the European Union. In Hungary there exists a different kind of “digital revolution”: control of all forms of electronic and digital communication by the government. In early June 2014, the government initiated a set of laws in order to silence opposition (in terms of Internet newspapers, blogs etc.) After signing a contract with the German firm Deutsche Telekom in 2014, the government pressured the editor in chief of a popular internet site, Origo.hu, to resign or Deutsche Telekom, via its “sister firm” Magyar Telekom, would shut down their portal. The newspaper *Pester Lloyd* reported that “[t]he German companies in Hungary - whether they are active in the media sector or in other industries - have been good at distinguishing themselves in the sense of pandering to authority and closing their eyes to the situation at hand, as long as tax laws, labor laws and other “investment conditions” are created in their favor.”<sup>30</sup> On June 6, 2014 there was a demonstration against this consolidation of industrial powers – a kind of Hungarian *Gleichschaltung* or consolidation of institutional powers – in which activists, including myself, marched from the parliament to the Deutsche Telekom.

Starting in 2014, there began another on-going demonstration in Budapest. In Szabadság Tér – in Hungarian “Freedom Square” – demonstrators protested against a statue, now erected, built to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the German occupation of Hungary in 1944. The statue portrays an eagle, representing Fascist Germany, attacking the angel of Gabriel, representing “innocent Hungary”. This statue represents another example of the present Government's attempt to whitewash the history of Hungarian involvement in the Holocaust. The protesters placed stones, candles, family pictures and historical documentation in front of the monument, where photos were found with accompanying notes such as “my grandparents, killed by Hungarian police in 1944.” There was a citation from Admiral Horthy, Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944: “In

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<sup>28</sup> Harry Lehmann, *Die digitale Revolution der Musik. Eine Musikphilosophie* (Mainz: Schott Music, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> See Edward Mendelson, “In the Depths of the Digital Age,” *New York Review of Books*, June 23, 2016.

<sup>30</sup> Editorial Staff, “Die Origo-Affäre oder Business as usual: Ungarische / Deutsche Telekom beugt sich politischem Druck von Orbáns Amtschef,” *Pester Lloyd*, June 4, 2014. (<http://www.pestierlloyd.net/html/1423affaereorigo.html>), accessed July 15, 2014.



terms of the Jewish question: I was an Anti-Semite my whole life.” At the end of each demonstration the protestors sang the Hungarian National anthem to emphasize that everyone, whether they are Christian, Jewish, homosexual or Roma, are all citizens of Hungary. Unfortunately, the fact of full “belonging” to a home country is still not a given for minority populations in Hungary today, as they continue to be treated like second-rate citizens in every-day life. With the refugee crisis, this situation has become even worse, as the Government has successfully waged a media campaign to create an ideology of fear around the immigrants who try to pass through Hungary to Germany.

These two demonstrations show how the Hungarian government of Viktor Orbán, financially supported and legitimized by the European Union, is inherently connected to the Hungarian dictatorship of the past. Reflecting on the fact that the German industry facilitated the rise of a Hungarian dictatorship eighty years ago, it is strange to consider that, today, German industry, in its push for globalized profits, facilitates the present-day Hungarian dictatorship, and its own kind of Hungarian “digital revolution”.<sup>31</sup>

This world lives in tandem with what many view of as new media's “positive” developments. It is exactly these developments that allow individuals to be distracted from the darker side of what is actually happening with mental concentration, freedom of expression and relationships with and responsibility not only to personal and collective histories but also to what is most private: our existence. As composers we make choices: we can choose to actually address what is going on around us in the political and media realms, not by allowing our music to be submerged in these problems but rather by reacting and responding in an intelligent and, hopefully, subversive manner.

If we leave Europe behind and rewind to 1980s America, we find Andy Warhol's “ready-mades” of this period. What did this art deal with? For some, it represented a social critique, a mirroring of American consumerist society, which, as we all know, has now become an international consumerist culture. In actuality this so-called critique integrated itself into a long, enormously successful, moneymaking party. This was a celebration of superficiality, lightness and the cult of the artist as “genius entertainer.” We should ask: what did this art help to distract Americans' attention from? In the 1980s it contributed to keeping Americans from paying attention to the mass incarceration of African Americans, 'final solution' politics applied to the American indigenous population, enormous military spending during the Reagan years, U.S. military operations in Central and South America and the takeover of the media and social realms of art by large corporations. American composers created sonorous equivalents to Warholesque visual art: the orchestra piece with a pizza delivery man coming in, the post-modern string quartet with accompanying electric guitar progressive rock licks, the performance art pieces with looping T.V. commercials, etc. These compositions seemed to take their cue from “the television revolution” and “mall culture”, as the composers who grew up with television integrated contemporary media and consumption experiences into their music. Because high art always involves pedigree, such American music attempted to bridge the gap between this media experience, its post-modern ideology and an imagined tradition of “western art music.” Just as Warhol's ready-mades allowed bankers to invest in million dollar art pieces that collectors could exhibit as “socially critical”. Indeed, this commercialized “art music” projected a socially

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<sup>31</sup> See Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században* (Budapest: Osiris, 1999); also in English as *Hungary in the Twentieth Century* (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 1999).

“progressive” veneer that could be enjoyed by the subscription audiences who took time out from watching their favorite T.V. series to go to the nearby concert hall.

Let us fast forward to Germany today. Employing the new democratizing potential of the “Digital Revolution,” composers are able to write “unterhaltende,” “entertaining” music, which is often funny, seemingly socially critical, very masculine and, most importantly, in the largest sense, totally “cool,” fashionable, while keeping emotion and depth at bay. This new music is made primarily in and for festivals in Germany, a country ready to give its music festival audiences a new kind of art music, which intends to entertain and move us away from the heaviness of German history of the last century. One might ask where the “historical” aspect of musical material resides, as the sampled sound object, be it created by the composer or by existent or non-existent anonymous workers in India and China, seems to be the norm in terms of its presentation. Instead of investigating historical complexity, the surface of the material, its “superficial” nature, becomes the celebrated norm, as lack of engagement allows the music to be “conceptual” and “cool.” What is the subject matter for such music? Themes that center around the media, globalization and “the act of composing” as self-reflexive activity. These themes take on various formats: composed music with video commercials, music as video game, music with text of the composer projected on a screen as “self-reflection”, composed music for YouTube, rehashed quasi-fluxus actions with musical instruments intended for the German media landscape, choir music with banal techno-samples, ensemble performing with comic book pages displayed on screen. Like the art movements of 1980s America, this presents itself as a celebratory critique of commercial culture; the term “new conceptualism” might be replaced by “new superficiality” or even, taking its cue from America, “new redundancy.” Listening seems to need help in our era of “digital revolutions.” It is as though music, by itself, is not enough anymore. We might as well ask: can we even listen anymore? Have composers become sophomoric media artists who need to have Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* presented to them in the form of a YouTube cartoon?<sup>32</sup> Are we totally distracted in terms of our hearing and comprehension or can we find our way back to engaging with musical material and content? Such an engagement might mean that composers choose to deal again with musical material as historical material. We might also have to shut our eyes and concentrate on what we hear, not what we see.<sup>33</sup> Perhaps to hear what is really going on in our world and in ourselves,

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<sup>32</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, Robert, trans. Hullot-Kentor (London: Athlone, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> The visual act of watching performers engaged in an intense form of concentration and bodily communication is important in the listening experience and certainly contributes to the sonorous realm. That being stated, I am far from being an opponent of the visual arts (including video art), having composed a number of works that deal explicitly with media and media manipulation, which bridge visual art and music in a variety of performance contexts (including installations, music for theater, dance, video etc.), since the 1990s. In addition, I have continuously been dealing with the latest technological advancements in the areas of music composition and ethnomusicology, being one of the founding members of the research project “Computational Ethnomusicology,” as well as developing new performance platforms for live-electronics. The questions raised here are meant to question commercial developments and de-historicizing tendencies in the present world of new music and how they pertain to digital technology. In the end, such commercializing developments, which function to manage and therefore limit perception and imagination, pertain to all of the arts (including poetry, literature, film, etc.). For a critical analysis of parallel developments in the visual arts see: Jed Perl's “The Cult of Jeff Koons,” *Jeff Koons: A Retrospective* an exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City, June 27–October 19,

we have to experience it in the sonorous realm.<sup>34</sup>

## Five Criteria of Critical Composition

So what is new music to become in the coming age? How are composers to respond not by creating a “timely new music” but rather a new music that can actually respond to the major questions of our time with a kind of “challenge of musical perception,” thereby allowing for our art, with all of its imagination and memory, to survive? The following are five criteria that, I believe, address some of the before-mentioned contemporary dilemmas of music composition.

### 1. The composer is part of and interacts with history.

The composer, situating her/himself as a historical being who expresses the present by composing music, gives the work a chance for relevance. For many, in the globalized world of today, the object of history is something to avoid, to mock and to negate. Historical consciousness presents itself not only as a problem for North Americans. In observing recent developments in the new music marketplace, we can see that this illusion of the virtual has become a universal position, accepted as a cool and liberating musical culture for young composers in Germany. The composer who would fend off the opposing a-historical ideology of global capitalism would also seek to consciously address questions of history, including music history, via their own compositional production. Therefore, such a composer could create the *new* in the context of activating both personal existential and collective historical memories of what was, thereby showing what new music can *become*.

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2014; the Centre Pompidou, Paris, November 26, 2014–April 27, 2015; and the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, June 5–September 27, 2015, (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2014/sep/25/cult-jeff-koons/>), accessed, Oct. 12, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> It seems that, with the invention of the personal computer and the development of android tablet and phones, the increasing use of “screen time” for both production and leisure has produced a society that is increasingly dominated by the visual. Rabbi Jonathan Sachs has discussed the historical and theological background of this dichotomy in “Covenant and Conversation – The Meanings of Shema,” 24th July 2010 ([https://www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha/the\\_meanings\\_of\\_shema/](https://www.ou.org/torah/parsha/rabbi-sacks-on-parsha/the_meanings_of_shema/)), accessed August 19, 2016. “There was a profound difference between the two civilizations of antiquity that between them shaped the culture of the West: ancient Greece and ancient Israel. The Greeks were the supreme masters of the visual arts: art, sculpture, architecture and the theatre. Jews, as a matter of profound religious principle, were not. G-d, the sole object of worship, is invisible. He transcends nature. He created the universe and is therefore beyond the universe. He cannot be seen. He reveals Himself only in speech. Therefore the supreme religious act in Judaism is *to listen*. Ancient Greece was a culture of the eye; ancient Israel a culture of the ear. The Greeks worshipped what they saw; Israel worshipped what they heard. This is how Hans Kohn put it in his *The Idea of Nationalism*. The ancient Greeks were “the people of sight, of the spatial and plastic sense . . . as if they thought to transpose the flowing, fleeting, ever related elements of life into rest, space, limitation . . . The Jew did not see so much as he heard . . . His organ was the ear . . . When Elijah perceived G-d, he heard only a still, small voice. For that reason the Jew never made an image of his G-d.”

## 2. The composer is part of a dialogue with society.

For a given work to have meaning, it is necessary for a composer to be involved in the life and culture of the time. Isolation is really not a possibility. Perhaps Michael Rehbahn's accusation, that new music remains “isolated” for a select few, refers to the specific functionality of new music in the German cultural industry? Rather than just writing for the next festival event, composers could actually decide to be in dialogue with society by writing music that is meant for active reflection in a multitude of listening situations. To be created for the longer term, such music that *matters* would reflect a stance in regard to the larger world. While music needs to exist *in dialogue* with society, the *autonomy* of the musical work takes precedence over the context of its performance. Rather than simply becoming part of a media landscape, existing as a “game” of provocation for a tightly-knit new music marketplace, the composition could, in very subtle ways, show an alternative reality to this culture of distraction, bringing the work back to an existentially conscious and autonomous musical expression.

In order to survive, such new music does not necessarily have to be performed in the large-scale German music festival. Rather, such music can and should be performed in local communities, in places of worship, in small rooms for private performance, in galleries and for the unexpected and even so-called “unlearned audiences” that thirst for experiences outside of fun and event culture. Such live music needs to be *accessed* rather than to be, in the Americanized sense of the word, *accessible*, and, in staying simultaneously autonomous and connected to history, can allow for music to *retain* and even *expand* its functionality as a challenge for the senses and imagination of its listeners. This might connect music to other art forms. I have seen a similar *expansion* of genre functionality in the work of Renee Gladman, 2014-2015 Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, who subtly combines poetry, prose and drawing to challenge her readers/viewers in a concentrated and consequent manner.<sup>35</sup> Her intertwining of calligraphic techniques with semiotic meanings allows for a radical art form that needs only small movements to powerfully engage genre and perceptual boundaries; by putting the functionality of the art form into question, it becomes strengthened and renewed.

## 3. Critical music composition exists to constantly re-formulate for the listener the question “what is music?”

Part of this functionality of new music has been to destabilize the categories of musical perception, to allow for so-called “subconscious” elements in a musical composition to gain power in order to take over its form. Through these elements, which often arise *from the work itself*, a given musical composition shows a relationship to existences, power structures *in the larger world*. The composition, existing as a *work within history*, tells of life experience and simultaneously shows its autonomy from life experience. For instance, Schönberg's *Suite op. 25* presents to its listeners both the shadow world of bourgeois piano music and, simultaneously, a new musical language. In Lachenmann's *Gran Torso*, the form of a string quartet genre needs to be re-evaluated in terms of its relationship to musical material, allowing the listener to reconsider pre-conceived concepts of beauty.

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<sup>35</sup> See Renee Gladman's Ravicka novels *Event Factory*, *The Ravickians*, and *Ana Patova Crosses the Bridge* (St. Louis: Dorothy, 2010, 2011 and 2013).

Galina Ustolvskaya asks her listeners “what is a melody” and they discover that it can be pressed into a corner, beaten, tortured and, nonetheless, call forth the innocence of a Russian lullaby. This is very different from the postmodern experience where the musical work is secondary and part of a performative elite entertainment intended for privileged insiders who deem such a liberating entertainment as “progressive.” In order to bring the listener back to concentrated hearing, the composer needs to contextualize a listening experience through the musical work with all the complexities of its materiality. The experiencing of musical form, in all its semiotic complexity, might connect to a hermeneutical mode of hearing musical material and form and give new possibilities for analogies and responses to the life-world of both composer and listeners, the musical work to forming a dialogue with the listening other.

#### **4. Critical music composition exists to create “world repair.”<sup>36</sup>**

We live in extreme times. Not only are basic values such as privacy, tolerance and diversity under attack but even the right to experience the world, in terms of diverse cultures and traditions as a vital, necessary part of our lives, is put into question. Even today, music retains the power to respond to the problems of the world. This need not be, a politicized music, such as marching bands accompanying demonstrators, but rather thoughtful and autonomous constellations of semiotically charged sounds, a music that presents a critique of the present *Zeitgeist*, while simultaneously offering an experience that connects the new and strange with the remembered. Just as understanding the stranger is contingent on a collective remembering of once being strangers, such a music might allow the critical faculties of the listener to open up to new spheres of consciousness that, in turn, allow for a re-alignment of commodified musical norms of shopping malls, symphony subscription series or of the rarefied German new music festival. The simultaneous remembering and new perception of difference would allow for an experience of aesthetic “disturbance” that would “realign” musical perception and critique in both personal and collective spheres.

#### **5. Critical music composition reaches out to and stands in dialogue with the other and reaches back into history to rediscover realms of musical transcendence.**

In December 2014, I spent several weeks in Germany, recording part of my composition cycle *Mishpatim (Laws)*.<sup>37</sup> During this time, I was able to have several conversations with ordinary Germans who showed some sympathy to the movement PEGIDA or *Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes* (Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamification of the Occident). This popular protest group had been demonstrating weekly against a so-called Islamification of the German nation. The members of this movement, which began in Sachsen, the province with the smallest

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<sup>36</sup> This relates to the concept in Judaism, which was contingent on historical memory, its culture of remembering also served to promote תיקון עולם “*tikun olam*” or “world repair”, serving to bring forth future (political) redemption and renewed splendor of its lost world. See Dániel Péter Biró, “Emanations: Reflections of a Composer,” in *Schönheit (Konzepte 2)*, ed. Gunnar Hindrichs (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2016: forthcoming).

<sup>37</sup> This composition cycle was written between 2003 and 2016. The recording of the entire cycle will be released by Neos Music in 2016.

population of Muslims in Germany, were then proudly identifying themselves as being part of a movement of *ordinary citizens* trying to save the Germany “that they once knew” now supposedly under attack from a unified religion called “Islam.”

In this time, I had to ask myself “what are these protesters *really* protesting?” And how does this relate to my experiences in Germany, as an observer from the quasi-outside and as a composer, tied to this tradition, from the quasi-inside? It became clear that, that for these protesters, an entire religion exists today as a threat against Germany. This fear connects to a previous ideology, which also reveals a line of thought that never completely left the German psyche, and has taken hold in many other parts of the world.<sup>38</sup> While it is clear that we live in an increasingly sectarian world, such reactions to this new political reality, where religion, security, state control and terrorism collide, exist as part of an expression of the three main values of contemporary civilization, summed up by Helmut Lachenmann as “development, security and fun.”<sup>39</sup>

Since this time, the situation has intensified in Germany and Europe, particularly because of the large influx of refugees from the Middle East and Northern Africa into the European continent. As this situation presents one of the biggest challenges to the continent since the Second World War, it also sheds new light on the functionality of an ongoing culture of consumption. As this situation is currently becoming instrumental for right-wing political ideology, the distinction between a culture of distraction and one of reflection becomes even more charged.<sup>40</sup>

As was discussed before, the new music that seeks to be “timely” and reacting to the pressures of consumption culture art production, presents a “fun-event” experience, simultaneously posing as a critical expression of contemporary reality and packaged as a multi-media extravaganza. Such music seems to express a “dispassionate” relationship to emotion, mystery and depth in its will to present a “cool,” distanced quality at all costs. It is as though music speaks with an avatar via a computer screen. How are we to face this dilemma of art music functioning as distanced “fun?” Can there be a re-claiming of the transcendental as an integral part of contemporary composition? Such music would need to be directed toward the other, as a listener, in a manner of compassion and seek to address questions of ontology, ethics and the other via meaningful - and simultaneously meaningless - sonorous communication.

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<sup>38</sup> In Germany, there has much debate about the concept of the German *Sonderweg* or “special path” in history. See Jürgen Kocka, “German History before Hitler: The Debate about the German *Sonderweg*,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, No. 1 (1988), pp. 3-16 and Wolfgang J. Mommsen, “The Weimar Republic: The Final Stage of the Decomposition of Imperial Germany?” *German Politics and Society* 14, No.1 (Spring 1996), pp. 65-73 and Helmut Walser Smith, “When the *Sonderweg* Debate Left Us,” *German Studies Review* 34, No.2 (2008), pp. 225-240.

<sup>39</sup> See “Über Musik nachdenken: Ein Gespräch mit Helmut Lachenmann zum 80. Geburtstag.” Interview with the composer in *Ensemble Modern Magazin* 42 (2015) (<https://www.ensemble-modern.com/de/presse/pressearchiv/interviews/2015/975>), accessed Sept. 10, 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Brad Evans and Zygmunt Bauman, “The Refugee Crisis Is Humanity’s Crisis,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 2016 ([http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/02/opinion/the-refugee-crisis-is-humanitys-crisis.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/02/opinion/the-refugee-crisis-is-humanitys-crisis.html?_r=0)), accessed September 10, 2016 and Lydia Gall, “Háború a menekültek ellen” [War against refugees], *Népszabadság Online*, September 9, 2016 (<http://nol.hu/velemeney/haboru-a-menekultek-ellen-1631065>), accessed September 10, 2016.



## Non-Representational Music: אֱהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֱהְיֶה

In the Hebrew Bible chapter שְׁמוֹנֶה (Exodus Chapters 1-5) the Eternal says to Moses, “אֱהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֱהְיֶה (I will be what I will be),” and He said, “So shall you say to the children of Israel, ‘אֱהְיֶה (I will be) has sent me to you’.”<sup>41</sup> Ehyeh asher ehyeh can be translated both as “I am that I am” and simultaneously could mean “I will be what I will be” showing a relationship to both a historical and future existence of the divine.

For Theodor Adorno and Gunnar Hindrichs, this text acts as a metaphor for the functionality of meaning in new music.<sup>42</sup> Just as new music exists in the process of becoming, it presents the listener with a language for our imagination, one that we have not yet heard yet one that relates back to the very beginning of sound, an experience of profound abstraction and intuition. By the attempt and failure to fully comprehend the semiotic structures of our composer prophets, we, like the early Israelites, hear an abstract sound, as described by Rabbi Mendel of Rymanov via Gershom Scholem. He states “All that Israel heard was the aleph with which in the Hebrew text the first commandment begins, the aleph of the word ‘I’ [...] For in Hebrew the consonant aleph represents nothing more than the position taken by the larynx when a word begins with a vowel. Thus the aleph may be said to denote the source of all articulate sound... To hear the aleph is to hear next to nothing, it is the preparation for all audible language, but in itself conveys no determinate, specific meaning.”<sup>43</sup> The revelation on Mt Sinai was “a mystical revelation, pregnant with meaning” and “had to be translated into human language. What the Israelites heard was disturbing and overpowering as “this revelation, the immense aleph, was not in itself sufficient to express the divine message, and in itself it was more than the community could bear. Only the prophet was empowered to communicate the meaning of this inarticulate voice to the community.”<sup>44</sup>

Responding to this theological framework, Adorno views the function of new music is not to be understood but rather to, as he claims, “name the name.” “In comparison to signifying language, music is a language of a completely different type. Therein lies music's theological aspect. What music says is a proposition at once distinct and concealed. Its idea is the form of the name of God. It is demythologized prayer, freed from the magic of making anything happen, the human attempt, futile, as always, to name the name itself, not to communicate meanings.”<sup>45</sup>

While this “theological” aspect of music continues to charge our hearing, new music, existing as “demythologized prayer,” moves between the two spheres of coherence and incoherence, the particular and infinite, its “reasoning” as Gunnar Hindrichs explains is “not factual. It is rather the aesthetically necessary statement of ‘It

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<sup>41</sup> וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֱהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֱהְיֶה וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֱהְיֶה

“שְׁלַחֲנִי אֵלֵיכֶם” “And God said to Moses ‘Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.’ He continued, ‘Thus shall you say to the Israelites, ‘Ehyeh sent me to you.’” *Etz Haim: Torah and Commentary*, ed. David L. Lieber and Jules Harlow (New York: Rabbinical Assembly, 2001) and *Tanakh, The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia, Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1985), p. 330.

<sup>42</sup> See Theodor Adorno, trans. Susan Gillespie, “Music, Language and Composition,” *Musical Quarterly* 77, No. 3 (1993), pp. 401-414 and Gunnar Hindrichs, *Die Autonomie des Klangs: Eine Philosophie der Musik* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1965), p. 30.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>45</sup> Adorno, p. 402.

is the case', presenting itself in the history of its interpretation and yet always different. The coherence of the musical work therefore essentially says only 'It will be that what it will be'. In this way, the presentation of veritative being is without meaning."<sup>46</sup> As new music took a turn, existing in a space between theology and philosophy, it allows for what Emanuel Levinas described as, "being in direct relation with the Other" and to show that what he calls "the fact of being is what is most private; existence," the sole thing which one cannot communicate.<sup>47</sup>

It is my objective here to consciously re-evaluate what this "social relationship" to the other is in terms of new music. I can imagine such a music as "songs without meaning," songs that express the most private experience of existence, while simultaneously striving to "name the name," by forming an ever-new musical language for the other. Such a language would serve to activate memory by postulating the listener within the context of an "unknown ritual" that is to be discovered, while its historical context is simultaneously to be rediscovered. This song, connecting the finite and infinite, particularly and universality, was described by Francesca Albertini in relation to Levinas' critique of Hegel as "a language which does not refer to any determined meaning, but whose musicality lets resound the perceptible against the mortally sclerotic process of the *il y a*. Even by breaking up the monism of the I, art offers to the I the opportunity of not losing itself in the chaotic senselessness of the perceptible; art offers itself as creative source of meaning, as a resurrection of the face. Hence art is not merely an iconoclastic gesture, because through the sonority of its language, it is able not only to collect into unity the multiplicity, but also to connect finite and infinite, particularly and universality without transforming this collection in a sort of idolatrous totality: art can save the difference of each element and can create inside of them an infinity of other differences which cannot be reduced to the Hegelian totality."<sup>48</sup>

### **Quails: The Hunger of Consumption and the Traversing of Categories**

In our fast, globalized, media-dominated world, we are constantly flooded with pictures, with information, with distractions. This idolatry of the never enough also has the affect of a cultural situation that constantly leaves one hungry for more. In striving to remember that primal sound, we might rediscover our most private being in existence, charging the transcendental imagination of that incomprehensible sound, "new music" might become "other music."

After the Eternal had spoken those incomprehensible words, securing the history and future of the children of Israel, they became unsatisfied, even when the Eternal provided enough to get through the next day in the desert. The question remains: shall we go back to the manna of our hearing? Or are we craving the distraction from our existence and a more ethical relationship to the other? As the Torah has sung to us:

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<sup>46</sup> Hindrichs, p. 178.

<sup>47</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, transl. Richard Cohen (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 74.

<sup>48</sup> Francesca Albertini, "The Language Of The Meeting With The Other And The Phenomenology Of Eros," in *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology, Ethics, Politics, Aesthetics*, ed. Joelle Hansel, (Dordrecht and London: Springer, 2008), p.166.

ורוח נסע מאת יהוה ויגזו שלמים מן הים ויטש על המחנה כדרך  
 יום כה וכדרך יום כה סביבות המחנה וכאמתיים על פני הארץ:  
 ויקם העם כל היום ההוא וכל הלילה וכל יום המחרת ויאספו  
 את השלו הממעיט אסף עשרה חמרים וישטחו להם שטוח סביבות  
 המחנה:  
 הבשר עודנו בין שניהם טרם יכרת ואף יהוה חרה בעם ויך יהוה  
 בעם מכה רבה מאד:  
 ויקרא את שם המקום ההוא קברות התאוה כי שם קברו את העם  
 המתאווים:

“A wind went forth from the Lord and swept quails from the sea and spread them over  
 the camp about one day's journey this way and one day's journey that way, around the  
 camp, about two cubits above the ground.

The people rose up all that day and all night and the next day and gathered the quails.  
 [Even] the one who gathered the least collected ten heaps.

They spread them around the camp in piles. The meat was still between their teeth; it was  
 not yet finished, and the anger of the Lord flared against the people, and the Lord struck  
 the people with a very mighty blow.

He named that place *Kivroth Hata'avah* (Graves of Craving), for there they buried the  
 people who craved.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Etz Haim: Torah and Commentary, pp. 832-833.

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