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Music with music

THIS IS A DRAFT TRANSLATION. IF ANYBODY WOULD HELP MAKE THIS AN ENTIRELY CORRECT ENGLISH TEXT, IT WOULD BE APPRECIATED A LOT.

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1.

Sensitivity has increased, that basically everything is a remix. No one knows anymore if or when a copyright infringement occurs, because you always build on what already exists, no writer invents his own letters and rarely his own words, and in music practically all sounds are found and recorded. Nobody writes on a blank sheet of paper anymore.

So: authorship is a construct. What is by me? »Even I myself am not by me« (Sophie Rois). Whoever composes takes a selection of existing music, reduces it back to a pre-compositional state, and then reassembles it until it has the format of a work again. The author is not dead, as Roland Barthes said, but the dead are still authors with us. A work is full of other music or its rudiments.

Then instrumentalists play the piece, it is their muscles and nerves that create and control the sounds, their mental powers that (per-)form the body of the work live. Furthermore, the instrument makers have their share, the concert hall architects and the upholstery companies – how many instances does a work have at all? Everyone, even a Beethoven, still stands »on the shoulders of giants« (Bernard of Chartres).

At first I do nothing more than make this circumstance recognizable; the individual tones I »coarsen« (Martin Schüttler) again and again to whole musics. I call this »music with music«.

2.

It all started with short samples, snippets of pop music, barely longer than a single tone, and I applied them like single tones to all kinds of New Music compositional techniques of the last seventy years; small barbed hooks and hyperlinks.

In my work series *windowed* I have fragmented given pieces of music to play with degrees of recognizability. Sound files of various origins running in the background are faded in only in excerpts between 40 and 1000 milliseconds. Depending on the size of such a »window«, the listener either perceives an indefinable sound fragment or a section that clearly refers to the underlying music. For example, I combined these fragments with actions of percussion instruments (as in *windowed 1* for percussion and audio playback). After all, the percussion instruments are also sounds that have been torn out of various cultures.

Over time, there were more and more samples, up to 70,200, in thirty-three seconds (*product placements*) – which I then correctly registered with a truck full of 70,200 registration forms at the GEMA [Performing Rights Society], as a political music theater. Then I pressed the notes of whole pieces into the keys and generated different results on the computer (*five programmings of a MIDI keyboard*). Then melodies were formed from stock prices: every human being is an artist, even bank managers; a children's pop composition app has arranged pieces with these tunes for me (*Charts Music*). Then I let my music be imitated by composers from low-wage countries for (little) money (*Fremdarbeit*). I have made programming code sound as a sound wave (*Compression Sound Art*), organized a composition competition for me (*Fremdarbeit*), used a condom as a speaker membrane to play a recording of the Pope (*Compression Sound Art*) and played the soundtracks of complete movies in a few seconds (*Cantata*). Then I collected more than fifty different metal styles and let them dance

to them (*Feeds. Hören TV*), or made countless style arrangements of one and the same tune with an arrangement software (*Style 1*). Then I reinterpreted the avant-garde; for example, I realized John Cage's *Silence Classic 4'33"* as a YouTube split screen video, fed Brian Ferneyhough's *Second String Quartet* into the pop composition software *Band in a Box* and let Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* speak by a car navigation device, or applied Maurice Ravel's *Boléro* – as the principle of steady increase in volume – to a remixed scene from the film *Downfall*; I performed Alvin Lucier's pioneering sound art work *Music for a Solo Performer* as a political performance under artificially aggravated conditions – the »postmodernization of the modern« (Jean-François Lyotard).

3.

So I'm letting compose. I let it be and let others work, sooner or now. Why? Because they do. That's the world. Before I start writing a single note or programming a sound wave, practically the entire history of music is already on my computer or on the Internet, both as sound files and as scores. So I don't need to compose many things anymore that already exist and can be used with a mouse click. Why nibble at the pen when others have come up with useful solutions? I often use pop music samples, mainly from bad pop music – the media noise, with which I make noise music. I also like to search the world for templates, »pre-compositions« instead of sucking something out of my fingers. These are, for example, statistics, blueprints, politicians' speeches, et cetera. I also let the computer compose a lot itself; the more I work with it, the more beautiful I find the results. (Maybe that's because you communicate so much with algorithms on Google, Facebook, & Co.) To put it bluntly: The medium must be composed; how this is then unfolded is the usual musical imagination that every church musician also has – or can be filled in by algorithms and the already existing.

You do not have to do any handcraft for which there are machines. One does not live in isolation, but refers to things, one is already born into an existing world. Most composers still compose in the wrong place: »The largest buildings they know are those that a single man is capable of building.« (Bertolt Brecht, *Stories of Mr. Keuner*)

The same applies to making music. Today we have a gigantic archive of audio recordings, from single tones, instrumental gestures, standardized composition techniques, expressive topoi to Mahler symphonies, in excellent quality. So why should musicians have to play that again? Just to make it sound more auratic and original? The live performance becomes an eyewash, actually they do quote, but the redundancy is covered with sweat. Just as a composer should only compose as much as really necessary, instrumentalists should also be stingy with their presence.

I was once asked to write tragic music for a play. I refused by saying that there are already thousands of tragic musics. There is nothing to add! They should make use of music history. I only compose where there is something to compose. You don't have to reinvent the wheel, you also don't have to build it anew. After all, intellectual achievements are not taken away, but multiplied.

The great emotions are all expressed in music, and these musics probably work forever (tension-relaxation!). »It corresponded in a certain way with my own and, as I had found out, not only individual, growing tendency to see all life as a cultural product and in the form of mythical clichés and to prefer the quotation to the 'independent' invention.« (Thomas Mann, *The Genesis of Doctor Faustus*)

4.

But just because creating today is so highly related to the existing, originality is required. You can copy originals, but not originality! Of course, there are ideas, qualitative leaps, achievements of individuals. The attitude, however, is different from that of the genius-autonomous author: Open Source. You open the sources and have your transparent concerns with them.

5.

He who writes for violin, is copying.

All composing is further composing.

Gérard Grisey said: I no longer compose with notes, but with tones.

I would say: I no longer compose with tones, but with music.

In this sense I am a musician.

Today it is no longer the question whether a noise can be music, but whether a pop song can be music.

Musique concrète recorded everyday sounds and musicalized it. I take existing music and musicalize it.

I like to make noise music. Pop music is noise.

Pop music quotes in atonal music: Making listening difficult with the simple.

I only like to quote music that I don't like.

Picasso once said: I do steal – where there is anything to steal.

I would say today: I do compose – where there is anything to compose.

6.

Still today, some composers succeed in mastering the art of producing a never-heard sound, but otherwise they inevitably make use of the existing. This applies not only to basic musical elements, such as the eighty-eight keys of the piano, but also to their combinations. Instrumental gestures, standardized compositional techniques and expressive topoi are omnipresent and can hardly be circumvented or reinterpreted after a hundred years of New Music and thirty years of its institutionalization (similarly applies to pop music); finally, the Internet, the *total archive*, makes it almost impossible to forget art history. That is why a change of category begins: The question is less and less whether a composer quotes, but *what, how* and *for what*.

In other words, music is objectified and functionalized, music with music: this is how I formulate the »content-aesthetic turn« (Harry Lehmann). There is plenty of »material« or »media«. But this is no simple lexicon of vocabulary with which one could now form sentences. Material is coarse and large, the sounds are heavy and cumbersome. They immediately contract into whole entities. Even the single tone is a composition. Today, sounds are no longer just bundles of structureable parameters, but semantic objects (you can see it again on the computer where the sounds are files and therefore have filenames and are tagged in archives). Even those who presumably compose in an abstract manner today compose »content-aesthetically«: this is how the clichés emerge. The oboe sounds beautiful, but also like an instrument of the bourgeois orchestral concert.

How to deal with it? If there is conscious faithfulness to the work, there must also be conscious unfaithfulness to the work, a director's theater in music. Combine a piano sound with a harpsichord sound. Play the second act of the *Meistersinger* an octave higher (if at all). Why does »interpretation« always only concern tempo, phrasing and dynamics? With this concept of interpretation, classical music is not updated, but neutralized. We are alienated and any form of misappropriation is therefore more honest. Whoever sings the *Jägerchor* right, sings it wrong (or are we in the 19th century?). I myself find it embarrassing that the music is far behind the Regietheater that is already getting old, but now it also goes through that, and thoroughly.

7.

The extreme case is the ready-made, the completely adopted, which only becomes a new work through minimal addition or re-contextualization. Besides, it is mainly all the transformation from other media and areas into the music and the new making let by others or machines: the extended ready-made concept.

In the music of the concert hall, all this is a barely cultivated field. *Musique concrète* was limited to Schaeffer, Henry and Ferrari, in Germany it was adorningly excluded, in France it has been replaced by spectralism, and these things are most likely to have developed further after Cage in the American underground, in the sampling of pop music and in sound art. John Oswald was a pioneer of sampling, but almost exclusively in the tape-only field and remained in the technical limits of the 80s. With today's means of digital sound processing on the laptop, with today's gigantic audio archives and the possibilities of combining them with live instruments, a huge field is opening up, especially as the Internet is now giving them greater social and political relevance. Collage is no longer just an art form, but an ubiquitous principle, be it Wikipedia articles on which many authors write, cosmetic operations and gender attributes that can be chosen individually, modular furniture, the mixed calculation of precarious working conditions (my tax return is a complex collage), patchwork families, the multicultural society or life philosophies, everything: collages.

Variations on a theme, paraphrase, potpourri, objet trouvée, collage, assemblage, musique concrète, bricolage, pastiche, medley, cover version, intertextuality, eclecticism, remix, remake, rework, sampling, appropriation art, bastard pop, patchwork, mash-up – that has also diffused somewhat, and it's easy to say: that's old.

No. It's just starting. Web 2.0 creates a huge mash-up culture, in pop as well as elitist art. Think of internet memes like *Hitler finds out ...*, the *inappropriate soundtracks* or the *shreds*. Fifteen years ago, that had only been possible in extremely expensive studios, and an effective distribution was almost impossible. However, material and technology are now available to almost everyone, almost free of charge, now everything can be combined.

You can dismiss the idea of collage as old hat, but nonetheless, whether you like it or not, it is the sign of the Internet age, its most typical form. Only the global information technology network is the great catalyst for some postmodern insights, the copying and the archiving is now so entirely virulent. We now have a huge, even total memory at our disposal with which we can compare everything. When a song is playing in the pub, all I need to do is hold my mobile phone in the air for thirty seconds, and the title of the song is given to me. One will not program such a thing for New Music and set up a plagiarism detection platform of New Music, but one can imagine it, and / or the threat should suffice. Thus forgetting becomes impossible, we always live in comparison with the past; every action is, now verifiable, the differentiated repetition of what has already been. The postmodern diagnosis that we now produce re-enactments, re-mixes, updates instead of the new or as new, continues to apply, it applies more than ever, it applies forever. How should this be overcome? Innocence is irreversibly lost. Whatever new epochs come, an essential moment of postmodernity, the lost innocence, presence of history, ironic or not, will remain, for the Internet is the most postmodern thing there is, and hopefully there will be no turning back from it, despite the terrible new barriers that corporations and governments want to impose.

Gottfried Benn's statement that »the art of the future will be collage« was more far-sighted than one thought. It's only now that sampling and remixing really get started!

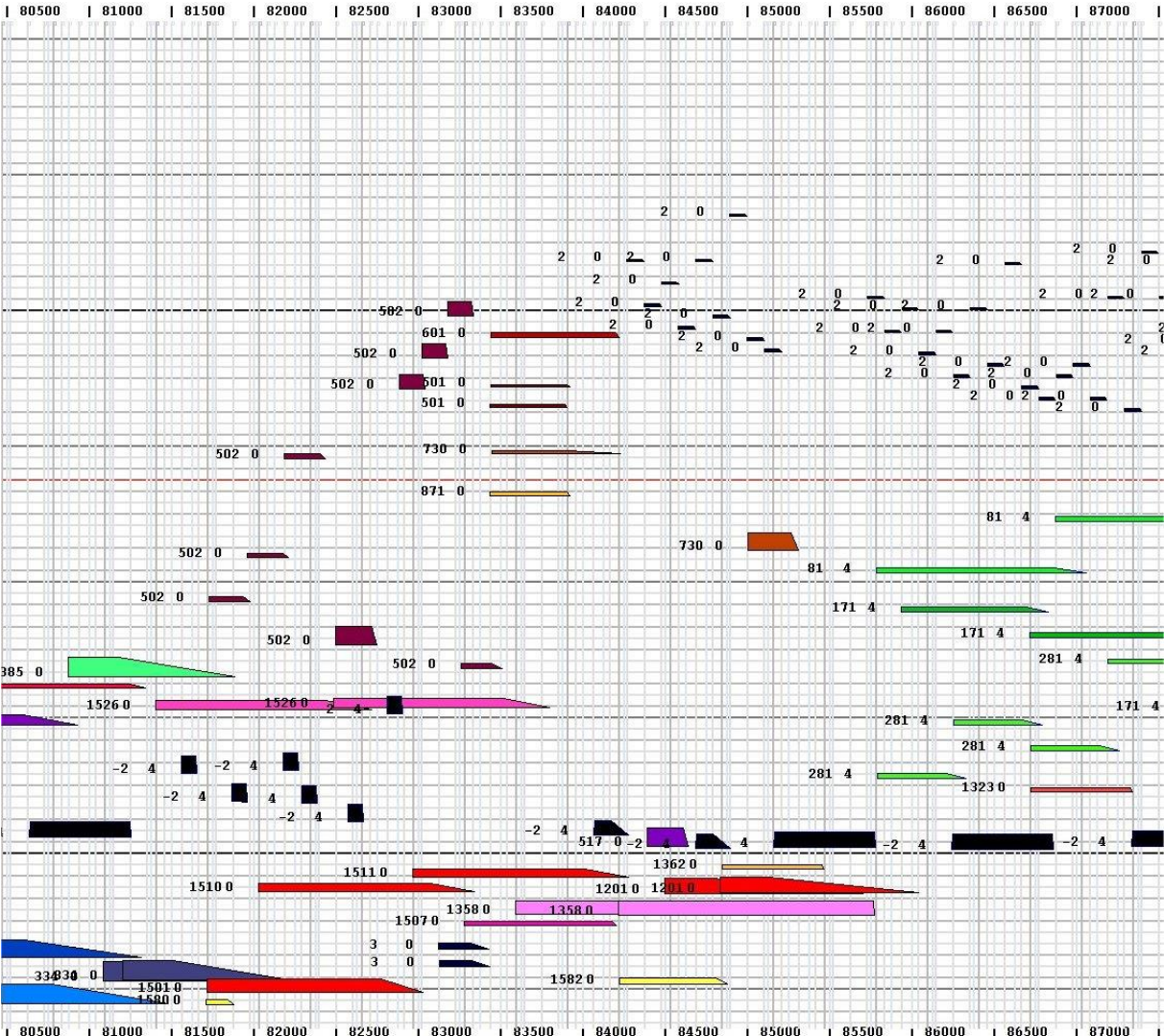
8.

For samples, of course, it is difficult to write on five staff lines with ink. That's why I've been programming my own composition and notation software *COIT* since 2007. The name is the acronym of *Calculated Objects in Time*. *Calculated* means algorithms, *Objects* is another word for notes, i.e. a graphical representation, *in Time* refers to the playback of notes in time. The goal was a software that

unites as much as possible: a notation interface, comparable to music paper on which I can place notes, in this case graphical objects, by hand or via MIDI keyboard; then these objects must also be able to be generated or modified by algorithms, and all this should be able to be played back for listening (both the electronic parts and the instrumental parts, thanks to a huge, high-quality instrument sample library, »ePlayer«). In the open source programming language *Pure Data* I had the necessary tools at hand: algorithms of all kinds are the very own possibility of any programming language; I had already worked with synthetic or concrete sounds in Pure Data, as the software is specialized in digital sound synthesis and processing; the graphical representation was made possible by *Data Structures*, a special feature within Pure Data. In addition, there are the now extensively existing sample recordings of instrumental sounds, which can immediately give a sounding impression of the composed.

On the one hand, COIT was born out of the need to have a suitable compositional medium for my aesthetic approach. On the other hand, it was supposed to develop potential to compose music that had never occurred to me before, or could not even occur to me at all! So I have been developing the software for five years.

I can experiment a lot with it (unlike twenty years ago, when you had to imagine everything at your desk like the deaf Beethoven used to do), and at the end a playable score in five-line notation is generated for the instrumental parts. Afterwards, I can put some work online and publish it via my blog and Facebook; my blog *Kulturtechno*, my own internet festival, so to speak, has a three-digit number of visitors every day.



Screenshot COIT

9.

The medium is the symphony.

Welcoming leap: Whatever epoch comes after postmodernity – it will be even worse.

Computers will always be stupid algorithm machines as long as people are still stupider.

Not preparing instruments, but preparing the listening; not with advanced playing technique, but advance to play with technology; not only differentiating, but also coarsening; not too heavy, but too easy scores; not only pitch intervals, but also human intervals.

Statistical music: not according to statistical criteria, but according to existing statistics; chance not as a natural, but as a cultural phenomenon; a piano not only because it sounds beautiful, but also because it sounds like a piano.

Composing means to steal an instrument.

The Well-Tempered Clavier is – technology-driven – postmodern Baroque.

A Mahler symphony is still in a pre-compositional state, while the single tone is already an opus.

To stand in Schoenberg's tradition means to break with it.

10.

Characteristic of the aesthetics of »music with music« is expropriation and misappropriation. I was once assumed that I would actually hate music if I were to handle it in this way. Well, in fact I don't feel connected to the so-called »tradition«, or if there is a tradition at all in which I feel rooted, then these are a few pieces from New Music of the last thirty years, but not art from the time of the stagecoach. This is not meant to mean ignorance, since my childhood I have passionately enjoyed playing the piano, teaching counterpoint and harmony at the university and working in music theory research. Otherwise, pop music is the music I listen to most, voluntarily and involuntarily. However, to my feeling for music is today presented an artificially maintained and pornographically exploited »drive of sounds«; and almost only from the distant position of the cutting table, this sound becomes music again.