# ON CULTURE

## DOES "CRITICAL COMPOSITION" (STILL) EXIST? REFLECTIONS ON THE MATERIAL OF NEW MUSIC

JONAS WOLF

Jonas.Wolf@gcsc.uni-giessen.de

Jonas Wolf is a second-year PhD candidate at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture at Justus Liebig University in Giessen, Germany. In 2017 he graduated in musicology and music theory at Folkwang University in Essen. His academic focal points include contemporary music, critical theory, digitalization, intermediality, music theater, and performativity. Currently, he is working on his PhD project on "Nomadic Concepts and Aesthetics of Musical Composition for YouTube."

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## _Abstract

Although the term "critical composition" was paradigmatically used by Nicolaus A. Huber in his text "Kritisches Komponieren" from 1972 (Huber 2000), one can argue that the early atonality and dodecaphony of the Second Viennese School — and their theorization by Adorno — laid the foundation for following generations of composers who perceived their work as a product of critical thinking. Following an Adornian rationale, early atonal composition would be viewed as an immanently negative and aesthetically indrawn last bastion against the historical tendency of the material in Western societies, only pre-conceptually connected to society, whereas many post-war composers turned toward analytical or politically committed forms of composition that introduced music as a means of critically reflecting on the interrelations between musical and social spheres.

By outlining the emancipatory potential of John Cage's music philosophy, I want to counterpoint the conventional notion of "critical composition" as a phenomenon within the post-war avant-garde, which is deeply rooted in the European intellectual tradition of a sovereign subject. Against this background, the critical potentials of contemporary conceptions of composition "as an expanded field of artistic practice encompassing a range of different media and symbolic relationships" (Barrett 2016) can be grasped beyond the ideals of work autonomy and material progress.

## 1_Prologue: Adorno and the Loss of Art Music's Naïveté

Critical and reflective compositional approaches to musical material are not a phenomenon of the 20th century. In fact, the theoretical examination and compositional expansion of possible material forms within concrete historical conditions of possibility are a necessity of art music production and have always had the potential to cause controversies between composers, music theorists, music critics, and listeners. In this context, the argument between music theorist Giovanni Artusi (1540–1613) and Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) regarding the 'old' polyphonic ideal and 'new' tendencies toward monodic forms — since 1603 known as *prima pratica* and *seconda pratica* — comes to mind as well as the claim to a 'rightful' continuation of the symphonic tradition asserted by both the Classicists and the New German School in the 19th century. Although art music discourses until the 20th century predominantly revolved around intra-aesthetic issues and approaches, Theodor W. Adorno diagnoses a fundamental double character of the artwork as both autonomous and *fait social*: Not only does he describe "aesthetic form as sedimented content" which can historically be traced back, he also understands "aesthetic relations of production" as "sedimentations or imprintings of

social relations of production."[1] Consequentially, Adorno postulates an objective historical tendency of the musical material, which, as a result of social and cultural mediations, seems to move into "the same direction as does real society even where neither knows anything of the other and where each combats the other."[2] Due to the transitoriness of the material and its ever-increasing historical self-awareness, no tonal formation deployed can be used indifferently in a reflective compositional process. According to Max Paddison, composing itself has become "a further kind of mediation, as reflexion upon historical becoming […] — a process which is incorporated as a key aspect of the constructedness of the music itself, and thus is mediated within the musical work as concrete, technical categories."[3] However, from the 19th century onward, the immanent movement of the increasingly 'marked' tonal material led to a musical exhaustion of expression, complicating the compositional avoidance of the work's transparency and triviality. Hegel described this as a historically recurring condition of the arts:

> What through art or thinking we have before our physical or spiritual eye as an object has lost all absolute interest for us if it has been put before us so completely that the content is exhausted, that everything is revealed, and nothing obscure or inward is left over anymore. [...] if the essential world-views [...], and the range of content belonging to these, are in every respect revealed by art, then [...] the true need to resume it again is awakened only with the need to turn against the content that was alone valid hitherto.[4]

Quite contrary to a "turn against the content" though, the total economic organization of bourgeois society entailed a subjectified art reception grounded on the use-value of sensual pleasure and intimacy which constituted an obstruction of historically reflective aesthetic tendencies due to the increased demand for fetishistic reiterations of affective musical tokens within the work. From the beginning of the 20th century onward, this tendency was further reinforced by the development of a music industry that increasingly focused on sound carriers instead of scores. In this context, Adorno argues that the "productive force of the composer" and "the inherent gravity of the work" have dissolved under the economic restraints and the alleged rise of anti-intellectualism in the early 20th century, and consequently postulates a stringent musical structuring "through which music is exclusively able to assert itself against the ubiquity of commercial enterprise."[5]

Against this background, the particularity of the historical rupture that occurred with the first atonal and — subsequently — dodecaphonic compositions by the Second Viennese School can be grasped. By separating the new musical means of atonality

from the historical tradition by a "qualitative leap" toward the twelve-tone technique,[6] which brought about a radically new organization of tonal material, Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and Alban Berg have dedicated themselves to a compositional method which, according to Adorno, works as an antithesis of society:[7]

> The truth of this music appears to reside in the organized absence of any meaning, by which it repudiates any meaning of organized society — of which it wants to know nothing — rather than in being capable on its own of any positive meaning. Under present conditions, music is constrained to determinate negation.[8]

In Adorno's understanding, early atonality and dodecaphony represent a break with the affirmative character of the arts, which until then was fundamental to every musical work.

## 2_From Ground Zero to "Critical Composition:" Paradigmatic Approaches

The serialism of the 1950s — a logical development of the twelve-tone technique — expanded the pre-organization of musical material in fixed-order series to other parameters such as dynamics, durations, and timbre. Although this constructivist method constitutes an objectivistic approach to the material, which is deprived of its traditional traces by its strict structuring in closed sets of proportions and relations, Adorno interestingly criticized serialism exactly for its supposed radical objectivity, claiming that "this music no longer contains anything composed," leaving the listener to "the mercy of an infernal machine."[9] While Adorno primarily feared for the substance of a musical "being-in-and-for-itself" due to the loss of a subjective moment, which he understands as a medial instance that controls the "objective rigor of musical thought"[10] and thus enables the internal 're-enactment' of the musical structure by the listener, several serial and post-serial composers rather have broken with (dogmatic) serial approaches in order to (re-)attain a relational musical materiality.

Luigi Nono (1924–1990), who devoted his work to the cause of the Communist Party of Italy (PCI), pitted the configuration and shaping of serial techniques and musical material against their functional value and their contemporary relevance. Therefore, his concept of a 'partisan music' appears to be incompatible with Adorno's ideal of New Music as an immanently negative and aesthetically indrawn last bastion against the historical tendency of the material in Western consumer societies in the 20th century. For instance, in his piece *La fabbrica illuminata* (1964) for voice and four-channel magnetic tape, Nono uses recordings of machines in a rolling mill, pay negotiations,

and syndicate declarations to create a sonic picture of labor conditions in industrial production sites. In an Adornian sense, such a use of pre-recorded real sounds would be regarded as "schizophone" and an undermining of the work's autonomy. Nono, being very familiar with historical materialism, never unquestioningly transferred constellations of duration, intervals, and dynamic relations that are inseparably linked to tonal traditions to his organization of musical material — lest he ended up with mere reifications of said constellations — but saw no ground for Adorno's argument against the artistic use of realistic and electronic sounds, which he incorporated in his compositions in order to create a communicative connectability with contemporary 'everyday consciousness.' In some of Nono's compositions, the object of critique — for example the exploitation of labor in *La fabbrica illuminata* — is treated both on a textual and sonic level. Furthermore, Nono does recognize the fact that a compositional process which engages in a practice of social change has to be highly connective:

> […] the relations between the creator and the masses (especially the working class) must not be those of a teacher to a student […] anymore. Both have to unite around the cause of the work which they develop together: One side brings in the idea, the circumstances, the material; the other, the composer, provides the technical means that the new sonic and lingual possibilities of expression offer.[11]

*La fabbrica illuminata* is a good example for such a responsive — or even collective? — approach: By way of constant dialogue with workers, Nono tried to adjust to their working practices, experiences, and needs in order to achieve the desired authenticity, relevance, and functionality of the composition. Owing to the workers' lack of previous knowledge about instrumental or vocal traditions, realistic sounds and 'proletarian' figures of speech are used as sonic main material. Despite the general feedback that the final piece could not represent industrial labor in its actual brutality, the workers granted the piece an emancipatory function, stating that *La fabbrica illuminata* helped them become aware of the inhumane noise exposure and think of ways to change their working conditions.[12] It may have been this resonance with the workers' concerns that motivated Nono to conceptualize some of his following works — for example *Non consumiamo Marx* from his tape work *Musica-Manifesto N.1* (1969) or *Ein Gespenst geht um in der Welt* (1971) — as *active* contributions to the agenda of Italy's counterculture. As Timothy Murphy puts it, some of Nono's works after *La fabbrica illuminata* "extended its methods to the international framework of the workers' struggle, partic-

ularly in its anti-imperialist or anti-colonialist manifestations."[13] Of course, this approach to composition as both a vehicle for socio-political messages and a sphere of dialogic resonance runs opposite to Adorno's postulate of the work's autonomy and transcendence. In order to retain its utopian moment, art, as the "promise of reconciliation in the midst of the unreconciled," must not, according to Adorno, assimilate social reality or reproduce concrete political concerns, be it on a sonic or conceptual level: "Art is indeed infinitely difficult in that it must transcend its concept in order to fulfil it; yet in this process where it comes to resemble realia it assimilates itself to that reification against which it protests […]."[14] Driven by the aim to express and enable critique, Nono's 'partisan music' outgrows any postulate of a utopian self-efficacy of the arts. The collective approach to the compositional process in La fabbrica illuminata, which, on a sonic level, results in the use of concrete pre-recorded sounds, is contradictory to the concept of 'intra-aesthetic' synthesis. Although 'extra-aesthetic' communicative elements automatically fall prey to reification processes and may place the composer under the (reasonable) suspicion of rendering their work into a mere propagandistic instrument, they appear to be a main constituent of any socio-politically engaged music. With regard to Nono's political pieces, this insolvable problem comes to light with particular clarity.

In a way, the compositions by one of Luigi Nono's students, Nicolaus A. Huber (*1939), also originate from the ideal of socialized musical creation and experience. Huber paradigmatically coined the term "critical composition" (*Kritisches Komponieren*) in his statement of the same title from 1972,[15] wherein he argues for a compositional approach that analytically deals with issues of musical listening and production. For Huber, New Music always reveals something *about* music. Likewise, provided the composer is dialectically aware, it reveals something about the human being as such. According to Huber, a critical composer has to analyse intra- and extra-musical relations, since the "problem of music conveys itself through the problem of human and societal reality, not solely through the alienated music sphere."[16] In accordance with Adorno, he criticizes the manipulative 'as if' character of music, considering it a result of the historical tendency of the 'closed' musical work in the context of its ongoing fetishized representation and consumption. However, instead of depriving his compositions of any concrete relation to society, Huber places the human being into the center of his work by compositionally thematizing and dissecting conditions and modalities

of musical and non-musical communication, perception and understanding.[17] Depending on the focus of the piece, Huber's analytical approach can result in a radical reduction of the material as well as in its unconventional expansion, as the following examples illustrate: (1) In *Informationen über die Töne e-f* (1965/66) for string quartet, he highlights the relations between the two tones e and f — and the perception thereof — by presenting them in varying positions, durations, colors and volumes while scarcely using other pitches. (2) His piece *Anerkennung und Aufhebung* (1971/72) for four films, three two-track tapes, and various mirrors not only aims at activating the listener's and musician's critical reflection but also the bodies of the instrumentalists. By demanding musical "muscle actions" and silent instrumental actions of the interpreters at the beginning of the piece and varying the relations between acoustic/visual stimuli and conditions of human expression in the further course, Huber expands his material to the human body itself, composing — via stimuli and written instructions — with "human tone color."[18]

Regardless of whether Huber deconstructs tonal or rhythmic relations on a microscopic level or explores extra-musical material (mixed media, theatrical elements, everyday objects, odors, etc.), his heterogeneous pieces originate from the same critical approach: No sound, technique, or musical expression shall be left unquestioned against the background of the interrelations between the intra- and extra-musical spheres and the historical and sociocultural pre-occupation of musical material. Since Huber's compositions are strongly focused on critical listening, he wants them to be understood as an intellectual cooperation of the composer and the listener who is willing to radically reflect on their own perception. However, the non-hierarchical inclusion of the recipient in Huber's works can hardly be grasped as more than a programmatic illusion or a merely utopian ideal. Huber's conceptualization of a 'music about music,' as a musical result of an analytical program which precedes the compositional process, cannot hide the actual power relation between him, as the sovereign composer, and the listener. Furthermore, the desired collective impact of his works is complicated by his dialectic approach that presupposes a sophisticated audience. Huber's works are informed by critical thinking but, contrary to some pieces by Nono, not embedded in a concrete practice of social change, and can thus be defined as 'applied theory.'

To get a comprehensive picture of the aesthetic tendencies and conceptions of critical post-serial composition, Helmut Lachenmann's (*1935) approach to musical materiality is of vital importance. In the 1970s, Lachenmann — at this time a harsh critic of the bourgeois trivialization of the symphonic apparatus — diagnosed a similar 'regression' of New Music due to the audience's expectation of established tonal and expressive musical tokens which, if met by the composer, leads to an affirmative aesthetic of immediacy. Thus, he criticizes composers such as Penderecki, Ligeti and Kagel for their strategies of implementing tonal 'taboos' for reasons of antithetical defamiliarization or humorous confrontation, accusing them of tamed revolutionary attitudes.[19] With his *musique concrète instrumentale*, Lachenmann created a musical concept of composing for classical instruments which is driven by a negativistic ideal. In analogy to Pierre Schaeffer's acousmatic *musique concrète*, the very processes of sound production on classical instruments serve as concrete material for the musical composition. The possible ways of sound generation are radically explored and organized by their acoustic qualities which "do not produce sounds for their own sake, but describe or denote the concrete situation: listening, you hear the conditions under which a sound- or noise-action is carried out, you hear what materials and energies are involved and what resistance is encountered."[20] Hence, Lachenmann's compositional approach is the result of open reflection on art music's aesthetic means. The break with patterns of expectation and immediacy through the refusal of pre-occupied material forms and the compositional expansion and dissection of the musical material served as an aesthetic compass at least for his early works following the introduction of his concept. His compositional approach, as a critically informed intra-aesthetic practice, avoids any worldly communication. As a composer who knows about the impossibility of concretely expressing critique through his music while retaining a utopian moment, Lachenmann does not make use of 'extra-aesthetic' means of connectability. However, the negational logic of works like *Guero* (1970) — in which the piano is used as a percussive and plucked instrument — or *Pression* (1969/70) — which explores relations of (bow) pressure on the cello — can today only be understood from a historical perspective. Since the 1970s, Lachenmann's approach to extended playing techniques developed into a distinguished personal style — not least because of its homogeneous intra-aesthetic — and subsequently became a teaching standard for studies in musical composition. The canonization of his works entailed the use and perception of his musical vocabulary

within newly gained contexts of expectation, thus undermining Lachenmann's original refusal of immediacy. While it still depends on the listener if the immanent structure of Lachenmann's works is internally re-enacted or not, the immanent negativity of his music — and thus its anti-institutional stance — are irrevocably lost.

Against the background of today's ubiquity of material — a result of the avant-garde's normative guideline of material progress and expansion — Rainer Nonnen-mann notes a "general establishment of New Music within the music industry" and the composers' awareness of "the inner contradictions and social ineffectiveness of 'critical composition.'"[21] Not only has the ideal of aesthetic immanence, as represented by Helmut Lachenmann, lost its footing as an exclusive bastion against the total expansion of musical reification; the use of worldly elements and politically charged gestures within critical relational approaches to (non-)musical material also decreased notably in the 1980s and 1990s: For instance, the late works of Luigi Nono and Nicolaus A. Huber concentrate on structural or spatial formations which foreground the sensual ex-ploration of instrumental and electronic sound possibilities. Despite the maintained subjectivity throughout their entire work, Nono's and Huber's turn toward a more sen-sitive and indrawn musical language points to their gained awareness that a subsump-tion of music under a concrete theoretical and ideological framework may — especially today! — run counter to its intention of enabling the expected result, which may be perceived as the actual radical practice in this context: the open reflection and sensibil-ity on the part of the listener.

## 3_Interlude: A Cageian Perspective

Contrary to the prevalent polarizations within (post-)serial approaches, the music of John Cage radically dismantles causal relations of meaning, thus shifting the concep-tualization of the compositional process from a highly constructive, determinate crea-tion of meaning toward an experimental arrangement which gives the sonic outcome — and even the writing process itself — over to random procedures. In *Music for piano* (1952/53), Cage tossed coins in order to determine the number of (randomly placed) notes on each page and the respective clef in front of each note — durations and dy-namics are to be freely determined by the performer. Other techniques and strategies include the creation of loose score pages that can be chosen and arranged *ad libitum* by the performers (*Concerto for piano and orchestra*, 1957/58), the indication of time

constraints for short fragments which can be played at any tempo (Cage's *Number pieces* between 1986 and 1992), or even the complete absence of deliberate sound (*4'33"*, 1952). While Adorno downplays Cage's approach as a "polemic retort to the expansion of administration," thereby — similar to his critique of serialism — complaining about the lack of subjectively (pre-)formed meaning in his works,[22] Heinz-Klaus Metzger recognizes a utopian intention in Cage's music which he explains by distinguishing the qualities of material alienation regarding serial techniques and, on the other hand, Cage's aleatoric concepts:

> One might think that it would amount to the same thing, regardless of whether the composer lets chance procedures or fixed-order series dictate what to write down in this or that spot. The difference is that the subject is able to appropriate the chance event which is not pre-occupied by any intention, while the man-made and objectified [serial] organisation, as an alienated and opposed entity, takes on evil traits and turns against its own intention.[23]

Metzger perceives Cage's approach as a rebellion against the conventional inner consistency of the occidental musical work. According to him, fixed musical objects within a measured real time automatically lead to an objectification and reification of music and thus to its affirmation of ownership structures.[24] Thus, Metzger comes to the theoretically overloaded interpretation of Cage's music philosophy as a proto-revolutionary anarchic force. Although one could question if Cage's concepts — and those of the Fluxus movement — really evade any possessive grasp, musical chance procedures and the conceptualization of music as an ephemeral performance could indeed be regarded as persistent possibilities of "non-standardized expression in a world of total standardization."[25] A turn toward compositional and musical processes as autonomous events does by no means render the musical outcome meaningless. Free from pre-determined meaning, it does not express anything but what it involuntarily communicates, creating a fragile topography of meaning. In our over-medialized present age, the autonomy of (acoustic) events plays a central role. Therefore, a change of perspective toward aesthetics of reception and the affordance of the respective work is much needed in light of the exploration of critical potentials regarding the use of material in contemporary composition.

The Cageian paradigm shift has only rarely been considered compatible with musical concepts by professed political composers, Mathias Spahlinger's concept pieces *vorschläge, konzepte zur ver(über)flüssigung des komponisten* (1993) being one of the

few exceptions. In his concept *Eigenzeit*, for example, he suggests sonic actions with objects or playing techniques that are hardly modifiable or even uninfluenceable regarding the temporal parameters of the action (tempo, rhythm, duration, etc.). Musical notation is entirely missing; instead, Spahlinger instructs the players to choose the cues for their respective actions freely. In the preliminary note to the pieces, he describes his rules as potentially influenceable, changeable, and abolishable, depending on the musical and social interaction of the group. While commanding reflection and decision-making on the part of the musicians, the instructions are never aimed at a result. As Spahlinger states, "non-intentionality, which is needed for the realization of these concepts, must not be confused with passivity or fatalism" but rather be seen as an artistic virtue that should also be a social one. Furthermore, he regards the concept pieces as practices of "introspective, critical relations to one's own will."[26] Viewed as reflections on the 'politics of the score' and propositions for non-hierarchical and collaborative creative processes, Spahlinger's *vorschläge* go well beyond Huber's and Nono's concepts of socialized musical creation in that they delegate the full responsibility for the material organization to the musicians, thus even calling the role of the composer into question. However, the universal and plural guise of the pieces make a directed critique impossible. Thus, the most pressing question with regard to recent compositional approaches seems to be in how far politically sensitive compositional concepts, which build on sonic and performative eventfulness and thus undermine the composer's status as a sovereign subject, can lead to the explicit expression or enablement of critique.

## 4_Critical Composition Today?

The strategy of total abstraction in the form of a stringent musical structuring, which Adorno postulated against the backdrop of the dialectic between the composer and the score, 'autonomous' music and culture industry, as well as between the subject and society, has lost its critical weight. 'Newness,' due to its non-intentionality — and thus: non-manipulativity — perceived by Adorno as the artwork's moment of truth, cannot be achieved through negativistic material progress anymore, since the (a)tonal means of expression within the traditional, 'ideal' artwork, which is conceived as an original, subjectively informed tonal entity, seem to be exhausted.[27] Furthermore, the negational logic itself has become a pattern of expectance, a cultural imperative even, which has

been carried into the art and music institutions, thus raising the suspicion that the critical effect of negation has been rendered impossible in an era of noncritical negativism. The realization of the fragile subjective moment of compositional creation was additionally reinforced by the increasing everydayness of phonographic recordings over the course of the 20th century. Reacting in resistance to the sedating, sensually overpowering and manipulating effects of pre-recorded 'schizophonic' elements, the post-war avant-garde concentrated mostly on historically and socially unoccupied electronic sounds and only used 'worldly' recordings if the macro structure and the intra-aesthetic of the work allowed for it. Nevertheless, the growing awareness of the production and inflection of social relations through music, highlighted by omnipresent sonic mediations on the one hand and the economic competition and divisions of labor in art music institutions on the other, has finally exposed the belief in the autonomous and original artwork as obsolete.[28] The consequential perception and conceptualization of music as a fundamentally social situation ensued new critical compositional confrontations with music's worldly substance and reflective approaches to an expanded materiality which I want to describe by building upon Patrick Frank's theoretical model of hyper-affirmativity and Diedrich Diederichsen's research on the indexicality in contemporary art.

According to Diederichsen, the artistic use of phonographic or photographic recordings of reality inevitably leads to their involuntary communication which may evade, overlay, or even run against subjective artistic intentions.[29] Similar to the effect of chance procedures in Cage's music, this communication via pre-recorded segments entails a new quality of eventfulness regarding audiovisual stimuli and sensual perception. However, in contrast to the emancipatory Cageian posit of 'anything goes' with regard to acoustic qualities and structurings, reflective compositional approaches to pre-formed — and therefore alienated and objectified — audiovisual media require contextualization in order to afford the listener's meaningful appropriation of the artistic outcome. Although causations of (bodily) presence effects by indexical recordings have the invasive potential of stimulating our desire or creating violent ruptures, the mere recognition of the material's 'realness,' from which its particular desirability originates, is not necessarily accompanied by its wealth in sensuality, let alone meaning. Hence, Diederichsen detects two ways of bridging this gap: On the one hand, he notices a strategy of imitation or purposeful utilization of index effects with the aim of creating

a desirable hyper-illusion; for instance, Diederichsen perceives reality TV as an extreme case of such an "indexploitation." On the other hand, he states the possibility of an increased conceptuality of the arts.[30] With regard to critical approaches to 'index sound,' the latter implies a rejection of sonic fetishism in favor of a discursive and immaterial materiality, as the following two examples show.

The music theater piece *Freizeitspektakel* (2010) by video artist Daniel Kötter and composer Hannes Seidl is characterized by a discursive approach to everyday perceptions of sound and space as well as to the societal implications of their reproduction and representation. The title of the piece was chosen with reference to Guy Debord's main work "The Society of the Spectacle" (1967), wherein Debord claims that social life in modern societies which feature capitalist conditions of production has been replaced by representations through its (re-)mediation by spectacular images that continually accumulate and become manifest in real space.[31] By way of integrating video recordings of 'spectacular' locations and audiovisual recompositions of trivial daily routines of the interpreters (Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart), Kötter and Seidl create a multidimensional field of tension between real, artificial, and everyday situations. The documental display of the interpreter's everyday life on the screen contains profane actions such as making coffee, taking a shower, or tooth brushing. Interestingly, the real sounds of these activities are replaced by a pre-recorded acoustic mimesis of the video's original audio track. Additionally, this substitutional audio track is imitated or enriched live on stage by the five vocalists. For instance, a scene that shows a singer of the ensemble in the city traffic is accompanied by a vocal mirroring of the car horn's sounds which, later on, evolves into a canonic voice. The artistic aim of this layered audiovisual mimesis is a staging of hyperreality as defined by Jean Baudrillard, who states an era of simulation that is characterized by the medial reproduction of images which do not refer to anything but themselves.[32] Furthermore, Kötter and Seidl disrupt the chronologically ordered everyday scenes by utilizing film segments which show sites that can be perceived as manifestations of the Debordian spectacle, including a casino, a fitness studio, or an amusement park. By letting the video doppelgangers of the interpreters sing arias by Jean-Baptiste Lully and Jean-Philippe Rameau at these locations, they include the music sphere in their discursive approach. The recordings were made at daytimes during which the sites were deserted, leaving a void that could be filled by the aria performances (as *representamens* of the spectacle 'opera'). Again,

the audio track is additionally, in a naturalistic way, imitated live on stage by the interpreters.

The deconstructivist moment of *Freizeitspektakel* originates from the equal interconnection of simultaneous medial and musical layers which, through their relativizing impact on each other, make the staging of hyperreality present throughout the whole piece. Kötter's and Seidl's compositional method of opposing and layering phonographic and photographic media causes a perforation of their respective indexical surface. In contrast to elaborated musical aestheticizations or defamiliarizations, their approach attains its critical potential through the mere contextualization and conceptualization of concrete material, thus being a paradigmatic hyper-affirmative composition.[33] The profanity and everydayness of its audiovisual material is not exposed or staged as something else, but rather becomes an event while retaining its worldly substance. Thereby, *Freizeitspektakel* follows the leitmotif of Seidl's and Kötter's works, the theoretical and compositional focus on epiphenomena:

> It is precisely because secondary phenomena have become so ordinary and ceased to be a focus that they tell us a great deal about how we act towards one another, about mechanisms of exclusion, power relations, fears, fetishization, ideas of values and fixed standards […]. Such observations […] of habitual incidentals and everyday rituals touch […] on the question of […] why we act the way we do.[34]

For his piece *Fremdarbeit* (2009), Johannes Kreidler formed a different hyper-affirmative concept: He hired a composer from China and a programmer from India and asked them to imitate his compositional style based on samples of his music. For the submission of the work, which was commissioned by the music festival *Klangwerkstatt Berlin*, Kreidler received € 1500; his 'workers,' who wrote the complete score, (allegedly) received only € 150. By reflecting the reality of neoliberal production in the concept of his piece, Kreidler creates a frame of reference that expands the compositional material to concrete processes of exploitation. Thereby, he also thematizes the question of authorship: Who actually composed this music? Borrowing a term from fine art practices, one could regard Kreidler's piece as an antagonistic relational approach in the sense of Claire Bishop, who derived her concept from Nicolas Bourriaud's idea of relational aesthetics: The focus on collective elaboration of meaning in temporary communities and the interest in the contingencies of interpersonal relationships rather than in the used material itself plays a central role in his idea of relational art. For Bourriaud, a microtopian ethos is the basic condition for politically significant relational art: "It

seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbors in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows."[35] Like Bourriaud, Claire Bishop has also identified the shift from a goods to a service-based economy as the main catalyzer for the tendency to retreat into isolatedly functioning microtopias within the social system of the arts. However, Bishop argues that the creation of temporary homogeneous communities fails to establish interfaces between the spheres of art, society, politics, and economics. Rather, she argues for a "relational antagonism" that openly reflects on worldly relations and interactions, even if that means to thematize the impossibilities of eroding hierarchies and boundaries between institutions and social spaces — and between functional systems of our society in general (such as economy, law, politics, and art).[36] Kreidler's piece can be understood as such an antagonistic approach, since he does not create a symbolic non-hierarchic cooperation with composers from another continent, but rather reflects on the impossibilities of overcoming those hierarchies beyond the framing a temporary self-involved artistic simulation, which necessarily derives from the operational logic of an economized and rationalized art system. In opposition to the creation and celebration of a functioning microtopia, Kreidler knows and shows that "everything and everyone has a price."[37] Since its premiere, *Fremdarbeit* has been controversially discussed. Although it seems likely that Kreidler has concealed the real identities of the Chinese composer and the Indian programmer — he may even have created an entirely fictional work — the piece drew criticism because of its alleged reproduction of colonial stereotypes. In this context, Martin Iddon points out that "though individuals remain unexploited within Fremdarbeit, its discourse repeats a colonial one," coming to the conclusion that the possible fictionality of the subjects "does not change the way in which they are *made to speak*," namely as "marginalized colonial (and colonized) subjects."[38] However, for Kreidler's concept to work, a colonial discourse *has* to be repeated and the subjects *have* to be recognized as inferior and marginalized. The admittedly stereotypical employment of an Indian programmer does not mean that similar exploitation processes are not real; they have always been at the base of our capitalist consumer society. Even if Iddon denies it, there is a difference between merely producing marginalized subjects and the hyper-affirmative tactic of reproducing and using pre-existing power relations and structures of exploitation as compositional material within a frame of reference, since the latter aims at a (temporary) perforation

of the everydayness and casualness of global processes of exploitation and colonization. By way of mere exposure of exploitative processes in an artistic framing, *Fremdarbeit* unfolds an internal socio-critique of the complicity of artists, institutions and consumers in musical contexts and beyond.

The increase in New Music's relationality and indexicality in the 21st century resembles the development of the visual arts since the 1960's, in that the confrontation with everyday materiality and the (hyper-affirmative) defamiliarization of hegemonic means of cultural production are at the core of many reflective compositional processes. Thus, critical composition today seems to follow the posit by Guy Debord, who stated that "critical art can be produced as of now, using the existing means of cultural expression."[39] It should be emphasized that today's critically informed New Music still pursues similar intentions compared to the post-war avant-garde, most notably the problematization of the media of sound production and distribution or the affordance of critical listening and general reflection on the part of the recipient. Nevertheless, the aesthetic means are different: First and foremost, a detachment from aesthetic ideals of inwardness, individual creation or material progress can be noted. In contemporary media-reflective approaches, the subjective moment of compositional creation and expression often is denied. Consequentially, this entails the rejection of the concept of an 'originary' materiality, as Felix Stalder also states:

> For instead of distancing themselves from the past, which would follow the (Western) logic of progress or the spirit of the avant-garde, these processes [of contemporary art and music production] refer explicitly to precursors and to existing material. In one and the same gesture, both one's own new position and the context and cultural tradition that is being carried on in one's own work are constituted performatively […].[40]

The integration of pre-existing everyday material (mixed media, pop music, pre-recorded indexical sounds, etc.) is rather aimed at displaying the material's eventfulness than analytically dissecting and subsuming it under a theoretical program which precedes the compositional processes. Thus, the material's affordances of the recipient's critical reflection through their situatedness in certain relational arrangements is a central concern rather than the setting of general (intra-)aesthetic imperatives. Furthermore, a turn toward an 'immaterial materiality' can be noticed: Mechanisms of music production, distribution, exploitation, and institutionalization may be adapted for relational and/or participatory concepts, thus creating multidimensional referential frames

and interrelations with regard to musical and non-musical materials, practices, environments, and symbols. The defining feature of a "conception of music as an expanded field of artistic practice encompassing a range of different media and symbolic relationships," as G. Douglas Barrett puts it,[41] is its referentiality toward existing material, its own institutional position, its cultural tradition. Critical compositions, now more than ever, reflect not only themselves but also their own imbrication and embeddedness within the institutional mechanisms of the professionalized landscape of musical labor division. The artistic positions and contexts become transformed, discontinuated, or continuated in a performative way, which means that a critical compositional practice today constitutes a tactical and temporal intervention based on the political, institutional, and medial needs and possibilities of expression and empowerment. However, the introduction of an overarching concept of 'contemporary/postmodern critical composition' should be avoided. The development of critically informed composition in New Music towards expanded discursive practices, which have outgrown the canonized intra-aesthetic and self-referential approaches of post-serialism, pushes the boundaries of the historical concept. Recent compositional approaches do not allow for a subsumption under one overarching concept, as neither aspects of materiality nor of criticality can be pre-defined against the background of the potentially ever-changing conceptual and modular constitutions of contemporary musical works. The score has long lost its function as the locus of the work; consequentially, its function as the main 'text' of the work is obsolete. As could be seen with regard to the given examples in this paragraph, the immaterial materialities of media environments, non-aesthetic relations to worldliness, and discourses from other art disciplines build the contingent compositional elements which can be embedded in their respective referential frames. As New Music to some extent becomes part of the broader artistic avant-garde, the terminology has to bridge a long-neglected divide. In order to prevent misunderstandings and to foreground more extensive and differentiated attributions to critically informed approaches, it may be time to leave the concept of 'critical composition' behind.

## _Endnotes

[1]    Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. by Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997 [1974]), 5 (hereafter abbreviated as 'Adorno 1997 [1974]').

[2]   Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophy of New Music*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006 [1949]), 32 (hereafter abbreviated as 'Adorno 2006 [1949]').

[3]   Max Paddison, "Performance, Analysis, and the Silent Work: The Problem of Critical Self-Reflexion in Adorno's Theory of Musical Reproduction," in *Musikalische Analyse und Kritische Theorie: Zu Adornos Philosophie der Musik*, eds. Markus Fahlbusch and Adolf Nowak (Tutzing: Schneider, 2007), 227–252, here: 240.

[4]   Georg W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Arts.* Vol. 1, trans. Thomas M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975 [1835–1838]), 604–605.

[5]   Adorno 2006 [1949], 19.

[6]   Adorno 2006 [1949], 13.

[7]   Adorno's interpretation of the Second Viennese School's early atonality and dodecaphony do not represent the composers' original intentions. Schoenberg in particular resented Adorno's views.

[8]   Adorno 2006 [1949], 20.

[9]   Theodor W. Adorno, *Dissonanzen: Musik in der verwalteten Welt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1991 [1956]), 152–155; my translation.

[10]   Adorno 2006 [1949], 14.

[11]   Luigi Nono, "Gespräch mit Maurice Fleuret (1966)," in *Luigi Nono: Texte, Studien zu seiner Musik*, ed. Jürg Stenzl (Zürich: Atlantis, 1975), 192–194, here: 193; my translation.

[12]   See Norbert Nagler, "Luigi Nono — Die Kunst, sich treu zu bleiben," in *Musik-Konzepte.* Vol. 20 (Luigi Nono), eds. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1981), 11–25, here: 22–23.

[13]   Timothy S. Murphy, "The Negation of a Negation Fixed in a Form: Luigi Nono and the Italian Counter-Culture 1964–1979," in *Cultural Studies Review* 11.2 (2005), 95–109.

[14]   Adorno 1997 [1974], 103.

[15]   See Nicolaus A. Huber, "Kritisches Komponieren," in *Durchleuchtungen*: *Texte zur Musik 1964–1999*, ed. Josef Häusler (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2000), 40–42.

[16]   Huber, *Kritisches Komponieren*, 40; my translation.

[17]   See Rainer Nonnenmann, "Vom Menschen in der Musik: Nicolaus A. Hubers kompositorische Welterschließungen," in *Musik-Konzepte.* Vol. 168/169 (Nicolaus A. Huber), ed. Ulrich Tadday (Munich: edition text + kritik, 2015), 5–26.

[18]   Nicolaus A. Huber, "Anerkennung und Aufhebung (1971/72)," in *Durchleuchtungen*: *Texte zur Musik 1964–1999*, ed. Josef Häusler (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2000), 347–348, here 348.

[19]   See Helmut Lachenmann, "Zum Verhältnis Kompositionstechnik — Gesellschaftlicher Standort," in *Musik als existentielle Erfahrung: Schriften 1966–1995*, ed. Josef Häusler (Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1996), 93–97, here: 95.

[20]   "Musique Concrète Instrumentale," Slought Foundation, accessed January 31, 2019, <https://slought.org/resources/musique_concrete_instrumentale>.

[21]   Rainer Nonnenmann, "The Dead End as a Way Out: Critical Composition — a Historical Phenomenon?," in *Critical Composition Today* (= New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century. Vol. 5*)*, ed. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (Hofheim: Wolke, 2006), 88–109, here: 104.

[22]   Johannes Bauer, "Das Schweigen der Sirenen, Adornos Ästhetik und das Neue der Neuen Musik," in *Musikalische Analyse und Kritische Theorie: Zu Adornos Philosophie der Musik*, eds. Markus Fahlbusch and Adolf Nowak (Tutzing: Schneider, 2007), 303–324, here: 307.

23  Heinz-Klaus Metzger, "John Cage oder Die freigelassene Musik," in *Musik-Konzepte Sonderband: John Cage*, eds. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1978), 5–17, here: 13.

24  See Heinz-Klaus Metzger, "Anarchie durch Negation der Zeit oder Probe einer Lektion wider die Moral: Hebel — Adorno — Cage," in *Musik-Konzepte Sonderband: John Cage*, eds. Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn (Munich: edition text + kritik, 1978), 147–154.

25  Ferdinand Zehentreiter, "Sensory Cognition as an Autonomous Form of Critique: Reflections on Redefining a 'Critical Theory of Art,'" in *Critical Composition Today* (= New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century. Vol. 5*)*, ed. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf (Hofheim: Wolke, 2006), 43–61, here: 61.

26  Mathias Spahlinger, *vorschläge zur ver(über)flüssigung des komponisten* (Wien: Universal Edition, 1993), 6; my translation.

27  Georgina Born correctly argues that the romantic misperception of the 'ideal work' as transcending the social sphere was paradoxically reinforced by the commodification and fetishization of the work as a creation by an "individual composer-genius." See Georgina Born, "On Musical Mediation: Ontology, Technology and Creativity," in *Twentieth Century Music* 2.1 (2005), 7–36 (hereafter abbreviated as 'Born 2005').

28  See Born, *On Musical Mediation*.

29  See Diedrich Diederichsen, *Körpertreffer: Zur Ästhetik der nachpopulären Künste* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2017), 10 (hereafter abbreviated as 'Diederichsen 2017').

30  See Diederichsen 2017, 47–49.

31  See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994 [1967]).

32  See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila F. Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994 [1981]).

33  See Patrick Frank, "Negation, Affirmation, Hyperaffirmation: Zum Stand aktueller Kritik," in *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 177.5 (2016), 16–21.

34  Hannes Seidl, "Music as a Social Situation," in *Substance and Content in Music Today* (= *New Music and Aesthetics in the 21st Century.* Vol. 9*)*, eds. Claus-Steffen Mahnkopf, Frank Cox and Wolfram Schurig (Hofheim: Wolke, 2014), 151–162.

35  Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002), 45.

36  See Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," in *October* 110 (2004), 51–79.

37  Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, 70.

38  Martin Iddon, "Outsourcing Progress: On Conceptual Music," in *Tempo* 70.1 (2016), 36–49, here: 49.

39  Guy Debord, "The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Art and Politics," transl. by Ken Knabb, in *Situationist International Online* (1963), accessed January 31, 2019, <https://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/newforms.html>.

40  Felix Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, trans. Valentine A. Pakis (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018 [2016]), 60.

41  G. Douglas Barrett, *After Sound: Toward a Critical Music* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 7–8.