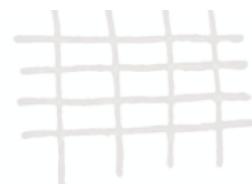


plain chant

Polyphony



HARMONIC  
polyphony  
(BACH)

## THEORY vs. PRACTICE:

a practical application of aesthetics



HARMONY  
(WAGNER)



WEBERN



NEW SERIALISTS

**ethan blackburn**

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

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

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

• • •

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

• •

# table of contents

<b><u>part 1. postulation</u></b>	4
<b>1. hegemonic . . . . .</b>	5
<b>2. problem(s) in focus. . . . .</b>	11
<b>3. question? question. . . . .</b>	17
. . . . .	
<b><u>part 2. process</u></b>	29
<b>plasticity . . . . .</b>	30
<b>syntax . . . . .</b>	42
<b>affect . . . . .</b>	52
. . . . .	
<b><u>part 3. no end.</u></b>	61
<b>no beginning . . . . .</b>	62
. . . . .	
<b>appendix</b>	67

**part 1.**

# postulation

# 1. hegemonic.

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

....

*this continuous albeit intermittent roadblock manifests itself deeper-*

*this continuous albeit intermittent roadblock manifests itself deeper-*

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

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

Hello, my name is Ethan Blackburn.

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

*This*

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

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

The second is understanding aesthetic principles.

*meaning no musicological studies, outside sources, no causal inferences. although all we work with happens to be inference. I purposefully object to Schenker, or Allen Forte, or Perspectives of New Music<sup>1</sup> or anything of that nature.*

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Plasticity** in the context of this research entails

*Plasticity also refers to an object's susceptibility to deformation, in terms of stress or strain.<sup>4</sup>*

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*don't worry, I already clarified this.*

## **indeterminacy**

*or decided in the practice room.*

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

this is where the origin of my research begins.

## **entropy**

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

*And thus,*

## **2. problem(s) in focus.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

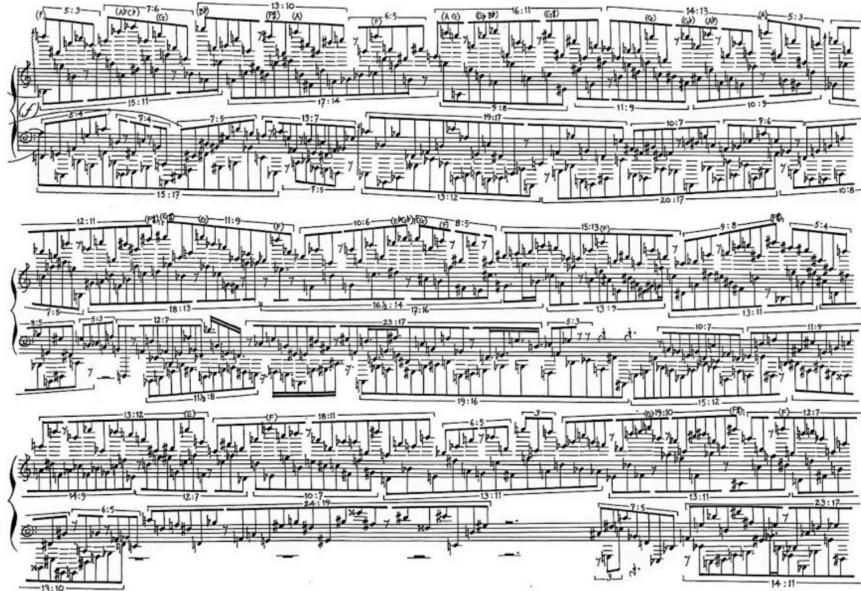
Additionally, the most popular written outlets of compositional journals were essays by musicologists that described the pitch system's complex forms and austere methodologies that stripped composers of

*personal agency.*

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

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

30.



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

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

### **academic hegemony,**

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

“Transgressing subjectivity by making its construction visible.”<sup>6</sup>

In approaching aesthetics, I asked, ‘can

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

<sup>6</sup> Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.

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

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

or

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

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

**voice**,

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

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

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



pictured left: Braxton, A. (2003).

Composition No. 340.

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

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

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

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

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

160 COMP. NO. 41-14

COMP. NO. 41-15

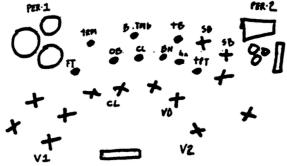
161

ove to open new worlds of sound activity that draw on many different factors. In Composition No. 41 we can experience no statements that emphasize the sound color and realness of a given instrument - or duo interchanges, trio and finally the collective body of the chamber ensemble.

Composition No. 41 was the first chamber orchestra work of mine to be publicly performed. a fact that took me by surprise. The first large annotated work of mine that I ever heard and as such the realness of this experience will always have a special place in my memories. All of the large stated structures prior to this work were written and filed in my drawer for safe keeping. Up until this performance, my relationship with large annotated structures had to do with recording concert ideas on paper as an exercise in theoretical postulation. This is so because music is sound, hearing and existence - which is to say it sans meaning if you don't hear it. Having Composition No. 41 actually 'actualized' in a performance would give me the first opportunity to ear what I had recorded on paper - not only for composition No. 41 but the realness of that opportunity gave insight into my earlier efforts as well. It was only after this experience that could begin to really develop and understand my own affinity nature. The reality of that experience would dictate the next cycle of my creative growth. Not only for the work you pursue in the future but also to correct earlier models from the past. Composition No. 41 would really be an important factor in the nature of my creative growth.

The first performance of Composition No. 41 was in

, 1977 at Alice Tully Hall by The New and Never Music Ensemble under the direction of Harvey Salberg. This version, which was the second revision, has since been performed at Michigan State University (under my direction) and at Antioch College. The final version of Composition No. 41 that will be published for the greater public is a third version (that contains only light changes in its dynamic components and tempo markings). Composition No. 41 was conceived to establish language music material groupings as a basis for alternative procedure and material specifics.



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

(which are admittedly unreliable)

Here I wrote it's the inception of the role of documentation in my music, well- in Braxton's music namely- but it ultimately led me to structure my research on the following question:

• •

### **3. question? question.**

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

*how does documenting my own process achieve a better aesthetic approach to music, of course for me personally, in my own guise, and does making the construction of my and others' processes visible and traceable help delineate issues of style, approach, etc. in composition, and does the explanation thereof demystify music to a point of degradation?*

My methodology begins and completes itself as a non-linear process, in terms of, even though I present each of these steps,

in order, the entire process was non-

*Namely,*

**analysis, synthesis, and re-analysis**

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

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

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

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

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

*Stein, Ryuichi Sakamoto, and Chick Corea).*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

With Vykintas, I discussed the compositional process using three questions from a very popular resource for composers<sup>9</sup>, and with Liviu Marinescu, we talked mostly about the sociological aspect of composition and contextualizing the self against a larger picture.

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

The first, as I mentioned, is

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

### **plasticity, syntax, affective qualities.**

#### **plasticity,**

*Plasticity being rendered here as indeterminate procedures or notation.*

---

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

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

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

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

And, so for

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

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

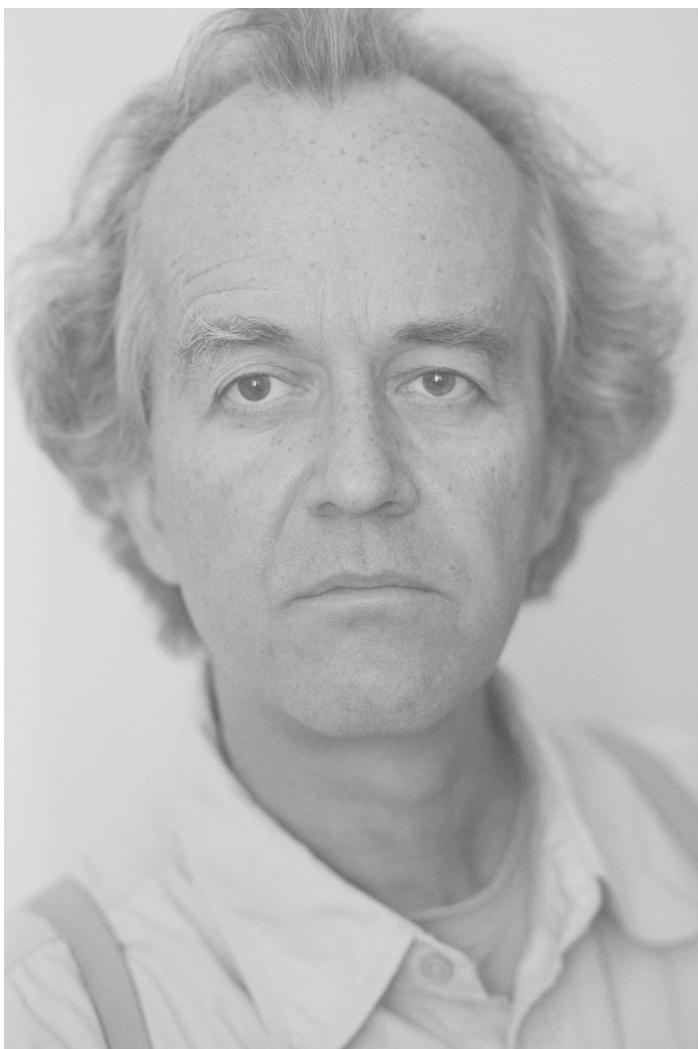
.....  
**syntax,**

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

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



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



pictures clockwise from top left:

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

*Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia (2024, March 1).*

*Morton Feldman. Encyclopedia Britannica. Photograph Rob Bogaerts, 1976.*

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

## **affective qualities.**

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

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

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

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

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

*It's very hard to explain what I mean.*

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

---

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

Music" (1984), and also from the example of Varèse's independence, expressed in a style so distant from Feldman's and yet, at a deeper level, sometimes close in its sonorities and always in its lack of methodology. Indeed, methodologists are Feldman's *bêtes noires*. He is polemically unsympathetic to all of them from Schoenberg to Boulez and beyond to "campus composers" of the "academic avant-garde." In "Predeterminate/Indeterminate" (1966), Feldman asserts that Schoenberg's "method of composing with the twelve tones, was not an alternative [but] still another organizational process, and one that adapted itself to the old forms." And "It is Boulez, more than any composer today, who has given system a new prestige — Boulez, who once said in an essay that he is not interested in how a piece sounds, only in how it is made... The **preoccupation** with *making* something, **with systems and construction**, seems to be a characteristic of music today. It has become, in many cases, the actual subject of musical composition."

Is Stravinsky an alternative to the methodologists? After all, he was not locked in to a single system unless to the appropriation of all musical history, much like Picasso's of art history. But no, it is precisely because of Stravinsky's reliance on history that Feldman can't give him the support he gives to Varèse who, of course, also needs it much more. So, Varèse (and Ives more parenthetically) are the composers from whom Boulez and Stockhausen could have gotten what they got in "glamorized" form from Schoenberg and Webern, "but they went to these [other] men with too deep a prejudice" — we can almost hear Feldman laugh derisively before adding — "the prejudice of the equal, the colleague" ("Conversations without Stravinsky," 1967).

Again and again Feldman cites painters to support his own prejudices and elucidate his arguments. Of the classic modern artists, he most reveres Mondrian, who "endlessly reduces, endlessly simplifies,"

A sound does not view itself as thought, as ought, as needing another sound for its elucidation; as etc.; it has no time for any consideration—it is occupied with the performance of its characteristics before it has died away; it must have made perfectly exact its frequency, its loudness, its length; its overtone structure, the precise morphology of these and of itself.

A sound accomplishes nothing; without it life would not last out the instant.

Relevant action is theatrical (music [imaginary separation of hearing from the other senses] does not exist), inclusive and intentionally purposeless. Theatre is continually becoming that it is becoming; each human being is at the best point for reception. Relevant response (getting up in the morning and discovering oneself musician) (action, art) can be made with any number (including none [none and number, like silence and music, are unreal]) of sounds. The automatic minimum (see above) is two.

Are you deaf (by nature, choice, desire) or can you hear (externals, tympani, labyrinth in which?)

Beyond them (ears) is the power of discrimination which, among other confused actions, weakly pulls apart (abstraction), ineffectually establishes as not to suffer alteration (the "work"), and unskillfully protects from interruption (museum, concert hall) what springs, elastic, spontaneous, back together again with a beyond that power which is fluent (it moves in or out), pregnant (it can appear where- as what-ever [rose, nail, constellation, 485.73482 cycles per second, piece of string]), related (it is you yourself in the form you have that instant

14/SILENCE

from left to right:

Feldman, M., & Friedman, B. H. (2001). Give my regards to eighth street: Collected writings of Morton Feldman.  
Cage, J. (1961). Silence: Lectures and writings (2011th ed.). Wesleyan University Press.

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

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

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

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

piece the consolidation and extension of its antecedents. But we can also read this process as an unfolding of parallel, at times scarcely comparable possibilities: the establishment of a manifold catalog of the most varied forms of thinking, writing, and playing, whose actual integration remains an unfulfilled task. Producing a whole means, first of all, combining DIFFERENT practices with each other: in order to seek out their relations to one another, to see how they behave toward each other and what transitions pass between them (formulation of the paradigm SHIFT—not the new paradigm), to see what happens when two practices are mixed (what third practice results, etc.)

All this: the incorporations of different constructs into one context, the linking of scattered exclusivities into an altered TOTALITY OF POSSIBILITY—all this belongs to the domain of "differentiation."

Differentiation is the essentially cultural part of our textual binary. In fact, it's what allows the term "culture" to exist at all. And by the same token, it is just as essentially conservative. Conservative in its original sense: preserving, sustaining. Differentiation only works when grounded on a pre-defined system of order. Using the coordinates of differentiation, we can measure refinement, and with it, increases in complexity, relational wealth, and entropy—all processes indicative of culture.

What becomes clear is that art and culture are not superimposable, and thus: not everything that is art is a part of "culture." This applies to action in general: each activity can resist or produce culture. And yet one without the other is vain futility—a culture without the capacity to integrate new impulses that could change the culture itself is an ailing culture: it will die. Conversely, the new, without friction against the status quo of culture, is a ghost. We can find no meaning in it.

DIFFERENCE	DIFFERENTIATION
The new	The give
Provocative-changing	Conservative-preserving
Coarse	Refined
Simplification/agentropny	Reduction and entropy
Negation (thought)	Affirmation (action)
Juxtaposing discretely existent things	Introducing multiple aspects into one thing
Object (tendency toward reification once the impulse toward differentiation weakens)	Development (in the traditional sense, that is, in Schoenberg's sense: varying)
Catastrophe (with a three-fold meaning)	Culture

Catastrophe I: Destruction, anti-art behind every stripped-down facade, an underlying layer becomes visible, behind a torn-down building: the open landscape.

Catastrophe II: Transition: the shift from one practice to another (not the new practice itself).

Catastrophe III: The silence before sound (... before the act): in art since 1945, this is often presented as pure listening, pure attention, openness, expectation and intentionlessness (empty images, silent music, rooms merely hinted at, not formed).

me need  
classical/folk  
in need of  
perverse  
naïve

affirmation

introducing

development

(in the traditional sense, that is, in

Schoenberg's sense: varying)

culture

itself

it will die

versus

new

friction

against

status quo

of culture

is a ghost

we can find no meaning in it

in

meaning

affect.

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

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

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

source: arscul.us/writings.html

#### interview vykintas baltakas

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

[E] - Ethan Blackburn

[V] - Vykintas Baltakas

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

[V] No, I know, I know.

I have two experiences, two very strong experiences.

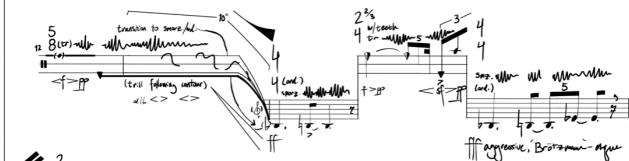
in school.

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

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

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

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



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

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

$\approx 90$ , reverently

3 8 6:4

3 8 6:4

## part 2.

# process

4 8 4:4

2 4 5:4

5 8 6:4

2 4 5:2

# plasticity

My first study is on plasticity.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

to achieve recognizing

something means i have measured

the difference between what i'm

verifiable only by the self.

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

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

*differential assessment.*

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

*hearing*

and what i've heard.

my willingness to label something comes from

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

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

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

Weiss/Weisslich 1.1 and 1.2, 1980

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

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

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

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

And on this next page,

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

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

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

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

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

"When sound is conceived as a horizontal series of events

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

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

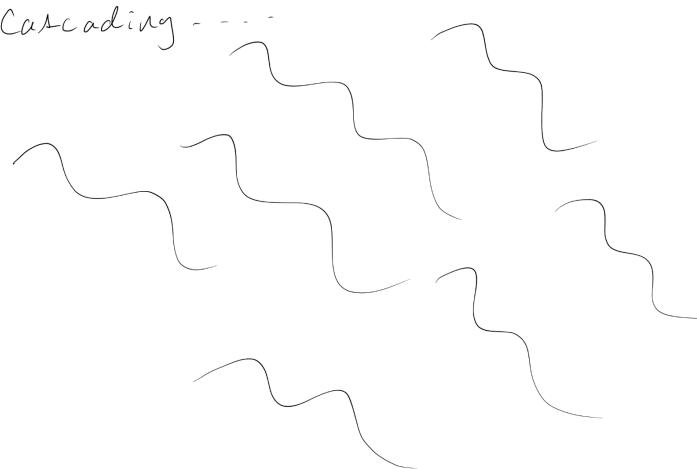
In order to articulate a complexity of such close temporal ordering one

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

In a way, the work resulting from this approach

can be said not to

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



*"lines play an omnipresent role in these instrumental pieces, embellished lines,*

have a 'sound.'

The idea of drawing in the *Überlegungen*:

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

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



*Überlegungen, Folder 1, "Morceau d'Annoux," 1983*

*line on form.*

35

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

(pictured left):  
sketch for 16 lovesongs.

(pictured right); excerpt.

*Ablinger, P. (2022).*

*simultaneously floating lines, lines crossing through, crossing out, other lines, lines with clumps of notes around them like Giacometti's knots of modeling clay.*<sup>12</sup>

*Now! Writings*

What we hear is rather a replica

i.e,

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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

*Substance refers to idea, rather than tangibility.*

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

of sound..."<sup>13</sup>

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

from the beginning is the only reason

5. 7

**asynchronous** play until you've reached the end, then stop. rhythm value determines max rhythmic speed to play.

vary speed greatly, but keep around  $\text{♩} = 50 - 77$  [ "≈ 1" ]

pp espress., unstable, airy

soft mallets

wait 1''

ped. until each ♪, ad lib.

pp

mf

sf pp

mf

pp

mf

pp

mf

pp con sord.

wait 4'' sul IV sepiere (gradual rib. until end)

sf pp

pp con sord.

s.t.

Wait 2'' moto vib. on each beat.

pp con sord.

Audio Example 1.

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

In this next example, from the thirteenth love song, I incorporated the previous image of a sinusoidal wave.

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

*specifically a single period of a sinusoidal wave, purely applied to the intensity curve. (events, dynamics, data...)*

*everything is sine waves,  
anyway.*

it is ever performed twice.

Vykintas Baltakas told me in an interview,

“...there is not a single situation in life which is exactly the same

13.

28

system lasts  $\approx 20''$  extremely staccato.  
percussion freely switches between any instrument, be as colorful as possible. view  as 'high sounds', and  as 'low sounds'. every dotted line denotes a period of roughly 5''.  
piano advised to freely add colors (inside the piano, using preparations, etc.) that follow the contour.  
saxes  $\rightarrow$  slap (closed or open), M random multiphonics.  
strings - • ord • pizz,  legno,  snap pizz,  ricochet + direction

**asynchronous**

A handwritten musical score for orchestra and piano. The score includes parts for Saxes, perc. pn., vlns 1 & 2, and cb. The score is divided into measures by vertical dashed lines. The first measure starts with a dynamic (tutti) PPP. The second measure begins with a dynamic tr um. Measures 3-4 show various rhythmic patterns for the Saxes and perc. pn. Measure 5 features a dynamic m. A dynamic (lub) is placed above a wavy line in measure 6. Measures 7-8 show more rhythmic patterns. Measure 9 begins with a dynamic +. Measures 10-11 show more rhythmic patterns. Measure 12 ends with a dynamic +. The score concludes with a dynamic (≥ 20") at the end of measure 12.

## Audio Example 2.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

as the previous one.”<sup>14</sup>

the composer must decide beforehand their place as mediator between

concept (relation to idea) and

manner

(performance).

globalization

and over-saturation of content,

scores, ideas, and networks entails

a re-orienting

of the issue of whether something we create

exists for us or itself.

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

1.         

2.         

3.         

4.         

5.         

6.         

**Agreement:**         

**Disagreement:**         

**Agreement - 1st measure:**         

**Agreement - 2nd measure:**         

**Disagreement - 1st measure:**         

**Disagreement - 2nd measure:**         

original sketches of *which stutter and sing*, using precise pitch as a 'suggested dictation'. Gesture as line preserved.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

why do i find certain sounds cheap?

process is unavoidable, inevitable of our attention therein.

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

has been a hyper-focus into subtleties of creation

in an effort to detach oneself from classicists,

just to make a new tradition/

**prison**

within itself.

honesty to a source other than

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

ourself is impossible unless we could somehow account

for every individual event or expression that lead

up to the creation of something.

The musical score consists of four staves of music, each with unique performance instructions:

- Staff 1 (Measures 44-45):** Features a bass clef, a 2/4 time signature, and a dynamic of ***s> sim.*** It includes markings like **ric. sim.**, **3**, **3**, **= pp**, **5**, **6**, and **f**.
- Staff 2 (Measures 47-48):** Features a bass clef, a 2/4 time signature, and dynamics ***sf***, **5**, **6**, **f**. It includes markings like **ric. marcato**, **non-ric.**, **ric. s.p.**, and **molto flaut. sul tasto**.
- Staff 3 (Measures 50-51):** Features a bass clef, a 2/4 time signature, and dynamics ***p.n***, ***sf***, ***sf***, ***ff***. It includes markings like **x3 pizz**, **5**, **short**, **arco, ord.**, ***sub.f***, and ***ppp***.
- Staff 4 (Measures 54-55):** Features a treble clef, a 2/4 time signature, and dynamics ***sfp***, ***p***, ***sfp***, ***poco rit...***, ***ppp***, ***molto flaut.***, and ***molto espress.*** It includes markings like **m.s.t.** and **3**.

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

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

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

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

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

*you already know.*

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

*sax, horn, piano, celesta, harp.<sup>16</sup>*

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

form is prescribed as an errant offspring of theory;

a bastard child to practice.

things that are *inevitable* are best sensed

holistically and intuitively,

requiring

no explanation

or

delineation of process.

"I cannot make a relationship between music and society.

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

<sup>16</sup> this being the instrumentation of the piece.

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

I don't know what society is."<sup>17</sup>

a word, that

(didn't start at a word)

becomes a *line*, (which was

never a *line* to begin with)

Video Example 4.  
excerpt from *disquiet*.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

# **syntax**

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Things have no choice but to have a syntax.*

*Gibberish is thus a very honest expression of absurdity.*

*“The only clear conclusion here is that structure and methods are as indispensable as they are hindrances.”<sup>19</sup>*

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

ergo i am always writing.

only sometimes do i sit down,

like a radio operator,

to try and fine tune myself

into the frequency

i want to

dictate.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.

Rondo mainly deals with form as the caricature.

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

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

*the choice to read something*

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

*is a choice to destroy it....*

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

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

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

that consists of constant distinctions of sequences

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

that last infinitesimally smaller than the previous

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

for proper part-distinction.

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

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

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

*A rondo premeditates the need for a 'tonic'.*

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

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

29

**109**  
Tempo I,  $\text{J}=92$

b. cl.

fl.

e. gtr.  
100% expression pedal, ring mod. amt.  
0%

to chain 6

perc.

vla.

vc.

Audio Example 5.  
excerpt from *rondo*

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

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

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

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

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

*syntax here is conceived as divisions.*

*rational vs. irrational.*

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

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

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

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

*alternatively, sections within categories can be balanced (emphasizing*

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

and the next *non-tonic*

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

these airy distinctions

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

alternatively,

mass as tonic

and an anti-mass

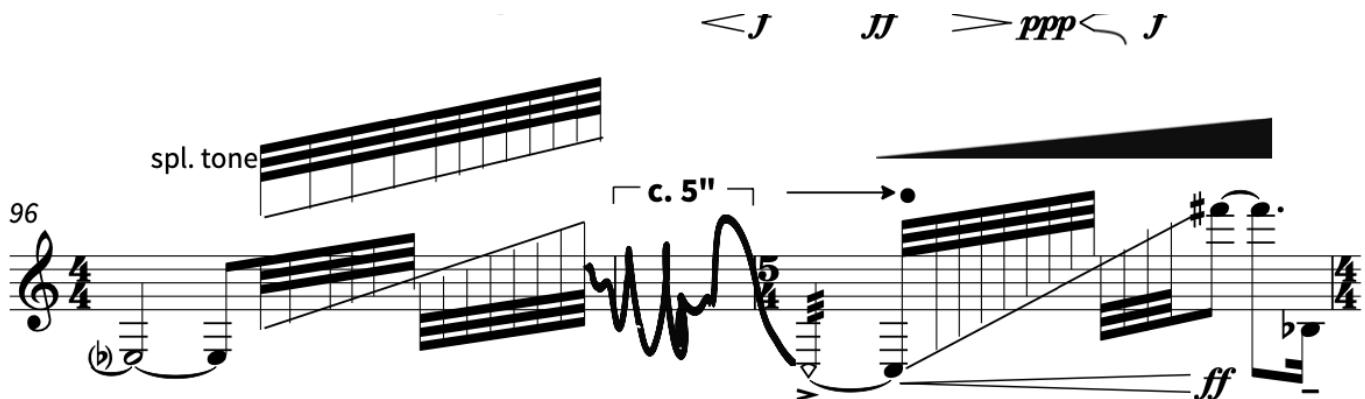
as the non-tonic.

*(pitch and form while de-rhythm).*

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

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

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



*rondo, bass clarinet part.*

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

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

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

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

And so I thought, applying this to another theory within phenomenology, specifically Umwelt theory<sup>20</sup>, how the relation or experience is inseparable from the world, namely how the observer is simultaneously being the observed.

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

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

*Improvisation implies immense self-perception.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

*ii.*  $\approx 90$ , reverently

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

This gesture is a syntactical use...

I cannot predict beforehand how it will be interpreted.

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

moment.

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

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

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

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

One example being in his Piano Concerto<sup>22</sup>, a one-measure cadenza for a contrabassoon, famously basically unplayable.

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

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

true dishonesty belongs to the academic, as the main role of the academic is to maintain a tradition rather than to ‘further’ it.

the issue of ‘academic’ writing is the intent of the composer to make their music sound interesting. the main evidence of this is the orchestral work, one that was conceived with the idea stripping any agency from the players.

x should be played like y, because we have essentially done it that way forever.<sup>24</sup>

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

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

<sup>24</sup> of course a gross over-exaggeration. but take the premise for what you will.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

yellow is sympathetic.

green is useable.

pink is almost palpable.

yellow was sense.

blue is beyond nonsensical,

blue is the beyond. purple.

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

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

<sup>25</sup> Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.

What he means, or what I have derived from this,

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

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

*quickness and slowness In Everything and there are*

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

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

it takes much

effort to

lea- rn,

but it takes

even more to

ignore.

14

entire system  $\geq 60''$

txt || needing angry feeling being existing, wanting to be needing angry feeling being existing,

cl. 1

cl. 2

cl. 3

b. d.

clav.

ff shriek (ppf) overblow (ad.) sim. ff sforz. m. ff

ff shriek (ppf) overblow (ad.) sim. ff sforz. m. ff

ff shriek (ppf) overblow (ad.) sim. ff sforz. m. ff

ff deep (ppf) ff sim. ff sforz. m. ff

cl. 1.1

cl. 1.2

cl. 1.3

b. d.

clav.

continued... clutter taking shape mm. Freeze... continue... Freeze... continue...

Audio Example 7.  
excerpt

# affect

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

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

It is important to note here that when I say listener, I'm not referring to the non-composer. In fact, the composer here is equally a listener and a receiver as to the audience.

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

and *WHAT IS?*, which

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

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

*This second phase, or the phase of propensity,*

voice as sound object is unfortunately

inseparable from its heuristic function in music.

sound requires expectation, something

lacking in some objectivities, which hangs upon timbre as a signal.

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

comes from my final recital.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

we are so belittled,

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

where we worry about whether our expressions are gimmicks

or not.

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

my music

as

answers

to

questions.

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

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

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

He writes, “the responsibility of the artist consists in perfecting his work so that it may become attractively disinteresting.”<sup>27</sup>

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

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

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

*Cage tries to state that music means nothing as a thing.*<sup>28</sup>

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

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

relation is *inseparable* from our perception,

since the act of listening, and experiencing

, remains as creative and integral

as the role as the sound object itself plays.

this intensity comes from content.

this content

forces the musician to draw

upon themselves,,

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

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

When a composer measures their difference by only their techniques and innovations, it relates to the sentiment of Morton Feldman,

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

*In anything, we merely love the relation we have to it.*

*The rest is, well, noise.*

voices and piano is nothing new.

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

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

The musical score consists of four staves: Soprano (S.), Clarinet (cln.), Piano (Pn.), and Bassoon (bn.). The score is divided into sections by vertical dashed lines. The piano part contains handwritten lyrics and musical markings. The vocal parts also have lyrics and dynamic markings. The bassoon part has a section labeled 'mer. bistro' with a wavy line pattern.

*excerpt from quem está falando?*

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

...

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

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

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

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

*Is it the job of anyone to say anything new?*

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

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

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

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

silences/rests are equivalent to spaces,

spaces that look empty

but contain something much more introspective.

who is speaking?

better to start with the premise

that i hate music, and

find every decision afterwards

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

finding the edge between

the idea and façade,

and using this to measure

the composition's

plasticity.

perception of the piece.

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

“Noise is music’s dreams of us.”<sup>31</sup>

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

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

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

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

*He says, “perception is learned, thus we ultimately cannot claim ownership of creative endeavors.”<sup>32</sup>*

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

which often means the source, disrupted to begin with,

is being represented by the

very minimum

of two manners

at any given moment.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.

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

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

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

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

Noise is inevitably a part of us.

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

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

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

and set about discovering means to let sounds be themselves

rather than vehicles for man-made theories or

expressions of human sentiments."<sup>33</sup>

---

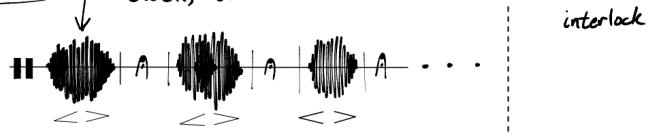
<sup>33</sup> Cage, J. (1961). *Silence: Lectures and writings* (2011th ed.). Wesleyan University Press.

Very slow, brooding ...

pp ~ p

THINK OF ONE COLOR AT A TIME.

R.S. → swell, think.



w.w/trb.

air to pitch



groupings...

### Audio Example 8. WHAT IS?, sequence one.

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

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

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

the most insipid parts of art are often

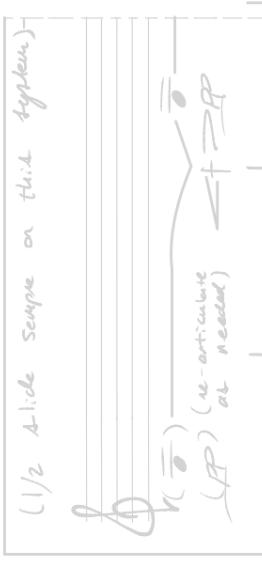
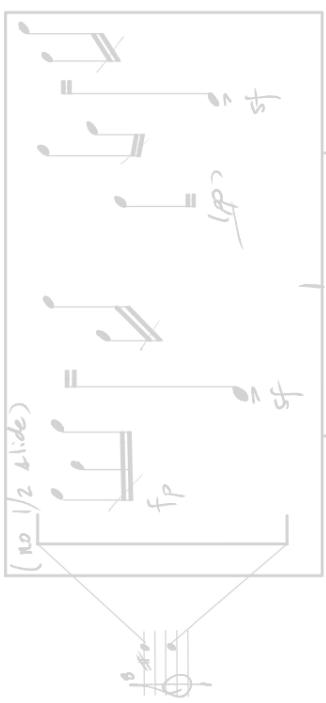
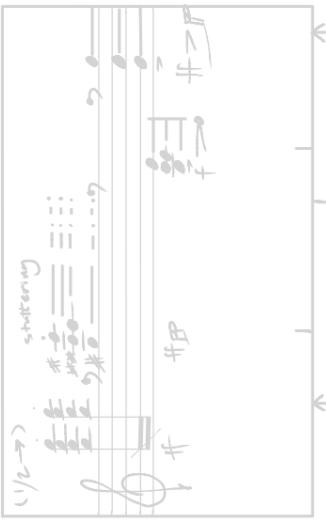
intellectually conceived.

5

15"

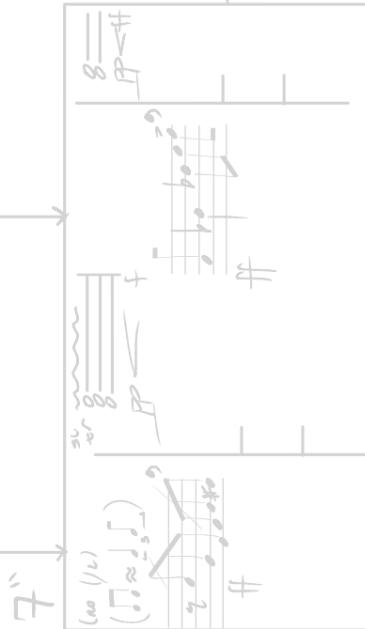
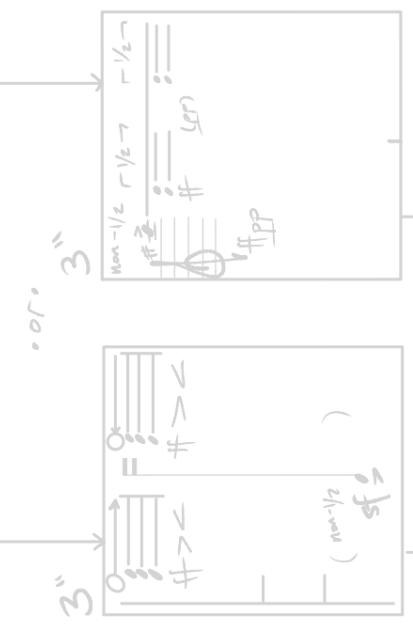
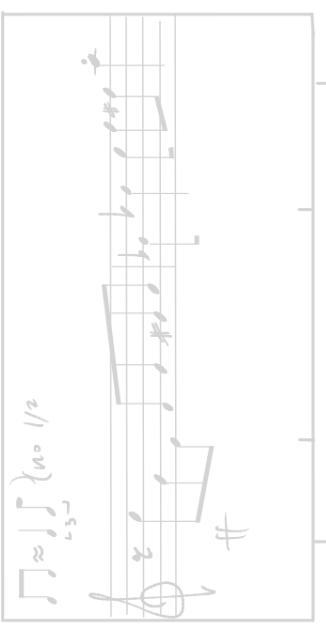
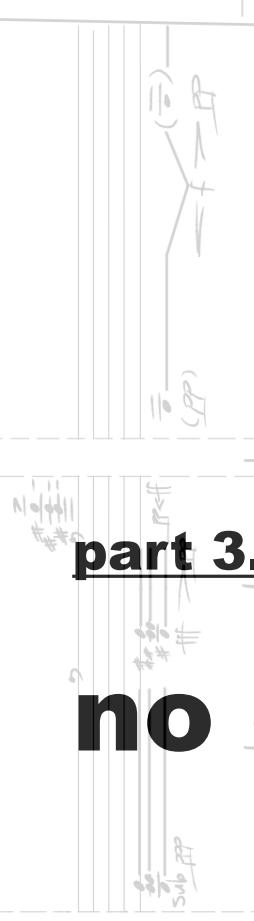
15"

15"

 $\approx 5''$  $\approx 5'', \geq 2 \times$  take 2" fragments

## no end.

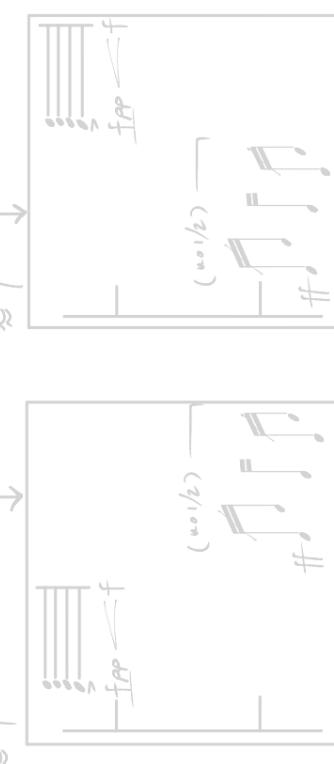
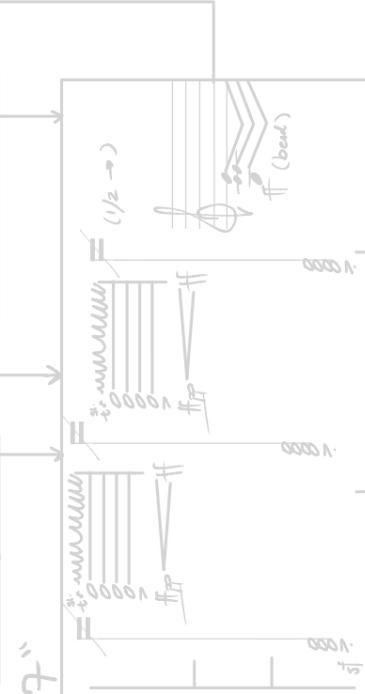
as fast as possible, ad lib.



.05"

3"

3"

 $\approx 4''$  $\approx 4''$ 

# **no beginning.**

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

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

Is repetition a conscious attempt or something inevitable?

We all write for more

*or less*

the same instruments, in the same

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

And music without this

*without,*

further estranging

*itself from the public when it fails*

to acknowledge

or

Rather,

# **sources cited.**

## **books:**

- Ablinger, P. (2022). Now! writings 1982-2021. MusikTexte.
- Cage, J. (1961). Silence: Lectures and writings (2011th ed.). Wesleyan University Press.
- Cage, J. (1967). A year from Monday: New lectures and writings. Wesleyan University Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1994). Difference and Repetition. *trsl. Paul Patton*
- Feldman, M., & Friedman, B. H. (2001). Give my regards to eighth street: Collected writings of Morton Feldman. Exact Change.
- Feldman, M. (2010). Vertical thoughts: Morton Feldman and the Visual Arts. Irish Museum of Modern Art.
- Kostelanetz, Richard. "John Cage and Richard Kostelanetz: A Conversation about Radio." *The Musical Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 2, 1986
- Varga, B. A. (2011). Three questions for sixty-five composers. University of Rochester Press.

## **scores:**

- Braxton, A. (2003). Composition No. 340.
- Cage, J. (1952). Concerto for Prepared Piano and Chamber Orchestra [Full score]. Peters Edition EP 6706.

## **websites:**

- Baltakas, V. (2023). [Writings]. Retrieved from <https://arscul.us/pages/writings/vykintas.html>
- Is This John Cage's Most Beautiful Piece? (2022, April 12) [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zIc5pO4tBwg>

## **personal communications:**

- Marinescu, L. (2022, November). [Personal communication].
- Baltakas, V. (2023, January 23). [Personal communication]. Retrieved from <https://arscul.us/pages/writings/vykintas.html>

*cover image:* Stravinsky, I. (1956). *Poetics of music: In the form of six lectures*. Random House.

# **appendix**

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

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

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

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1VgpVgQoQUi391wWm9GZQGgxjE2APnKz?usp=sharing>

Thank you,