

Refuse Collection

Schoenberg/Lachenmann – Straub/Huillet – J.H. Prynne

1
Ursula Böser,
*The Art of Seeing, The Art
of Listening: The Politics of
Representation in the Work
of Jean-Marie Straub and
Danièle Huillet*
(Frankfurt am Main:
Peter Lang GmbH,
Europäischer Verlag
der Wissenschaften,
2004), 72.

2
Schoenberg had a very
particular program in
mind for composing
specific images into the
music that is similar to a
work such as Strauss’
Alpine Symphony as
indicated below.

- I. Quiet – short (the calm
before the storm)
- II. The threatening
Danger appears
- III. The Threatened
becomes anxious
- IV. The Danger draws
closer
- V. The Threatened
become aware of the
Danger
- VI. The Danger grows
- VII. The fear grows
ever greater
- VIII. Catastrophe
- IX. Collapse

An alternative ver-
sion that Schoenberg
considered for the final
two images was: VIII.
The Danger passes, IX.
Alleviation of the Ten-
sion of the Threatened
(salvation, deliverance).
See J. Daniel Jenkins,
ed., *Schoenberg’s Program
Notes and Musical Analyses*,
Schoenberg in Words, vol. 5,
(New York: Oxford Uni-
versity Press, 2016), 329.

Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe (Threatening danger, fear, catastrophe) are the words that preface the score to Schoenberg’s *Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene* (Opus 34, henceforth *Begleitmusik*) from 1930, which was commis- sioned by the Heinrichshofen Verlag in Germany.¹ The commission was for a film score that Schoenberg ultimate- ly abandoned in favor of the more abstract program of *Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe*, perhaps similar to the typical tone poems found by a composer such as Richard Strauss.² An accompanimental film would, in Schoenberg’s view, subordinate the music to the images presented giving the music a more illustrative account of these sensations. By abandoning the accompanimental film, Schoenberg be- lieved that only music as a non-conceptual medium could convey such sensations directly to a listener.



Arnold Schoenberg,
Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene, 1930

Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *Einleitung zu Arnold Schoenbergs Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene*, 1972 (henceforth *Einleitung*) is a "desynchronized reaction" to Schoenberg's *Begleitmusik* by enlisting a number of representational strategies (such as interviews, photo montages, documentaries, texts, etc.) in the attempt to create an image that captures the sensations of Schoenberg's music. Included in their accompaniment are dialogues through various kinds of montage such as the letters between Schoenberg and Kandinsky, Brecht's 1935 address to the International Congress of Writers for the Defense of Culture as well as the juxtaposing of photos and documentary newsreels that depict the effects of violence from the mass executions by the Versailles forces at the end of the Paris Commune of 1871, the American bombing of Vietnam and the Nazi extermination camps. Situated within these materials is the seeming "biopic" about Schoenberg himself followed by stills of photos and paintings of Schoenberg as well as documentary-like readings of the letters and address by Günter Peter Straschek and Peter Nestler (who are filmed in a broadcasting recording booth). Throughout the film are black spaces that act more as lacunae preventing a seamlessly integrated context for this variety of materials.³ Such an experience wants to engage us with what becomes visible in these instances of violence and catastrophe, for the viewer to construct their own *counter-shots* to a history that is presented by means of discontinuous montage and not narrative integration, through what film critic Serge Daney notes as "the stubborn rejection of all the forces of homogenization."⁴

Martin Walsh has noted that *Einleitung* is a "deconstruction of cinematic language," particularly in the way it repositions the idea of the documentary through a materialist lens.⁵ Sound—including the voice-over commentary—is foregrounded in such a way as to not establish or determine meaning for the viewer. Rather, sound is used to involve us in a more active process of seeing and listening, and ultimately toward our own construction of meaning. The documentary-like readings of texts in *Einleitung* attenuate one's listening to the rhythms of language, as opposed to simply its meaning, and thereby reassert the materiality of the spoken text. Yet the heterogeneity of materials in *Einleitung* is not seamlessly fused together into a linear

3
Böser,
The Art of Seeing, 83.

4
Serge Daney,
"A Tomb for the Eye
(Straubian Pedagogy)," in
*Der Standpunkt der
Aufnahme – Point of View:
Perspectives of Political
Film and Video Work*, ed.
Tobias Hering
(Berlin: Archive Books,
2014), 359.

5
Martin Walsh,
*The Brechtian Aspect of
Radical Cinema*
(London: British
Film Institute Pub-
lishing, 1981), 85.

6
Harun Farocki,
*Weiche Montagen/
Soft Montages*,
ed. Yilmaz Dziewior
(Bregenz: Kunsthau
Bregenz,
2011), 206.

7
Hugh Kenner,
The Pound Era
(Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1971),
152.

8
Benoît Turquety,
*Danièle Huillet,
Jean-Marie Straub:
"Objectivists" in Cinema*,
trans. Ted Fendt
(Amsterdam:
Amsterdam University
Press, 2020), 159.



Fragment of Arnold Schoenberg's painting
Gehendes Selbstportrait from Huillet-Straub's *Einleitung zu
Arnold Schoenbergs 'Begleitmusik zu einer Lichtspielszene'* (1972).

narrative or argumentation, but rather organized through the montage of independent tableaux-like moments that refuse commentary or interpretation in order to explicate their meaning. Such a practice of *soft* montage (i.e., montage through an inclusive "and" rather than an exclusive "or" as suggested by the practices of Harun Farocki or late Godard)⁶ recalls Ezra Pound's ideogrammic method in poetry where *luminous details* are brought into focus through the raw juxtaposition of concrete facts.⁷ According to Benoît Turquety, *Einleitung* functions through the ideogrammic method by juxtaposing a series of concrete events and thus forms "a constellation without any explicit connection" whose coherence is maintained rhythmically and energetically.⁸

With soft montage in film, one can achieve a kind of semantic spark or jump when two things are placed together that are not normally associated with the same field of reference or meaning, particularly when the possible connections between the two things are maximized. Sometimes these sparks can follow in quick succession, producing disturbance patterns of their own, similar to the effect that one finds in the atonal music of Anton Webern. In this music, electricity continuously jumps between juxtaposed musical figures as a way to gain energy in a context where tonal grammar, phrasing and rhythm are severely

reduced. The Cambridge poet J.H. Prynne produces a similar reaction in poetic discourse maintaining cohesion through energetic sparks among, “extended trains of unfamiliar words and phrases which break the rules for local sense” so that “discourse levels and fields of reference are switched abruptly and without sign-posts,” and the construction of relationships and pattern-making can occur in new ways.⁹ The energy in which the structure of a work unfolds over time constitutes its *rhythm* that then becomes coterminous with its temporal experience. This potential of rhythm to generate energy, force and violence are key characteristics for critiquing a lyric subjectivity intrinsic to an expressionist poetics of music.

Coherence in the films of Straub and Huillet is often supported by techniques such as rhythmic patterning, abrupt juxtapositions, asymmetric relationships, serial variations and repetitions, thus creating temporal structures similar to those in music composition. As Straub has remarked,

One needs a rhythm even before one starts shooting the film, or works at the cutting table. One needs to know why one chooses particular angles from which to film, how long the individual shots will last, and then choose another standpoint or an identical one, but nearer, or the same, only a little more distant.¹⁰

In both poetry and music, the tensions between rhythm and meter are ways in which new resistances might be made appreciable, since counting and the use of numbers (syllables and line breaks in poetry or rhythm and meter in music) enables one to apprehend the proportion of one thing to another, including their possible incommensurability. Incommensurability can destroy the integrity of syntax and argument through which the lyrical features of music become prominent, thus challenging a place of stability in which events can be apprehended, related and given meaning through lyrical expression.

The methodology of Straub and Huillet involves precisely constructing the framework for each shot and then allowing contingencies to manifest so that freedom evolves from its opposite: “One should never say or show something in which one cannot sense the possibility of its opposite as an intrinsic resistance.”¹¹ These contingencies are referred to as “unforeseen factors” that arise from within

- 9
J.H. Prynne,
“Difficulties in the
Translation of
'Difficult' Poems,”
*Cambridge Literary
Review*, 1/3
(Easter 2010): 157.
- 10
Elke Marhöfer,
Jean-Marie Straub,
Mikhail Lylov,
“A Thousand Cliffs,” in
*Der Standpunkt der
Aufnahme*, 322.
Reprinted in the present
volume, 376.
- 11
Straub,
“A Thousand Cliffs,” in
the present volume, 388.

- 12
“A Thousand Cliffs,”
378.
- 13
Tag Gallagher,
“Straub Anti-Straub,”
Senses of Cinema, no. 43
(2007): 2.
- 14
J.H. Prynne,
“Poetic Thought,”
Textual Practice, 24(4)
(2010): 597.
- 15
J.H. Prynne,
“Resistance and
Difficulty,” *Prospect* 5
(Winter 1961): 27.
- 16
Levi Bryant,
Nick Srnicek, and
Graham Harman, eds.,
“Towards a Speculative
Philosophy,” in
*The Speculative Turn:
Continental Materialism
and Realism*
(Melbourne, Australia:
re.press, 2011), 5.
- 17
J.H. Prynne,
“Mental Ears and Poetic
Work,” *Chicago Review*,
vol. 55., no. 1 (2010): 126.

the work itself and are an integral part of the subject matter that establish the work as a “site of resistance.”¹² “If you have a great deal of patience, it is charged with contradictions at the same time. Otherwise it doesn’t have the time to be charged. Lasting patience is necessarily charged with tenderness and violence.”¹³ In a similar vein, as Prynne has remarked in the context of poetic composition, “Nothing taken for granted, nothing merely forced, pressure of the composing will as varied by delicacy, because these energies are dialectical and not extruded from personality or point of view.”¹⁴

What does it mean for a work to become a site of resistance? Cognitive engagement depends less upon perception as on the experience of resistance, which forms the surrounding world of a subject’s activity when things present themselves through their inertial force. Instead of intelligibility as a criterion of knowledge, resistance can “make accessible the fact of a thing’s existence without impairing its status as a substantial, independent entity,”¹⁵ a way of affirming the world around us without completely jettisoning the role of the subject.¹⁶ It is through resistance that a model of perception is expanded beyond a subject’s limit of the perceivable world in an attempt to record the manifold richness of how things are.¹⁷ This projective expansion includes much more than any apparent intention of the subject whereupon *contingency* becomes a necessary part for pushing outward toward reality; a closer engagement with what there is, including a conception of agency and feeling that is not distinctly identified with a personal subject. In this sense, a site of resistance in the films of Straub and Huillet contextualizes what knowledge is valuable and what paths of action are potentially possible.

II

An important aspect of *Einleitung* is its fundamental repositioning of the idea of *accompaniment*. The composer Hanns Eisler suggested that in Schoenberg’s music, words are always secondary—or accompanimental—to the music, for example in the opera *Moses und Aron*. As Straub suggests,

Eisler argues for this divorce between the two parts of the opera, the words and the music. I think

however that Eisler is wrong, and that the work really is a unity. This is the conclusion that I've come to, more and more surely, as I've studied over the text of the opera and listened to the music accompanying it, to the structure and rhythm of the music."¹⁸

What Straub proposes is the idea of *polyphony* between music and text where each contribute equally to the aesthetic experience. The idea of accompaniment itself suggests a form of violence through the enforcement of a relationship that Straub and Huillet fundamentally question, a relationship often of subordination and hierarchization. The one place in *Einleitung* where Straub and Huillet do force a relation hangs upon the word "but" (*aber*) that links Brecht's public address, which connects fascism with capitalism, to Schoenberg's letter to Kandinsky in which he states he does not want to be exception to Kandinsky's anti-Semitism, thus implying that it requires an act of violence to reveal the often hidden connections between racism and capitalism.

Grammar, the way in which images, words and sounds are connected (and often forced together) is constantly threatening to fall into subjectivity and violence through the lyrical procedures of desire to establish meaning. *Einleitung* juxtaposes a series of concrete events that form a heterogeneous constellation without any explicit connections, whose coherence is maintained rhythmically and energetically. Schoenberg and Brecht, in their respective work, each created an image of such catastrophe that could only be captured through a refusal of the "homogenized forces of representation," including a refusal of an artistic expression that confines itself to an exiled and protected space in contemporary culture.

Schoenberg's renunciation of a tonal (and hierarchical) structure is not a refusal of musical grammar in itself. He is still invested in grammar as a way to renew musical language to the point where it becomes possible once more to explore the pure elaboration of musical thoughts. For Schoenberg, the whole task of art is to unexpress the expressible, whereas the expressible are those sanctioned meanings made possible and contained by conventions.¹⁹ These conventions are established through the musical grammar and syntax of how connections are made—the

18
Joel Rogers,
"Moses and Aaron
as an object of
Marxist reflection:
Jean-Marie Straub and
Danièle Huillet
interviewed," *Jump Cut*,
no. 12/13 (1976): 61.

19
Walsh cites Roland
Barthes' idea of
"expressing the inexpressible" to frame
Schoenberg's music.
Walsh, *The Brechtian
Aspect of Radical Cinema*,
82.

20
Theodor W. Adorno,
"Music, Language,
and Composition,"
trans. Susan Gillespie,
The Musical Quarterly,
vol. 77, no. 3 (Autumn
1993): 401, 405.

21
Ming Tsao,
"Helmut Lachenmann's
'Sound Types,'" *Perspectives of New Music*,
vol. 52, no. 1
(Winter 2014): 217–238.

22
Tsao, "'Sound Types,'"
217.

23
Tsao, "'Sound Types,'"
220.

foundation of a musical language—where, as Adorno notes, every musical phenomenon points beyond itself, on the strength of what it recalls, from what it distinguishes itself, by what means it awakens expectation. The traditional doctrine of musical forms has its sentence, phrase, period, and punctuation. Questions, exclamations, subordinate clauses are everywhere, voices rise and fall, and, in all of this, the gesture of music is borrowed from the speaking voice.²⁰

The term *vocables* comprises chords and their progressions, melodic phrases, gestures and most importantly, cadences; i.e., those expressive aspects of a musical language that are found in tonality but have their origins in the speaking voice.

The composer Helmut Lachenmann has expanded the concept of vocables through the notion of the *Strukturklang* (structure-sound), where expressive aspects of a composition are generally stable rhetorical devices—gestures and cadences grounded in the language of late Romanticism and early Expressionism—against which the materiality of sound production becomes perceptible and creates resistances.²¹ A Strukturklang engages the listening not so much through the perception of sound, as through the experience of resistance to the lyrical procedures of an expressive subject. In Lachenmann's music, the materiality of sound production presents itself as *noise* in the music, noise not only in the disruption of expressive intent but also in the physicality of performance. A Strukturklang is a musical process that requires an active listening whereby a sound's internal time or *Eigenzeit* is coterminous with one's experience of it.²²

In opposition to the Strukturklang is the *Texturklang* (texture-sound) that is experienced as "object-like" (where one appreciates the sound long before it has ended). A Texturklang is a point of orientation for a listener as an extended moment of passive listening that creates a subject-position in the musical experience.²³ In other words, Texturklänge (texture-sounds) are moments of relief that give a listener the impression that a full listening experience is manageable and understandable. Such points privilege a humanist center from which lyrical procedures such

as gestures and cadences (i.e., Lachenmann’s *Kadenzklänge*) make for an authentic language of personal agency. The desiring “I” as the expressive subject is composed into the music through these *Klangtypen* (sound-types) against the material resistances of sound production.

Lachenmann’s *Kadenzklänge* (cadence-sounds) derive from the grammar of tonality: phrasing, antecedent/consequent relations, attack/resonance, cadence, period forms and symmetry. These tonal shapes also inform Schoenberg’s *musical idea* (musikalischer Gedanke) where notions of motive, gestalt, phrase, theme, rhythm, harmony and form, shape the wholeness of the musical work.²⁴ These musical shapes generate vocables or gestures in which a speaking subject is inscribed into the music, including Schoenberg’s notion of lyricism, where the *musical idea* is made possible by representing a feeling “subject” in the musical discourse.²⁵ Schoenberg’s idea of a musical prose can therefore be seen as a perceptual process of expansion that begins from the outward intention of a subject which takes the limit of the perceivable world as a basis and is elaborated through an encounter with resistance beyond that limit. This is the case for how subjectivity is encoded in Schoenberg’s monodrama *Erwartung* and explains why there is so much resonance between music and poetic composition, between Adorno’s *musique informelle* and poet Charles Olson’s *projective verse*.²⁶ The language of expanding outwards, disrupting boundaries and increasing the “world’s available reality” is abundant in both of these ideas.

Perhaps a more radical idea of the musical gesture and subjectivity in music is the anti-humanist orientation of Ferneyhough’s *figure* where gestures arise not from stable rhetorical devices against which the materiality of sound can place pressure, but through *lines of force* as structural categories in which musical processes conflate with musical objects (i.e., processes as “shadows thrown by objects in time”).²⁷ At the center of a musical gesture is no nucleus of tangibility but instead a system of relationships. What matters is what happens between gestures, between sounds where lines of force can arise and generate *figural energies* in the act of moving from one discrete musical gesture to another.²⁸ Ferneyhough’s gestures arise not from an

24
Arnold Schoenberg,
*The Musical Idea and the
Logic, Technique, and Art
of Its Presentation*,
ed. Patricia Carpenter
and Severine Neff
(New York: Columbia
University Press, 1995),
102–103.

25
Arnold Schoenberg,
“Heart and Brain in
Music” in *Style and Idea:
Selected Writings*,
trans. Leo Black
(Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1984),
53–76.

26
Theodore W. Adorno,
“Vers une musique
informelle” in *Quasi una
Fantasia* (London: Verso,
1998), 269–322 and
Charles Olson,
“Projective Verse” in
Collected Prose,
ed. Donald Allen and
Benjamin Friedlander
(Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1997),
239–249.

27
Brian Ferneyhough,
“Il Tempo della Figura,”
in *Collected Writings*,
34–36 and “Adorno
Presentation” Goldsmiths
College, London, 21
February 1998 (unpub-
lished document).

28
Ferneyhough,
Collected Writings, 35.
Note that Olson mirrors
the same idea when he
writes, “At root (or stump)
what is, is no longer
THINGS but what hap-
pens BETWEEN things,
these are the terms of
the reality contemporary
to us - and the terms of
what we are.” Charles
Olson, *Collected Prose*, 138.

expressive first person, as with Schoenberg or Lachenmann, but through impersonal forces applied to the language of music where music’s rhetorical tropes are twisted and damaged in order to unexpress the expressible. It is through the resistance of these rhetorical materials that the lines of force become apparent and are harnessed for a new kind of lyricism to manifest. Paraphrasing Straub, one must intelligently respect the existing space in order to take in its lines of force against which expressive devices could emerge without being derivative of a represented content.²⁹

In comparison to Schoenberg’s “idea” or Lachenmann’s Strukturklang, Ferneyhough’s *figure* maps out a lyrical subjectivity in more radical ways, always denying a stable subject-position of intent and desire by placing expression itself as a matter of transition from one state to another. The dense polyphony and rhythmic complexity of Ferneyhough’s music works between multiple networked relationships, shifting from measure to measure in ways that, similar to the poetry of Prynne,

sustain rapid alignments and realignments and provide both a conceptual topography and a virtual history of association. Accumulated meaning is systematically dismantled as the syntactical structures defeat any attempts to memorize connections and relationships.³⁰

This is not a music that leads the listener back to its composer, but to a musical language as a theoretical structure that begins to explore the limits of a humanist mode of expression and attempts to move beyond it.

III

In J.H. Prynne’s “Refuse Collection” (2004), the parataxis of a lyrical poetic language, with its documentary quotations from the everyday language of capitalism and media representation, attempts to create an image of another catastrophe, the atrocities of Abu Ghraib in Iraq. Such a poetic language is conveyed through a formal sense of poetic rhythm in a similar vein to Straub and Huillet’s formal sense of filmic rhythm. Akin to the tension created about and across the montage between shots in Straub and Huillet’s film, Prynne situates the tension about and across

line-endings where “there is a kind of dialectical unsettling because line-endings and verse divisions work into and against semantic overload in the poetic work.”³¹

As Colin Winborn has suggested “to ‘re-fuse’ is ‘to fuse or melt again’, and ‘refusion’ is ‘the act of pouring back’. Almost all of Prynne’s work is concerned with the ‘re-fusing’ of seemingly incommensurate or incompatible discourses; it turns also on the ‘refusion’ of self into other” where “military, economic and scientific discourses all collide, sometimes within the crash zone of a single term.”³²

The first stanza of “Refuse Collection”:

To a light led sole in pit of, this by slap-up
barter of an arm rest cap, on stirrup trade in
crawled to many bodies, uncounted. Talon up
crude oil-for-food, incarnadine incarcerate, get
foremost a track rocket, rapacious in heavy
investment insert tool this way up. This way
can it will you they took to fast immediate satis-
faction or slather, new slave run the chain store
enlisted, posture writhing what they just want
we’ll box tick that, nim nim. Camshot spoilers
strap to high stakes head to the ground elated
detonator like a bear dancing stripped canny
sex romp, webbing taint. Confess sell out the
self input, yes rape yes village gunship by
apache rotor capital genital grant a seed trial
take a nap a twin.

Prynne’s poem “Refuse Collection” fuses a variety of discourses without achieving a harmonious co-existence and union of parts. Indeed as Winborn continues, ““Refuse Collection” is suspicious of the idea that anything is truly ‘collectable’ as part of a projected ‘whole,’ particularly in terms of knowledge. It condemns a culture of excess in which human life has come to be seen as ‘refuse,’ mere matter for the ‘spectacle dump’; and yet the poem is itself a waste product, a space in which words and phrases that would be flushed away by other poets come to be deposited. It is in this sense a ‘Refuse Collection,’ a disorderly gathering of verbal detritus.”³³ The text of “Refuse Collection” “brutally assaults the idea of ‘autonomous’ and ‘unique’ subjectivity. ‘You’ merges with ‘we’ or ‘they,’ what is ‘inside’ is also revealed

31
Prynne,
“Poetic Thought,”
599.

32
Colin Winborn,
“‘Derangement from
deep inside’:
J.H. Prynne’s ‘Refuse
Collection,’”
PN Review 175, vol. 33,
no. 5, 55.

33
Winborn,
“‘Derangement from
deep inside,’” 56.

as ‘outside,’ and what is ‘over there’ blends disconcertingly with what is ‘here’ and ‘at home’: we are all complicit and accountable. This is the darker side of Prynne’s concern with the ‘refusion’ of self into other. The whole text urges us to resist being ‘collected,’ brought on side, by a war-mon-gering government.” Prynne’s text critiques the idea of establishing consensus.

“Refuse Collection” is a poem that is absent of clear subject-positions in the context of imperatives for committing unethical acts (such as “Kick them around” and “stamp on non-white body parts”). As Nandini Ramesh Sankar has pointed out, “Refuse Collection” “progressively refines a strategy of combining the problem of guilt and social agency with the formal device of pronominal ambiguity” implying that there is “the abdication of any clear subject-position.”³⁴ The use of the imperative in combination with the act of torture suggests that agency is conflated with complicity, most notably in the confusion of pronouns. For example, the juxtaposition of *you* and *they* creates an unresolved ambiguity regarding agency: “This way/can it will *you they* took to fast immediate satis-/faction or slather.” With the ambiguity between pronouns, the individual lyric voice is dislocated and passes through the collective, embedding it into a much larger historical and social context that makes it complicit with acts of collective violence.

Such an ambiguity makes the poem critical of a self-righteous anti-war *us* as well as an *us* that is responsible for the atrocities. The poem accepts neither a position of despair or self-righteousness from which one can deny responsibility. It critiques the notion that in a democracy one can find those spaces in which free and rational discourse between equals might exist. Prynne, along with Straub and Huillet, is critical of any form of expression that seeks to encode universal human feelings. Such expression is essentially a Romantic sensibility in that it seeks to locate a unifying personal consciousness at the center of the phenomenal world, almost entirely controlled by the first person pronoun or character point of view, and implies a fixed, stable perspective in an otherwise unstable world. Similarly, music whose vocables are equally controlled by the first person pronoun—gestures and forms of expression that fall into the tropes of Lachenmann’s

34
Nandini Ramesh Sankar,
*Poetics of Difficulty in
Postmodern Poetry*
(PhD diss., Cornell
University, 2012), 188.

Kadenzklänge—also become a music of nostalgia, an unconscious desire for a utopian space where new expression is thought to be possible based on earlier experiences of harmony and closure.

Nostalgia is *the* potential problem in the music of Lachenmann where the materiality of sound production—experienced as noise—simply is not enough to destabilize the rhetorical tropes, gestures, Kadenzklänge and the hierarchical structuring of his musical language derived from tonality. The problem of subjectivity in music is entirely tied to the phenomena of Klangtypen, in particular the Kadenzklang whose shape evokes the shadows of the spoken voice and its intentional declarations (rhythm, pacing, emphasis, breath, sound-patterning and rhyme). In this sense, Schoenberg’s *Begleitmusik* still is committed to a representational music by composing into the music through expressive vocables, a sense of subjectivity or agency, that feels *Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe*. Although the hierarchical tonal structure is abandoned with respect to pitch, the rhetorical tropes—the language-like aspects of music derived from tonality—are maintained (as in Pierre Boulez’ critique of Schoenberg’s twelve-tone music).³⁵ Both Schoenberg’s and Lachenmann’s is a music fully endowed with consciousness: Schoenberg’s *musical idea* and Lachenmann’s Strukturklang develop from an organicist conception of music whereby notions of subjectivity—such as a relatively stable speaking “I” within an otherwise unstable (or non-hierarchical) musical discourse—are constructed through the lyrical procedures they employ.

Straub once said that language is colonization, referring to the fixing of stable meanings through the solidification of signifier and signified into an identity. Straub and Huillet seek to undo this solidification by focusing on the rhythmic and musical attributes of spoken language, insofar as the sonic materiality of language is reasserted.³⁶ Language, including filmic language of images and sound, is too often complicit in the acts of violence that *Einleitung* brings together through montage. Indeed, as Prynne states in his note on war and language,

The idea that there is an innocent or unwounded condition of language in any of its historic or con-

35
Pierre Boulez,
“Schoenberg is Dead,” in
*Stocktakings from an
Apprenticeship*,
trans. Stephen Walsh
(Oxford: Clarendon
Press, 1991), 209–214.

36
Walsh,
*The Brechtian Aspect of
Radical Cinema*, 86.

37
J.H. Prynne,
“A Quick Riposte
to Handke’s
Dictum about War
and Language,” *Quid* 6
(2000): 25.

38
J.H. Prynne,
*Stars, Tigers and the Shape
of Words: The William
Matthews Lectures* 1992
(London: Birkbeck
College, 1993), 1.

39
J.H. Prynne,
*Stars, Tigers and
the Shape of Words*, 6.

ceptual formalizations, from which at some determined point in war-like operations it can passively fall into victim-damage and victim-anguish...is false and dangerous and absurd.³⁷

The grammar of language, in particular, can create and manipulate connections between events to participate in “the mounting up of a war program, in advance of the hostilities and to justify their methods.”³⁷ My belief is that music is also complicit in the condition of language, particularly through its speech acts, which inform musical shapes and gestures—the language of music—that have over history become emotional carriers of language’s sense.

In “Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words,” Prynne writes that if language is a social code of interactions, in which performance is an expressive procedure within a context of sense-bearing acts, then anything that can count towards meaning may do so; intonation, style-level, choice of words and their sounds and echoes.³⁸

The lyrical aspects of spoken language, which I believe are at the basis of music composition, do not in themselves create meaning or sense but endorse it through such parameters as rhythm, meter, pacing, sound-patterning and rhyme: all the expressive skills of “word-painting” or imitation found in the history of composed music. This “style of sound,” as suggested by the poet Alexander Pope with regard to Prynne’s “Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words,” is a “signifying code that is potentially sense-bearing, or at least sense-confirming and sense-enhancing” and “can be managed so as to give innumerable motivated echoes of non-arbitrary confirmation to the sense or idea.”³⁹ It is the “innumerable motivated echoes” that, when detached from the sense or idea (as the “shadows” of speech acts), become the language of music.

I am particularly interested in how noise and interference are coded back into these language-like aspects of music (i.e., the idea of *reverse transcription*) so that moving from the play of sound and gesture—the material of music—to music’s materiality (its “grain of voice” so to speak) can become the start of an ecological approach to music composition. This ecology is constituted through a feedback

loop that continually registers between the physical characteristics of sound (its materiality, spectrum and noise), music's language-like aspects (Klangtypen derived from aspects of tonality such as gesture, phrasing and cadence), music's aura (as stratified layers of historical and cultural associations), and music's compositional structuring through various kinds of processes—primarily serial and mathematical—that can work into and against music's language-like aspects. Such an ecological approach can already be gleaned in the manner in which Straub and Huillet methodically work with their actors in the reading and reciting of texts where the “innumerable motivated echoes”—the varied musical aspects of speech-acts including intonation, pacing and emphasis—are worked into and against the meaning of the text thereby producing a rich counterpoint. Indeed, their film scripts are filled with musical indications for the actors such as *accelerando*, *ral-lentando*, *pizzicato*, *forte*, *pianissimo*, etc.

IV

My musical composition for 18 musicians, *Refuse Collection*, is an attempt to bring together Schoenberg's music, Straub-Huillet's film, and Prynne's poem under the rubric of a noise-bearing “speculative music composition” that *reverse* transcribes Schoenberg's Opus 34 through the rhythmic and metric forces of Prynne's poem in such a way that a listener comes to hear a counter-melody against the original music as *Begleitmusik* (“accompanimental music”) to the forces of the original work. Under the pressure of Prynne's poem, my musical composition begins to show the scars of Schoenberg's original music by working against it. Indeed, in Schoenberg's theoretical writings, the true nature of *accompaniment* is defined as counterpoint (an inherent *working against*) so that sufficient resistance is encountered in the act of listening to meet the continuing demand for palpable texture in human affairs. My aim, as a composer, is not to entirely dispense with an organicist orientation, but to orient my materials toward virology, as a parasite that disrupts music's communicative and lyrical point of view. In biology, “the virus integrates with the host cell's genome, replicating along with it but remaining dormant until the right sort of conditions emerge for it to reactivate.”⁴⁰ These reactivations of usage codes from

Schoenberg's expressionist musical language under certain compositional conditions provide the basis for my *Refuse Collection*.

Below is the syllabic structure of the first stanza of Prynne's poem and the resulting initial metric structure for my *Refuse Collection*, where addition signs indicate small breaks due to punctuation with occasional regroupings in order to generate more manageable metric lengths (such as $8 = 4 + 4$). Measures in square brackets are additional measures that lie outside the syllabic count of the poetic line that I added later for temporal reasons. The syllabic count generally informs the numerator of each measure and only occasionally the denominator. The denominator of each measure is generally freely chosen in such a way as to keep a musician counting *only* on each specific measure. Thus, rarely does the continuation of a beat continue across two or more measures such as 4/4 followed by 3/4. In such a context, the denominator will be changed to enact a tempo change, for example, 4/4 followed by 3/5. Furthermore, when the denominator is the same for two or more successive measures, then the numerator is arranged in such a way as to prevent more global groupings. For example, 3/16 followed by 5/16 could easily be regrouped as 8/16 or 4/8. If the denominator is not changed, then another measure will be inserted between them such as 3/16, 4/16, 5/16 thus preventing a more common metrical grouping to emerge. These changes force a musician to continually count and concentrate on the immediate measure at hand in order to generate energy in the performance of the music by preventing more global perspectives on the music's rhythm from materializing, whereby a musician's concentration can relax.

To indicate the formal divisions in the original poem between stanzas, fermatas were placed in the music. For example, after the last 5/16 measure (“take a nap a twin”), a fermata of three seconds is placed to indicate the end of the first stanza in the poem. The formal structure of the poem interrupts the structure of Schoenberg's music in unpredictable ways, thereby preventing clear tension/relaxation relationships that mimic the rhythms and breathing of the speaking voice from manifesting while still demanding an active listening. By applying an

Refuse Collection

The score is in C

♩ = 76

[illegible]

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intentionally expressive aspects of the text and its intended meaning. The rhythmic grid for my *Refuse Collection* is constructed from the meter scheme suggested by the poem. The previous image, *Refuse Collection sketch*, shows the composite rhythmic sketch for the opening four measures (based on the first one and a half lines of Prynne's poem "Refuse Collection") in many stages of development.

V

How can musical lyricism, through its gestures, cadences and song, be attained in an era where the effects of human expression have become problematic? Through my composition *Refuse Collection*, scraps and filings from various musical references that lie outside of my immediate musical consciousness and whose language is fundamentally at odds with my own expressive desires, accumulate so that music's materiality exceeds human agency and can dissolve an ego-centered expressiveness in favor of a more encompassing subjectivity. The nature of my *Refuse Collection* suggests the recuperation of discarded materials as *waste* through a discontinuous montage of musical fragments based on Schoenberg's music, but whose *rhythm* is informed by Prynne's poem.

Waste signifies noise, excess and rubbish, which stands as a rebuke and challenge to instrumental systems because rubbish is what is left when the operation of the forces of homogenization are complete and nothing should be left.⁴²

In my reworking of Schoenberg's *Begleitmusik*, rhythm and meter are destabilizing musical forces on instrumental actions in order to foreground the materiality of sound production through a noise-bearing aesthetic. The waste that is a product of music's materiality can tune into the accumulated layers of signification accrued through music's evolution and reactivate past codes as the contamination of damaged forms.

Such a reworking of Schoenberg's Opus 34 attempts to provide another image of *Drohende Gefahr, Angst, Katastrophe* that is defined through the cracks and rough textures of Schoenberg's original music. My *Refuse Collection* is lyrically expressive, which means that subject-positions⁴³ can exist for a listener to engage with the music as expressive

42

N. H. Reeve and Richard
Kerridge, *Nearly Too
Much: The Poetry of J. H.
Prynne* (Liverpool:
Liverpool University
Press, 1995), 10.
Composer John Cage
even uses the term
“courageous wasteful-
ness” as an aesthetic
for music composition.
See James Pritchett,
The Music of John Cage
(Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1993),
157.

43

Eric F. Clarke,
*Ways of Listening:
An Ecological Approach to
the Perception of
Musical Meaning*
(Oxford: Oxford
University Press,
2005), 91–92.

gestures and cadences of intention, potentially forming aspects of a compositional language. In my music, these subject-positions are never *stable* points of orientation (as they are with Schoenberg or Lachenmann) and thus my music critiques the idea of any unifying personal “voice” or agency speaking from behind the musical language. Indeed, subjectivity in my music emerges from those areas of contact between the materiality of sound production and a musical expression that is fractured and destabilized throughout. If there is the presence of a lyrical voice, it is then made insecure, with the possibility that it may open up at any moment to other forms of expression with which it must cohabitate and find dialogue. Listeners should listen “beyond anthropocentric terms, including the ways in which the resistance of the world—its conflicting and dynamic materiality—exceeds subjective desire, conceptual thought and technological control.”⁴⁴ My music is a *materialist* music, akin to Straub’s notion of a “materialist image”—a sound world outside of consciousness, rather than a sound world fully endowed with consciousness, where a listener is not directed by my own subjective desire for expression but is required to rethink subjectivity and expression within a larger domain of possible sounds.

What the lyrical domain of music opens to is what John Cage would refer to as “anarchic harmony” where sound is freed from a human intentionality and reaches into the artlessness of nature, not nature as socio-historically mediated nature, but closer to what Quentin Meillassoux calls “the great outdoors.”⁴⁵ The sudden allusion to musical materials from other time periods impose shifts of scale that immediately disrupt any sense of personal, unmediated perception. They make a subject-position for listeners to orient themselves insecure and incomplete, thus providing a challenge to the humanist paradigm. The sound world that my music evokes manifests from the contingencies that appear when one reverse transcribes many layers of musical sources with sound’s materiality into a dense and rhythmically unstable Strukturklang. Through reverse transcriptions, connected roots among sounds begin to develop their own internal agency and activity, and separate themselves from my expressive intentionality as a composer. Noise in my music is then not merely disruption of signal or material resistance toward lyrical intent (as in

44
George Clark and
Redmond Entwistle,
“We do everything
for this art, but this art
isn’t everything:
Notes on Danièle Huillet
and Jean-Marie Straub,”
Vertigo Magazine,
vol. 3, no. 6
(Summer 2007): 2.

45
“Harmony is freed from
structural responsibility,”
or rather, harmony lies
outside thinking.
Pritchett, *The Music of
John Cage*, 49.
“The great outdoors” is
that which is “not
relative to us, and which
was given as indifferent
to its own givenness
to be what it is, existing
in itself regardless of
whether we are thinking
of it or not; that outside
which thought could
explore with the legiti-
mate feeling of being on
foreign territory—
of being entirely
elsewhere.”
Quentin Meillassoux,
*After Finitude:
An Essay on the Ne-
cessity of Contingency*,
trans. Ray Brassier
(London: Bloomsbury
Academic, 2008), 7.

the music of Lachenmann) but quite possibly those interferences that lie outside the reach of humanity because they are the result of material and cultural forces passing through many stratified layers of accumulated earth.

My music engages with a “lyric of the Anthropocene” that sensitizes a listener to become more mindful of our history, environment and the organic connection of music to the world and to nature. As Straub has noted, “We have something concrete beneath our feet, the earth, and we must have the ability to enjoy the earth, so as to be in a position to protect it.” And in the same context: A film “has to do with geology. [...] Geology is the study of that which is not visible, or barely so; that which is underneath.”⁴⁶ Music composition should understand its corruptions as well, not by avoiding expression but by fully understanding music’s relation to language, to speech and to song in order to deconstruct the rhetorical tropes that are so prevalent in the culture of today’s “new music” that is still dominated by Romantic sensibilities. Music also must become a defense of the earth, as we cannot afford another alternative.

46
“A Thousand Cliffs,”
385, 389.

